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THE SUFFERING ANIMAL

On the Weakness and the Power of the Living

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A Bianca e Lorenzo, e alle loro vite esemplari

The whole of nature, and the eternal order of things is not aimed in any way at all at the happiness of sensitive beings and animals. In fact it is quite the opposite. Nor is their own nature and the eternal order of their being aimed at it. Sensitive beings are naturally *souffrants*, a part of the universe that is essentially *souffrante* […]. Go into a garden of plants, grass, flowers. No matter how lovely it seems. Even in the mildest season of the year. You will not be able to look anywhere and not find suffering. That whole family of vegetation is in a state of *souffrance*, each in its own way to some degree […]. The spectacle of such abundance of life when you first go into this garden lifts your spirits, and that is why you think it is a joyful place. But in truth this life is wretched and unhappy, every garden is like a vast hospital (a place much more deplorable than a cemetery), and if these beings feel, or rather, were to feel, surely not being would be better for them than being.

Giacomo Leopardi[*]

[*] Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone: the Notebokes of Leopardi*, London, Penguin, 2013, [4133, 4175, 4176, 4177], pp. 1785-1823.

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Introduction

O why should Nature's law be mutual butchery!

Thomas Hardy[*]

I.

The following doctoral dissertation developed unexpectedly. Initially, my PhD research project aimed to reconstruct the wide contemporary debate on the theme of human-animal relationship by adopting a comparative perspective between continental philosophy and analytic philosophy. It was an ambitious project which, as it often happens during a doctorate research, was destined to be better defined and somehow modified in its extension from the very beginning. I did not expect it would have changed so much though. The necessity to operate a radical chance rose immediately.

My literary review started focusing on some of the major and most influential contemporary works devoted to the theme of animality and, more specifically, on animal rights. Most of them are usually ascribed to the so-called analytic tradition and a certain well-established cliché wants them to be not as so interested in history of philosophy as their continental equivalent, and, thus, to be more focused on the normative aspects. Hence, I approached these works having this "bias" in my mind, but after few readings I was astonished by the relevant amount of history of philosophy in them. Indeed, all these works devote their initial chapters always to a historical reconstruction whereby understanding the way western philosophy has thought of the terms of "animal" and "human". Moreover, the most interesting thing was that such reconstructions had many aspects in common with those elaborated within the continental environment. Therefore, it seemed to me there was the possibility to establish a continuity between these two theoretical traditions exactly through the plane of history of philosophy, that is where we use to pinpointing the major divergence. Hence, was the distinction between analytic philosophy and continental philosophy still consistent, at least for what concerns the animal question? My impression was that the historical-philosophical presuppositions were the same and that, as far as the methods and outcomes are surely different, western contemporary reflection on the human-animal relationship moves from a well-established theoretical posture in relation to its history. In summary, it seemed to me that such a commonality expresses the way contemporary authors perceive themselves, their "intellectual mission", and their difference compared to those who preceded them - the moderns - in thinking of the definition of the human-animal relationship. Because the terms of "humanity" and "animality", besides being crucial normative questions to understand the boundaries and the foundations of ethics, are "genetic notion" of western philosophical culture, which our understandings of the living, of the relationships among living beings and of life as such depend upon. Hence, before going to inspect the conceptual solutions and the outcomes conceived by contemporary reflection on animality, I held to begin my inquiry by deepening these common historical-philosophical presuppositions. As a matter of fact, I was, and I still am, persuaded that this set of problems has not been hitherto inspected enough. Furthermore, this reorganisation gave me the opportunity to frame my

[*] Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, ed. Patricia Ingham, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 296.

research more clearly. By doing so, this work ended up acquiring an unforeseen historical-philosophical account. Yet, it does not mean that the purely theoretical approach has been sacrificed on the altar of meticulous contextualism and of philological detail. I simply considered to be necessary to understand the historical content of the concepts I intended to employ properly. In fact, there was something that did not seem right in contemporaries' self-perception and in the judgments, they delivered towards the moderns. This "philosophical narration" seemed to me remarkably effective, but excessively schematic, not to say excessively simplifying. To verify whether this narration was consistent or questionable not only led me to deal with the human-animal relationship differently than how I planned before; it also helped me to select more clearly and more effectively the authors I should have focused on in due course. I am not the one who can eventually decide upon the effectiveness of these changes and, more generally, the theoretical strength of the following research. From my side, I can only say that it has further stimulated my personal interest in this research field.

II.

The first chapter moves from the critique of what I named the "*official philosophical narration*" of contemporary animal studies. A "narration" that we find at the base of the main works which, starting from the second half of the Twentieth Century, had revamped the theme of animality within the philosophical debate, from Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* to Jacques Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I am*. It is a well-established plot built upon the harsh opposition between two figures who also exemplify the fundamental difference between two decisive moments of history of philosophy: René Descartes, the forefather of modern rationalism, and Jeremy Bentham, the forefather of contemporary utilitarianism. In the first part of the chapter, I attempted to reconstruct the guidelines of such a plot, highlighting how the latter ends up being historically misleading, and amply characterized by prejudices and distortions typical of contemporary understanding of modernity. Moreover, all these simplifications – fostered also by a militant purpose which tends to stress clear juxtapositions ethically more persuasive but heuristically less effective – go to dim the real historical-philosophical problematicness of the theme of animality within western thought.

Hence, I believed it was necessary to "re-start" from the very beginning of modern animal question: Descartes' thesis of the *animal-machine*. Emblem par excellence of the worst consequences of modern rationalism, the *animal-machine* can be rather considered as the first great "compromise" that the innovative push of modernity made with the established tradition whereof it aimed to question the foundations. In my opinion, when we are to deal with this topic of Descartes' work, we should start by asking: why did a philosopher of that standing, who developed one of the most radical form of mechanism of his time, ended up maintaining not so much that animal bodies are machines (in this, the human being's body is no exception), as that *animals do not suffer*? One might answer, as it is usually answered, that this was due to the stubbornness of rationalism, that for which modern philosophy could even go to deny reality as long as the truth of human reason could be affirmed. Yet, is the madness of solipsism the sole reason to determine the blatant nonsense of Descartes' thesis? The historical-philosophical reconstruction I am proposing in this first chapter focuses on some aspects of Descartes' reflection which are not usually considered since, most of the time, they are so implicit that they tend to be invisible. To put it simply, anytime the animal appears on the scene of Descartes' theatre, God appears as well. Or better: anytime animal suffering is mentioned, God's goodness is questioned. And who is this God? It is the God of

theism, the providential principle bearing the basic axiology of morality as we know it, especially as Descartes knew it. In other words, Descartes saw what the spokespeople of modern theriophily could not see as clear and distinct as him: *if animals suffer, then God cannot exist*. In few words, the rise of modern philosophy was characterized by a disturbing awareness: that animal suffering is the trigger of the death of God.

Hence, the *animal-machine* represents Descartes' attempt to solve the materialist drift ushered in by his mechanist ontology as quick as possible. Because, in this chapter, I have strongly stressed the "materialist Descartes" who thinks of the body-machine paradigm to contest the vitalism and the spiritualism typical of the Scholastic-Aristotelian understanding of the living. Descartes' mechanism represents the first modern attempt to tear the problem of life away from the monopoly of metaphysic. On the contrary, the "immaterialist Descartes" who claims the immateriality of the *cogito* rises exactly in opposition to such a materialist radicality internal to Descartes himself. For these reasons, Descartes is the forefather of modern philosophy not only because of the invention of the *cogito*, as the contemporary interpreters use to maintaining. Descartes is the forefather of modern philosophy because he ushered in the two main guidelines of modern philosophy, that is what I named the materialist (or anti-humanist) *route of res extensa* and the idealist (or hyper-humanist) *route of res cogitans*. Two different ontological views which will compete against one another for the definition of the living. Because materialism and idealism are also, and perhaps especially, two antithetical theses on the living, two ways of defining the human-animal relationship and our ultimate understanding of the phenomenon of life.

The third part of the chapter is devoted the *route of res extensa*. The latter represents a materialist response to Descartes' thesis on the animal machine. It would be misleading to understand this debate as a confutation of the Cartesian view on the human-animal relationship. The modern debate on the «soul of the brutes» was rather the attempt to fulfil Descartes mechanist project beyond the "theistic" clause of the *cogito*. In other words, the *animal-machine* already provided a fully-fledged materialism, and it was simply a matter of extending Descartes' mechanist paradigm of the body to what Descartes himself had ontologically excluded from it: self-consciousness. Yet, the arguments in favour of a «thinking matter» were not as difficult to maintain from a theoretical point of view, and most of the time, they proved to be more consistent than Descartes' counterintuitive dualism. As I have attempted to show, we could even claim that no author, neither the most Cartesian ones (such as Malebranche), endorsed the reality of the *animal-machine.* The *animal-machine* was rather an indispensable "ontological clause" to save something more fundamental. Indeed, while the materialists' arguments could simply defeat Descartes' view, however they could hardly deal with a more urgent question: the charge of atheism. In order to show this, I amply focused on Pierre Bayle, one of the sharpest interpreters of early modern philosophy and, in my opinion, one of the greatest absences within contemporary reflection on animality. Pierre Bayle clearly shows us what was really at stake in the modern debate on the soul of the brutes; what all moderns were aware of, but few of them were "brave" enough to maintain overtly. In a formula: *Descartes's position is ontologically and philosophically inconsistent, but it is morally necessary*. As is known, Bayle is the philosopher who established the theoretical structure of modern atheism, highlighting the unsustainability of theism both argumentatively and morally. In Bayle's eyes, animal suffering represents the ultimate argument in favour of atheism: *there is animal suffering, therefore God certainly does not exist*. Nevertheless, Bayle pointed out how the death of God by the animal entailed the death of the human and, with it, the opening of an axiological abyss whereof we can hardly foresee the outcomes. Therefore Descartes' dualist solution turned out to have the only advantage of saving us from the abyss, a "conservative" act before the destructive power of animal suffering.

Hence, in Bayle we find a compendium of all the tensions characterizing modern debate on the human-animal relationship, thereby revealing how misleading and reductive contemporary judgments on modern understating on animality are. Moreover, Bayle allows us to understand that materialism is the philosophical frame wherein it is possible to define the human-animal relationship in egalitarian terms, both from an ontological point of view and from an ethical one. Such an equality is given by the experience of suffering, which represents the anti-metaphysical feature of the living par excellence. This explains the fundamental role played by the theme of atheism in the development of anti-humanistic thought. Atheism will be one of the common thread of the following research for two main reasons. First, far from being a simple theological argument, atheism is an ontological thesis or, better, a thesis on the condition of living. The bearing axis of modern atheism is suffering as the universal experience affecting the living, and which, by killing God and destroying any ontological hierarchy, allows to establish a common moral ground among all sentient beings. Yet – and this is where the nexus between atheism and suffering shows its real deconstructive potential –, such a commonality is given not simply by the fact that all sentient beings suffer in their own way, but that they all suffer uselessly, that suffering is a meaningless injustice crying out for revenge. This is why I amply insisted on atheism: it allows to derive a materialist discourse on suffering even where it is not immediately evident and, thus, to highlight a certain theoretical continuity among different authors who really attempted to embrace and endorse the moral implications of materialism against the immorality of metaphysics (it will be the cases of Charles Darwin in the second chapter and of Primo Levi in the third).

The triangulation between atheism, suffering and materialism represents a well-established pattern of modern philosophy. A conceptual basic structure wherein we find an egalitarian definition of the human-animal relationship that contemporary animal studies have unconsciously inherited through curvy ways (moral consequentialism, empiricism, and Darwinism). I named this paradigm *the suffering animal*, which, in my opinion, stands for not only the great modern alternative to the traditional paradigm of the *rational animal* (made even more metaphysical by Descartes' *cogito* and then by Kant), but especially the theoretical structure capable of fulfilling the great challenge that the animal has always represented for our consciousness as living beings.

III.

The second chapter is devoted to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. In my opinion, after Darwin, philosophy can no longer define the human-animal relationship without assuming the evidence provided by evolutionary science. If Darwinism has represented a revolution for our worldview, probably the harshest decentralisation endured by our species and our identity as living beings, it is because it has been also a revolution for philosophy and its categories. For this reason, this chapter focuses especially on the philosophical content of Darwin's theory, seeking to understand the new direction taken by modern materialism from that moment on. Indeed, in my opinion, Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection represents the peak of modern materialism, that is the moment where the paradigm of the *suffering animal* "evolves" towards its ultimate definition.

What does Darwin tell us about the human-animal relationship? He simply tells us that the problem does not exist, that these "labels" refer to nothing but a preconceived, static, and simplifying understanding of the living. There are no animals as there are no humans: there are rather individuals within a «coral of life» where the sole commonality is given by their

undergoing the iron law of life: natural selection. The first part of this chapter is devoted to Darwin's image of the coral of life, that is the ontology sustaining the working of natural selection. The structure of the coral of life, and its intricate network of relationships among individuals, claim the unsustainability of the human-animal relationship as conceptual toll capable of say something effective on the living. Which animal? What is their position within the coral of life? Is this position affine to that of the human, i.e., that primates we use to naming *Homo sapiens*? Without posing these questions in the light of evolution by natural selection, the human-animal relationship risks persisting to be a self-celebrating comparison from which the human beings always come out confirmed in their metaphysical image. Centuries of comparison between human beings and wolfs, human beings and bees, human beings and ticks, had been only of help to repeat the same old story of an alleged ontological exceptionality of the human. And, as early Twentieth Century philosophical anthropology witnessed, this preconceived relationship had persisted despite the advent of Darwinism. On the contrary, Darwin teaches us that a comparison is still possible as long as we attain to some basic epistemological rules. We can attempt to define a "human difference" only on the ethological level, and we can do so by comparing the human-animals with their "fellow of branches". In other words, mammals, especially primates (some specific species of primates) represent the mirror before which the human being can understand his particular position within the living, however losing the faith in his absolute uniqueness. This because, within the coral of life, the features which makes any individual different are produced, and ultimately evaluated, solely by the working of natural selection.

The load-bearing axis of Darwin's ontology is the individual, the ultimate reality which natural selection operates upon. Darwin's radical ontological individualism is the principle which makes his materialism consistent with its anti-vitalistic premises, thereby preventing any metaphysical escapes. Nevertheless, such a rigid individualism leads right to the question of «moral sense» from the point of view of natural selection. The second part of this chapter inspects Darwin's naturalistic understanding of morality, focusing especially on the theoretical nexus between nature (or life) and morality. What I aimed to understand here is how a materialist perspective can deal with the question of morality without contravening its anti-metaphysical premises. In other words, how can a fully-fledged materialism define the relationship between life and morality? In my opinion, Darwin shows us a possible way, although problematic. Indeed, Darwin attempted to keep together continuity (behaviors we use to considering as moral are products of natural selection) and discontinuity (moral sense establishes a selective process which opposes to that of life). Darwin condensed such a dynamic under the ethological category of *civilisation*, that is a "reversive" process taking place typically in the so-called social animals (especially mammals and primates), and that in the human-animals reaches a very intense degree of development. In Darwin, civilisation is the same as «humanity», the «virtue» for which those who are destined to be eliminated by natural selection becomes instead subjects of aid and solidarity. Usually considered as the emblem of eurocentrism, Darwin's understanding of civilization hides a deep philosophical meaning which, in my opinion, has been scarcely remarked by contemporary moral philosophy, and which, if properly reconstructed, reveals Darwin's philosophical modernity. The theoretical core of Darwin's moral view is the notion of «sympathy», the social instincts which makes naturally self-centered individuals interested in others suffering. Hence, like the moderns, Darwin establishes his materialistic understanding of morality upon suffering, that is the precarious and vulnerable condition affects all sentient world. Hence, after having dissolved the human-animal relationship from the ontological point of view, Darwin makes it inconsistent also from the moral one: despite the frictions posed by the rigid working of natural selection, the virtue of humanity, that is civilisation, can be potentially applied to all suffering being. In Darwin's view, suffering turns out to be

the evolutionary phenomenon which laboriously tends to opposes the eliminative laws of fitness.

The idea of Darwin as theorist of the *suffering animal* paradigm can be reinforced by stressing the question of atheism. In the third section of this chapter, I attempted to reconstruct Darwin's atheist argument, stressing not only how he resorted to the argumentative schemes of modern atheism, but also how he ended up radicalizing the latter further. By questioning the theistic notion of Providence, Darwin aimed to question life as such: a weak phenomenon which condition of possibility is the blind suffering of the many for the good of a few. In a formula: *there is life, therefore God cannot exist.* Therefore, in Darwin's view, life cannot be an ethical model, and it can be so only in so far as we enhance those fragile possibilities we are given as sentient beings (sympathy, altruism, moral sense, and so on). Since Darwin's materialism cannot conceive any leap beyond natural selection, the only way sentient being are able to "revolt" against the mechanism of life is *civilisation*. For Darwin, *civilisation* is the key, in so far as it is directed towards equality. Of course, Darwin's optimism might sound naïve and even politically gloomy nowadays. Nevertheless, the philosophical content of his evolutionary inquiry on morality highlights a fundamental feature of materialism: an understanding of life in terms of weakness and fragility, wherefrom it is not possible to trace any sort of ethical hint. For Darwin, life is not only ontologically overrated, but also morally unreliable.

The last section of the chapter is devoted to a comparison between Darwin's materialism and Nietzsche's one. Nietzsche's critique of Darwinism highlights the definition of two great alternatives within contemporary anti-metaphysical reflection. If, from an ontological point of view, Nietzsche acknowledges Darwinism to be the ultimate gravestone of metaphysic and of any metaphysics of the human; from a moral viewpoint, he refuses instead to establish morality upon suffering since the remnants of a metaphysical tradition that Darwin ended up reinforcing by making it a natural fact. For Nietzsche, the only way whereby really overcoming metaphysics consists in centering morality upon the notion of power, the power of a life whereof living beings are individual expressions. In my opinion, by doing so, Nietzsche defined a different and alternative materialist paradigm: that of *the powerful animal*. From here on, the *suffering animal* and the *powerful animal* will be the paradigms which contemporary materialism will largely look at. Two guidelines which will also characterize the reception of Darwinism within continental philosophy. In fact, as I attempted to show, for many contemporary philosophers, resorting to the "Nietzschean alternative" will be basically a way to distance themselves from Darwinism, to stubbornly resist to Darwinian revolution in the name of the "irreducible" vitality of life. Hence, to decide upon the weakness or the power of life will ultimately determine the definitions of the human-animal relationship employed within contemporary materialistic and anti-metaphysic reflection.

IV.

The third chapter focuses on an exemplifying case of contemporary employment of the *suffering animal* paradigm: the Italian writer Primo Levi. At first glance, such a choice might appear unusual. Nevertheless, the philosophical study on Primo Levi I carried out before and during the following doctoral research persuaded me not only of Levi's undeniable philosophical value, but also that his reflection represents a particularly important moment of overall contemporary though. This is due to a fundamental reason: in Levi, we witness the employment of a whole series of philosophical categories (those attaining to the *suffering*

animal paradigm) in relation to one of the most extreme historical episode which intensely affected contemporary philosophy, that is Auschwitz.

In the first part of the chapter, I attempted to reconstruct how Levi has been located within the contemporary philosophical debate on dehumanization. The latter has represented one of most fruitful theoretical frames for twentieth-century reflection on the human-animal relationship. Many has been the theoretical proposals, from the re-confirmation of humanism to the deconstructive outcomes of post-humanism. The anti-systematic and "handmade" character of Levi's philosophical thought caused a wide range of interpretations, often conflicting one another. In my opinion, the categories of humanism and of post-humanism are not capable of explaining Levi's philosophical position within the debate on dehumanization, ending up providing instead inconsistent interpretations. Hence, in the second part of the chapter, I attempted to reconstruct Levi's thought by inserting it within the tradition of modern atheism in order to stress his original theoretical position. The idea of Levi as a "modern thinker" allows not only to better understand the specificity of Levi's thought in relation to the contemporary philosophical environment, but also to define the theoretical strategies he resorted to in order to deal with the philosophical meaning of his experience as prisoner within Auschwitz. Among the literature on the *Shoah*, Levi is probably the witness who more insisted in making Auschwitz an existential paradigm capable of bringing to light the essential features of the human as living being and, with them, the deepest meaning of life as such. The fulcrum of Levi's view of life is the *drowned-saved* binomial which, well beyond its indispensable heuristic values for the understanding of the concentrationary universe, aims to stress the profound iniquity whereon the working of life is established. In Levi, the very modern nexus between atheism and suffering is radicalized further by means of the question of inequality, that is the idea of a fundamental disparity characterizing the way individuals come into the world: «*To he who has, it will be given; from he who has not, it will be taken away*.» In the third part of the chapter, I attempted to show how behind Levi's atheist argument of the "inegalitarian God" there stands a deep reading of Darwin, an author that Levi himself always acknowledged to be one of his fundamental sources. In particular, I proposed the idea, carried out both philologically and hermeneutically, of "Primo Levi as a reader of *The Descent of Man*". In my opinion, the Darwinian source of Levi's thought characterizes the very foundations of his understanding both of the human-animal relationship and of Auschwitz as an extreme, not to say unnatural, negation of civilisation, that is of the chance of equality among individuals coming into the world unequally. Because, for Levi, the only plausible egalitarian principle is the inevitable fact of *suffering* which, without exceptions, grips the living as a whole. In the conclusive section of the chapter, I talked of "Levi' phenomenology of the human", that is the reduction of the "human" to a sort of moral-aesthetical appearance of a living body. Levi stresses the fragility of the human as a moral feature hang by the thread of a sight, of smell and of other's recognition. Yet, Levi's deconstruction has a fundamental point, something to which he, as a former victim, always held on. For Levi, beyond civilisation there is nothing but the inhumanity of fascism, that is the unnatural and political extremization of that inequality nourishing the very working of life.

V.

The fourth and final chapter of the following dissertation is devoted to Gilles Deleuze's "materialism of power". I decided to focus on Deleuze for three reasons. First, because, among the most important spokespeople of twentieth-century anti-humanist and anti-metaphysical tradition, Deleuze is he who more push himself to provide a "new" ontology

capable of accounting for the most important acquisition of contemporary critical thought: the positive value, both ontological and axiological, of difference. An acquisition developed especially following the philosophical "trauma" embodied by the historical experience of Totalitarianism. Secondly, because, in Deleuze, we find an intense dialogue with the authors I beforehand considered: from the moderns (Spinoza and Hume), to Darwin, to Nietzsche, and even Primo Levi. By doing so, the four chapters outline an overall choral context wherein it is possible to highlight continuities and divergences which portray the contemporary debate on the human-animal relationship and, more fundamentally, on materialism. Lastly, because, in the face of his ontological proposal and his challenging confrontation with the history of philosophy, Deleuze represents nowadays one of the main reference points for the contemporary materialist thought supporting the so-called post-humanist philosophies. Indeed, I am convinced that Deleuze's philosophy had set off the affirmation of the paradigm of the *powerful animal* within contemporary reflection on the human-animal relationship.

The first part of the chapter is devoted to the analysis of the historical-philosophical content of Deleuze's materialism. The idea of Deleuze as theorist of the *powerful animal* gets always clearer once the theoretical strategies structuring his historical-philosophical research are brought to light. Deleuze outlined an extraordinarily strong and coherent "historical philosophical trajectory" along which he situated the protagonists of his monographies. The starting point is Hume, the latter assumed by Deleuze as the modern moment of greatest destitution of dialectical thought and of any metaphysics of the Same. Categories such as empiricism, habit and sympathy are fundamental in Deleuze's interpretation of Hume, but, as we noticed, they have been fundamental as well for the definition of paradigm of the *suffering animal*. Hence, with Hume, Deleuze's philosophy is found to be originally within the trajectory that from Descartes goes to Darwin, and whereof Hume himself represents a central moment. I attempted to show how Deleuze's strategy consisted in deflecting such a trajectory towards a different outcome. The first important change of direction is Bergson, who allowed Deleuze to combine Humean empiricism with a vitalistic ontology which overtly aims to provide a *bio-logos* alternative to that of Darwinism. Through Bergson's vitalism, Deleuze can decline the theme of difference within the ontological category of «power», that is what permits to think of difference in positive and expressive terms. Life, difference, and power: three notions destined to become equivalent in Deleuze's materialism. The following step of Deleuzian research is represented by Spinoza who, as I attempted to show, provided Deleuze with the fittest ontology for a "materialism of power" which, while claiming the positive ontological character of difference, also establishes a moral perspective capable of maintaining such an ontological value of difference within ethical practice. This is possible insofar as life and power becomes synonyms. Therefore, with Spinoza, Deleuze can make ontology and ethics correspond one another beyond the metaphysical schemes of judgment and recognition. Yet, the modern Spinoza risks bringing Deleuze's trajectory back to the *suffering animal*. In order to avoid this, Deleuze eventually turns to Nietzsche. First, Deleuze makes Spinoza "Nietzschean", thereby deactivating the contractarian contents (which tend to oppose life and ethics) and, above all, the notion of *conatus*, that is the idea of a constitutive precariousness characterizing of the living. In other words, Nietzsche allows Deleuze to neutralize the genetic nexus (destined to become fundamental in Darwin) between life and survival, which understands the living as a surviving being caught in a constant resistance to the inevitable dissolution. By doing so, Deleuze finally leads his theoretical research wholly into the route of the *powerful animal*.

The main thesis I have attempted to prove in this chapter is that Deleuze's "materialism of power" is established, and it cannot do otherwise, upon a continual negation of the

questions of evil. For Deleuze, who combine Spinoza's ethics of joy with Nietzsche's will to power, to establish ethics on suffering and, therefore, to pose the question of evil against life as such, would entail a return to a metaphysics disguised in disguise. In Deleuze, the affirmation of the power of life is not the same as claiming the nonexistence of evil, but it rather represents the attempt to not make evil, i.e., suffering, the main question of ethics. The "whole", the "impersonal" are the keys: individuals and their finitude cannot be the point of view wherefrom judging life. In Deleuze's eyes, this is the *suffering animal*'s greatest mistake: to judge life from a very narrow and reactive viewpoint. Thus, Deleuze's "materialism of power" is established upon two main theoretical presuppositions: the compliance of ethics with life, and the assumption of an ontological solidarity among the living which allows to make power a differential but not discriminating principle. To put it simply, the idea of an "equality of different powers" can avoid being an oxymoron if and only if the question of evil, the "evil of the world", is considered to be as ethically irrelevant.

The last section of the chapter is devoted to Deleuze's original philosophical production, especially the notions of *becoming* and of *faciality*. The latter allow to understand the way Deleuze eventually defined the human-animal relationship. Once again, the category of power plays a fundamental role. Indeed, thanks to it, Deleuze could, on the one hand, contest human exceptionality (all living beings express a power of a wider power, that is life) and, on the other hand, establish a common ground of power (the power of life) wherein all the living beings affect one another. In my opinion, it is sufficient to add the variable of evil to stress the inconsistency of Deleuze's equation between life, power, and joy, and to highlight not negligible remnants of anthropocentrism and the presence of fully-fledged *biodicy* attempting to justify life before the evil it produces in order to survive. In fact, in Deleuze, a new God eventually seems to rise, a providential source of power and joy bearing the name of life.

Outcomes and Perspectives

The conclusion of the following research is devoted to Deleuze's encounter with Primo Levi, which I portrayed as the final confrontation between the *powerful animal* and the *suffering animal*. At the end of such an introductory overview, I would like to briefly recap the theoretical outcomes this research led me to. First, although I was initially persuaded about a strict opposition between the paradigms of the *suffering animal* and of the *powerful animal*, I ended up being convinced of their essential complementarity. In other words, starting from the second chapter, I started to realize that Nietzsche's remarks on Darwin rose undeniable flaws of forms that are worthy to be accounted. Yet, if analysed through the lens of the philosophical content of Darwinism, Nietzsche's perspective reveals to have flaws of form which are as much undeniable. Therefore, it seemed to me that choosing between one of the two paradigms would have meant to rely upon an understanding of the living defective from the outset. In my opinion, it is not a matter of deciding whether life is weak or powerful, whether an anti-anthropocentric and anti-metaphysical ethics should be grounded on suffering or on power. It is rather a matter of understanding what both perspectives can tell us about our experience as living beings among other living beings. Because the *suffering animal* and the *powerful animal* cannot subsist alone: on the one hand, there stand the risk of falling prey of a "pastoral power" claiming to be the only one capable of saving us from the evil of life; on the other hand, the "courage of being powerful" can easily become the chance to liberate our inner desire to unburden our «moral sense» from the heavy obligation to equality. After all, if it is true that Darwin assumed too easily the "natural goodness" of

our traditional axiology, it is however true that Nietzsche ended up claiming the "natural" reasons of inequality.

Therefore, I considered Primo Levi and Gilles Deleuze to be two authors capable of stressing very clearly the tension between the *suffering animal* and the *powerful animal*. Nevertheless, in the end, despite the reasonableness of both paradigms, for which life cannot be understood but through their complementarity, the *suffering animal* does not cease to appear to me more consistent and, above all, more inclusive. After all, nowadays, what is really at stake with the human-animal relationship is the definition of a more inclusive and egalitarian morality among living beings who tend to oppose one another. Indeed, the theme of the animal rights poses a matter of civilisation: the idea that any equality among human beings will never be enough until it is extended even to animals. The animal is a "progressive figure" which reminds us not only that civilization, human civilization, will be truly accomplished only when animals benefit from it, but also that such an accomplishment will be possible only if humankind stops dividing internally. The *suffering animal* is overtly egalitarian, and it does not need to "hide" anything about life in order to affirm its truth: that life is essentially fragile and that the power it is capable of is limited and fortuitous. Because the greatest limit of the *powerful animal* consists in their faith in the category of power as such: not only we are not all powerful in the same way, but there are also those who are not powerful at all. Power is a feature of life that it is unequally distributed since life as such – supposing that philosophy stop invoking anti-Darwinian forms of vitalism - requires this very inequality to work, to survive. If we decide to use the category of power to establish a field of solidarity among the living, then, soon or later, we will face the inevitable question of evil, and, thus, to justify some kind of inequality.

Of course, suffering alone is not enough. The fact that we are all destined to suffer alone is not sufficiently compelling. It would be the same as understanding life, our life as living, in the light of a "destiny" which, albeit unavoidable, however risks restraining the vitality we are endowed with. It is right because we, as sentient being, tend to revolt against the suffering of life, that it is worthy to seek joy. This is why I decided to rely on Primo Levi to take the stock of the following research. Indeed, Levi talks of *the drowned* and *the saved*, two side of that same coin bearing the name of life. His philosophical atheism represents the attempt to claim that such a disparity is given by nothing but chance, that moralized chance that Levi names «luck». *The luck of being saved and the unluck of being drowned*. Luck is what eventually determines our being *suffering animals* or *powerful animals*. In my opinion, the pages Levi devoted to the question of luck represent one the most powerful moments of contemporary anti-metaphysic reflection. And they are very constructive ethical pages. Once thought to be a principle of chaos, a moral destabilizer incapable of providing fundamental points to establish our ethics upon, in Levi, the blind chance through which luck and unluck are distributed among the living becomes the driving force of ethics, what structures our «moral sense». Because the luck of our power always entails, somewhere else, the unluck that makes others suffer. In luck, we find an ethical principle which does not withdraw from life, but it rather lies in its very centre. The *powerful animal* and the *suffering animal* can discover their ethical point of equilibrium in luck, the luck of temporarily avoiding an inevitable destiny. Because if we do not come into the world being all lucky, soon or alter we will all be unlucky. These are our weakness and our power as living.

Chapter I

The Sensitive Cogito.
The Legacy of Modern Materialism Within Contemporary Animal Studies

> It will be said, that I mean that the conclusions deduced from the study of the brutes are applicable to man, and that the logical consequences of such application are fatalism, materialism, and atheism - whereupon the drums will beat the *pas de charge.*
>
> Thomas Huxley[1]

An Uncertain Canon

A certain "official philosophical narration" is establishing within contemporary animal studies. According to this narration, current age stands for the rise of a new ethical awareness which is gradually allowing animals to enter into the «ethical circuit.»[2] Although such an entry is far to be accomplished, contemporary «animal turn»[3] has being trying to dismiss western anthro-logocentric understanding of the human-animal relationship. Yet, any narration has a hero and a villain. From Peter Singer[4] to Jacques Derrida[5], the starting point of contemporary reflection on animality is unanimously considered Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian philosophy. The main reference is a brief passage of *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789):

> *The day may come*, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may come one day to be recognized, that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os saxrum*, are reason equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or, perhaps, the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? the question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?[6]

Although located in a footnote, animal studies scholarship acknowledges Bentham's line of reasoning as the very first theoretical attempt to overcome western endemic logocentrism. By stressing the «capacity of suffering and enjoyment»[7], Bentham «marked a sharp departure from a cultural tradition that had never before regarded animals as other than things

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[1] Thomas H. Huxley, *On the Hypothesis that Animals are Automata, and Its History* (1874), in *Collected Essay*, I, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 243.
[2] Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2006), trans. David Wills, New York, Fordham University Press, 2008, p. 106.
[3] Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals. Why Animal Studies Now?*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2012, pp. 3-24.
[4] Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (1975), New York, HarperCollins, 2002, p. 7.
[5] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, p. 27.
[6] Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, New York, Hafner Publishing, 1948, p. 311.
[7] Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 7.

devoid of morally significant interests.[8] Therefore, Bentham is the philosopher who offered the remedy for the rationalistic pathology of modern age. A pathology which has cause endless sufferings, especially for animals.

Yet, every hero has a villain to confront with. As Paola Cavalieri points out, «it is difficult to imagine something further from Cartesian and Kantian abstraction» than Bentham's words[9]. In fact, in this forward-looking passage, Bentham argues against the well-known Cartesian hyper-rationalistic understanding of human subject whereof counterpart is the controversial notion of *animal-machine*. According to animal studies scholars, modern philosophical reflection on animality is wholly negatively influenced by Descartes's strict dualism. A perspective which has radicalized further the Greek-Christian paradigm of the *rational animal*. In fact, starting from 1637 *Discourse on the Method*, the human and the animal have become two opposite ontological orders: on the one hand, there stands the rational reign of *cogito* (or *consciousness*), wherein only human beings have citizenship; on the other hand, the mechanical and insentient reign of *res extensa* (or *matter*), wherein all the other living beings are confined. For this reason, nowadays Descartes performs the role of great «villain»[10] within the philosophical narration of animal studies: he is the forefather of a cruel understanding of animals which, still today, provides the theoretical justification for human beings' dominion over other living beings.

I am aware that this reconstruction might seem too simplistic. As well as some might reject the actual existence of an "official philosophical narration" within the extended field of animal studies. Nevertheless, if one takes into account influential works such as Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, Tom Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights*, Paola Cavalieri's *Animal Questions* and Gary L. Francione's *Animals Property, and the Law*, then they really could notice that a certain pattern keeps happening. A pattern structured around three main figures: Descartes as polemic front, Bentham as turning point, and current animal liberation movements as moral awakening. These three coordinates represent the salient stages of a "plot" that all those authors endorse. After all, any issue which stands out the philosophical debate, such as animality nowadays, produces, on purpose or not, precise historical references which highlight the continuity or the discontinuity with a certain tradition. Especially when, as in the case of animal liberation movements, such concepts aim to set political and cultural mobilization up. In the following pages, I aim to go into this narration and to stress its theoretical contents from the wider viewpoint of history of philosophy. I would like to start stating that, in my opinion, the philosophical narration of current animal studies is *basically* correct. Utilitarianism, from Bentham to Singer, can be really considered an "epoch-making" turning point whereby overcoming western speciesism, inasmuch they seriously started to consider animals as any other minority which demands, against a well-established majority, respect and moral consideration. At the same time, modern Cartesianism has undoubtedly radicalized further the old-centuries ontological division between human beings and animals. As, Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* amply shows, this philosophical narration has become a remarkably effective theoretical tool for the animal liberation cause, where the historiographical approximations help to make activists' revindications more persuasive. [11] Nonetheless, from the point of view of history of

[8] Gary L. Francione, *Animals Property, and the Law* (1995), Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1995, p. 33.
[9] Paola Cavalieri, *The Animal Question. Why Nonhuman Animals deserve Human Rights* (1999), New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 59-63.
[10] John Cottingham, *"A Brute to the Brutes?": Descartes' Treatment of Animal*, in «Philosophy», 53/1978, p. 551.
[11] John M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (1999), Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. 15ff.

philosophy, there is no doubt that this narration turns out to be partial, summary and even based on superficial factual knowledge.

First, the role performed by Bentham is overstated. This is due to a certain "Anglo-centrism" which affects the major spokespeople of animal studies. Bentham is indeed the only "positive" historical reference, an arbitrary starting point containing all western debate on animality into contemporaneity. At most, in some more accurate reconstruction, such a genealogy is retraced until Hume or Locke, that is, once again, other well known "Anglo-Saxon" philosophers. And this because, according to them, the "continental" tradition is altogether "infected" with a basic Cartesian humanism. As Raymond Corbey pointed out, «While in the English-speaking world most philosophers would sub scribe — or would at least be inclined to do so — to the idea of perhaps large, but ultimately gradual differences between humans and animals, most philosophers from the European continent would not underwrite the continuity of beasts and humans. A considerable number of continental philosophers operate in the wake of Aristotle or Descartes rather than that of Locke or Hume.»[12] When we find a wider historical spectrum, we rather face a «short history of speciesism»[13] which seems to be more a history of vegetarianism and slaughter (from Plutarch, to Voltaire, and even Schopenhauer) than a genealogy of philosophical concepts and categories. More generally, such an "a-historicism" is due to the tendency by analytic philosopher to put the normative question first. This historiographical superficiality becomes further clear in the case of Descartes. As we noticed before, the French philosopher performs the role of «villain» since he conceived the "cruel" concept of the *animal machine*. The latter is the meeting point of crucial questions (theological, anthropological, epistemological, moral etc.) which marked out the passage from Aristotelian-Scholastic philosophy to modern one. Yet, such a theoretical complexity utterly fails within the philosophical narration of animal studies, where the *animal machine* is largely processed as a simple zoological thesis. In the beginning of *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer states that «Readers whose common sense tells them that animals do suffer» may even take the liberty to avoid dwelling upon the analysis of Descartes's incompressible «view that animal are automata.»[14] According to Singer, more than Greek-Roman thought, Christianity «spread the idea that every human life – and only human life - is sacred»[15], thereby establishing a rift with animal world destined to increase more and more. Yet, as he continues, «the absolute nadir was still to come. The last, most bizarre, and – for the animals – most painful outcome of Christian doctrines emerged in the first half of the seventeenth century, in the philosophy of Rene Descartes.»[16] In Singer's reconstruction, the foolishness of the *animal-machine* thesis – after all, common sense clearly tells us that «animals do suffer» - is due to two precise ideological demands: to safeguard Christian doctrine of immortal souls from the heresy of mechanism, and to provide a justification for the experimentation on live animals. Although he acknowledges that Descartes' position might be less rigid[17], Singer reconstruction has become canonical, standardizing so a certain harsh judgement on Descartes which has been taken for granted. Therefore, within animal studies, the French philosopher is largely portrayed as the modern

[12] Raymond Corbey, *Ambiguous Apes*, in *The Great Ape Project. Equality Beyond Humanity* (1994), ed. Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1994, p. 135.
[13] Singer, *Animal Liberation*, pp. 185ff.
[14] Ibidem, p. 10.
[15] Ibidem, p. 191.
[16] Ibidem, p. 200.
[17] Both in Singer and in Regan the main historical-philosophical reference is Cottingham's *"A Brute to the Brutes?"*.

emissary of Christian doctrine and the first committed apologist of «vivisection»[18], that is the servant of the hegemonic ideologies of his time: theism and scientism.

Nevertheless, what it seems to be more disturbing and challenging for all these authors is Descartes' denial of common sense.[19] According to them, the *animal-machine* is a «counter-intuitive claim»[20] which madly contrasts with the everyday experience. As Singer states: «to most people, then and now, it is obvious that if, for example, we stick a sharp knife into the stomach of an unanesthetized dog, the dog will feel pain.»[21] Therefore, Descartes' denial of animal pain and consciousness is nothing but either a deliberate insanity or an ideological presupposition. In any case, the moral consequences are as "clear and distinct" for humans as they are ill-fated for animals. This is the reason why Bentham suddenly appear as the "hero" of western common sense. As Cavalieri points outs, Bentham's remarks vanished «the metaphysical gulf connected with linguistic ability or reason» and allowed other animals to «become again the conscious and sensitive beings they always have been for common sense.»[22] In Boyce Gibson's words, the animal-machine is «a grim forestate of a mechanically minded age» which «brutally violates the old kindly fellowship of living things.»[23] Therefore, Descartes' insights could certainly turn out a fruitful epistemological innovation, but, as contemporary age have sadly discovered, every scientific innovation embodies a dark side which can always produce new forms of cruelty and oppression. Let's consider, for instance, the well-known passage from Fontaine's 1736 *Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire de Port-Royal*.

> *Il n'y avoit guères de solitaire qui ne parlât d'automate. On ne se faisoit plus une affaire de battre un chien. On lui donnoit fort indifféremment des coups de bâton, et on se moquoit de ceux qui plaignoient ces bêtes, comme si elles eussent senti de la douleur. On disoit que c'étoient des horloges, que ces cris qu'elles faisoient, quand on les frappoit n'étoient que le bruit d'un petit ressort qui avoit été remué, mais que tout cela étoit sans sentiment. On élevoit de pauvres animaux sur des ais, par les quatre pattes, pour les ouvrir tout en vie et voir la circulation du sang, qui étoit une grande matiere d'entretien*.[24]

This brief description of the vivisections carried out in Port-Royal – one of the most important Cartesian schools during the XVII century – has become an inevitable quotation. A single episode which exemplifies the «reigning ideology of the times.»[25] Hence, Descartes ushered in a new cruel *habitus* towards animals which neutralized the remnants of "common sense" which somehow still persisted in ancient and Scholastic philosophy. Indeed, although anthropocentric, the Aristotelian paradigm of the *rational animal* - later adopted by following Christian anthropology (Thomas Aquinas) - acknowledged sensibility to animals, albeit it denied them "high" abilities such as reason and language. For his part, Descartes instead "dared" dissociate this old-centuries communion, establishing a more anthropocentric paradigm - the *cogito* - that the following reflection never seriously turned

[18] See for instance Paola Cavalieri, *The Animal Debate. A Reexamination*, in *In Defense of Animals. A second Wave*, ed. Peter Singer, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, pp. 58-60; Tom Regan, *Animal Rights, Human Wrong. An Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (2003), Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2003, pp. 34ff.
[19] Peter Harrison, *Descartes on Animal*, in «The Philosophical Quarterly», 167/1992, p. 227: «In sum, then, Descartes was neither a brute, nor was he muddle-headed. His guilt consists of this: he had the temerity to point out that the traditional justifications for attributing consciousness to animals were vacuous. It is not yet clear that he was wrong.»
[20] Cavalieri, *The Animal Debate*, p. 58.
[21] Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 10.
[22] Cavalieri, *The Animal Question*, p. 61.
[23] Alexander Boyce Gibson, *The Philosophy of Descartes* (1932), New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 196.
[24] Nicolas Fontaines, *Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire de Port-Royal*, II, Utrecht, 1736, pp. 52-53.
[25] Regan, *Animal Rights, Human Wrong*, p. 34.

down. [26] Notwithstanding some feeble and sporadic "returns to common sense" during Enlightenment (Voltaire) and the early Romanticism (Rousseau and Schopenhauer), the Cartesian paradigm went undisturbed through whole modern philosophy. Because of this epochal fascination for the *cogito*, modernity has never been able to conceive the animal question under a moral profile. Using Agamben's words, animals have been only the fuel to make the «anthropological machine»[27] of humanism work increasingly. Therefore, the animal-machine paradigm represented a devastating friction for western moral growth. It marked an obscurantist parenthesis out between ancient moderate anthropocentrism and the contemporary moral reawakening. As if there were a firm line of continuity from Port-Royal to the slaughterhouses of agro-food industry.

As I have stated before, this "history of speciesism" perfectly suits with a normative approach and it can be considered as theoretically legit as it is effective. Nevertheless, I have some doubts about the philosophical substance of these claims. It seems to me that this narration aims to pose more a matter of civilisation, which hopes for a growth of awareness, than a philosophical inquiry. However, by emphasizing the normative dimension in expanse of the historical-philosophical aspects, these interpreters – whose authority is unquestionable - are missing the very stakes of the animal question within western philosophy. After all, history of philosophy is never marginal. Especially when the relationship between ethics and common sense is taken for granted, as a constitutive feature of human moral experience. In my opinion, reducing Descartes' philosophical effort to an unfounded fallacy or, even worse, to a vile form of "intellectual prostitution" is unacceptable. It twists not only the single contribute of Descartes, but also the epistemological effort of modern philosophy as a whole. As Charles Darwin states in *The Origin of the Species*, not exactly a "specist" work: «When it was first said that the sun stood still and the world turned round, the common sense of mankind declared the doctrine false; but the old saying of *Vox populi, vox Dei*, as every philosopher knows, cannot be trusted in science.»[28] These remarks are not philosophical Mannerism. It is not what Nietzsche would call «antiquarian history.» On the contrary, in my opinion, they are essential to understand how important the relationship between humanity and animality has been during modern times for the development of contemporary philosophy. Starting from Descartes' insights, a huge and intense debate on the animal soul took place, wherein the Cartesian position, even though influential, was not hegemonic at all. On the contrary, it was the golden age for anti-Cartesianism. Indeed, during this period, the philosophical reflection went far, outlining very sophisticated arguments which aimed to overcome the basic principles of western thought, from ontology to morality. Hence, from the point of view of history of philosophy, Bentham's question on suffering is neither extraordinary nor innovative. As I will try to point out in the following pages, the contemporary debate on animality can be rather considered a "legacy", a "completion" of modern debate.[29] It is only a matter of resuming the thread of this discourse.

[26] Harrison, *Descartes on Animal*: «Descartes was neither a brute, nor was he muddle-headed. His guilt consists of this: he had the temerity to point out that the traditional justifications for attributing consciousness to animals were vacuous. It is not yet clear that he was wrong.»

[27] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open. Man and Animal* (2002), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004.

[28] Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection* (1859), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 143.

[29] Jean-Luc Guicet, *From the Animal of the Enlightenment to the Animal of Postmodernism*, in «Yale French Studies», 127/2015, pp. 69-83.

> How could such a sound, ingenious mechanist flinch so badly when it came to making an exception for humanity? *Of course* our minds are our brains, and hence are ultimately just stupendously complex "machines"; the difference between us and other animals is one of huge degree, not metaphysical kind.[30]

The thesis of the animal-machine goes along Descartes' reflection since the very beginning. The first theoretical step in this direction was taken with the *Treatise on Man* (1630). In this regard, there are some biographical and philological questions which deserve to be accounted. The *Treatise on Man*, along with the *Treatise on Light*, were published posthumously only in 1664 under the title of *The World*. Descartes began these works in the October 1629 but, despite the commitment, he decided to abandon the project on hearing of condemnation of Galileo in 1633[31]. Indeed, *The World* aimed to provide a mechanistic explanation of some of the most disputed questions during early modernity such as the beginning of the universe, the planetary motion and the origin and the endurance of life. A physical perspective, same as heliocentrism, which could certainly run into religious and political persecution at that time. Descartes' hesitation tells us a very important aspect of the state of scientific research during modern age. As Leo Strauss highlighted, in this period the risk of persecution and censorship was concrete, not to say lethal, and it largely affected any attempt to claim a heterodox perspective explicitly[32]. For this reason, most of the modern works overflow with rhetoric, dissemblance and dialectical tricks which could mask "scandalous" thesis under a more obliging account. In the case of Descartes, we can consider, for instance, the well-known *incipit* of the «description of a new world» in the *Treatise on Light*:

> Nonetheless, in consequence of this, I do not promise to set out here exact demonstrations of all the things I shall say. It will be enough that I open for you the path by which you will be able to find them yourself, when you take the trouble to look for them. Most minds lose interest when things are made too easy for them. And to present a picture that pleases you, I must use shadow as well as bright colours. Thus, I shall be content to pursue the description I have begun, as if I had no other design than to tell you a fable.[33]

As Élisabeth De Fontenay stressed, the allusion to «the guise of a fable» represents an expedient whereby Descartes «established a breach towards a superstitious, occult metaphysics which nourished scepticism»[34]. Indeed, here Descartes is about to outline a cosmologic model where the creation and the endurance of the world are explained by means of a mechanist ontology. A perspective where God, the first providential principle par excellence, is dangerously reduced to a starting impulse from which laws of nature necessary follow.

This radicality becomes even more evident in the *Treatise on Man*. The latter can be considered Descartes' first attempt to develop a mechanist anthropology:

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[30] Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea. Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (1995), London, Penguin Books, 1996, p. 370.

[31] As Emanuela Scribano pointed out, Descartes did not publish the *Treatise on Man* because of prudential motivations, as in the case of the cosmological theory of the *Treatise of Light*, but because of the lack of an adequate embryology, that is an explanation of the formation of the living. Descartes will develop the latter in the 1647 *The Description of the Human Body* (published posthumously in 1664). Cf. Emanuela Scribano, *Macchine con la mente. Fisiologia e metafisica tra Cartesio e Spinoza*, Roma, Carocci, 2015, pp. 21-22.

[32] Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988.

[33] René Descartes, *Philosophical Essays*, ed. Roger Ariew, Cambridge, Hackett, 2000, p. 41.

[34] Élisabeth De Fontenay, *Le Silence des Bêtes, La philosophie à l'épreuve de l'animalité*, Paris, Fayard, 1998, p. 277. Translation mine.

> I assume that the body is nothing other than a statue or earthen machine, which God forms expressly to make it as much as possible like us, so that not only does he give it externally the colour and shape of all our members, but also he puts within it all the parts necessary to make it walk, eat, breathe, and ultimately imitate all those of our functions that may be imagined to proceed from matter and to depend only on the arrangement of organs.[35]

By means of the body-machine paradigm, Descartes distances himself from old-centuries authority of Greek thought.[36] He was aware of the many contradictions that the encounter between Christian theology and Aristotelianism produced, especially for what concerns the understanding of the living. In his eyes, one of the most insidious fallacies was the obscure paradigm of the tripartite soul. Within the Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective, the soul, i.e., the form of each living thing, consists of three parts: the vegetative soul (biological needs), the sensitive soul (sensations) and the rational soul (reason and language). The rational soul is superior to the other two, albeit it contains them. This is the ontological background of the paradigm of the *rational animal*: human beings share with all other living beings, vegetables and animals, the elementary features of life, but they are the only ones endowed with rationality. This qualitative understanding of the living, where the epistemology of truth is immanent to the sensitive knowledge (the common sense), suited perfectly with Christian metaphysic. Yet, such a Greek-Christian ontology wavered on a fundamental theological issue: the immortality of soul. In fact, if the soul is the form of every living being, then it could not subsist without a body, thereby compromising the salvation plan.[37]

Descartes' reflection on the proper status of body and of the soul aimed to re-establish this debate. Therefore, his radical approach is not a *petitio principii*, but rather the attempt to put an end to all the ambiguities caused by ancient essentialism.

> I should like you to consider next all the functions I have attributed to this machine—such as the digestion of food, the beating of the heart and arteries, the nourishment and growth of the members, respiration, walking, and sleeping; the reception of light, sounds, odors, tastes, heat, and other such qualities by the external sense organs; the impression of their ideas on the organs of the common sense and the imagination; the retention of the impression of the ideas upon the memory; the internal motions of the appetites and passions; and, finally, the external motions of all the members, which so suitably follow the actions of objects that present themselves to sense as the passions and impressions found in memory, that they imitate in the most perfect manner possible those of a real man. I should like you to consider that all these functions follow naturally in this machine simply from the arrangement of its organs, no more or less than the movements of a clock or other automaton follow from that of its counterweights and wheels, so that *it is not at all necessary for their explanation to conceive in it any other soul, vegetative or sensitive, or any other principle of motion and life other than its blood and its spirits, set in motion by the heat of the fire that burns continually in its heart, and which is of a nature no different from all fires in inanimate bodies*.[38]

As Descartes states, a mechanic explanation of the living body permits to conceive any corporeal function, from digestion to imagination and even memory, as the necessary product of a certain arrangement of organs. Therefore, life, that is the fact that a body-machine continues to work, is caused not by vague intrinsic potentialities, but rather by the «heat of the fire» which burns in the heart. By doing so, Descartes is reducing the vegetative

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[35] Descartes, *Philosophical Essays*, pp. 41-42. See also Julian Jaynes, *The Problem of Animate Motion in the Seventeenth Century*, «Journal of History of Ideas», 2/1979, pp. 219-234.

[36] It is a critical attitude towards the authority of the «ancients» that Descartes carried out until his very last work, *The Passions of the Souls* (1649). Cf. Descartes, *Philosophical Essays*, cit., p. 298 «The defectiveness of the sciences we have received from the ancients is nowhere more apparent than in what they have written on the passions»

[37] Gary Hatfield, *Animals*, in *A Companion to Descartes*, Janet Broughton and John Carriero, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp. 404-425.

[38] Descartes, *Philosophical Essays*, p. 43. Emphasis mine.

and the sensitive souls of scholastic philosophy to matter. The latter, depending on its structure, produces most of the functions whereof a body is capable. As we noticed before, these considerations did not find a more precise development. Descartes was aware of their suspicious radicality. The mechanic understanding of body endows matter with a complete autonomy, releasing it from the old-centuries perspective which reduced it to a passive substrate upon which the shaping power of «form» is impressed. Indeed, Descartes' proposal gave rise to an extremely dangerous suspicious: the possibility of a material origin of thought. In other words, Descartes' perspective could finally legitimate the scandalous thesis of materialism. It is exactly because of this radical concept of the body, that the reflection on the souls was to be likewise radical.

Descartes went back on the human-machine hypothesis in the fifth part of the *Discourse on the Method* (1637). Yet, this time, the mechanic interpretation of the body is carried out in addition to the important consideration on the nature of souls developed in the previous part. It is the "discovery" of the *cogito* («*I think, therefore I am*»), that is the philosophical demonstration of the immateriality of thought.

> Then, examining with attention what I was, and seeing that I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world nor any place where I was, I could not pretend, on that account, that I did not exist at all; and that, on the contrary, from the very fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it followed very evidently and very certainly that I existed; whereas, on the other hand, had I simply stopped thinking, even if all the rest of what I had ever imagined had been true, I would have had no reason to believe that I had existed. From this I knew that I was a substance the whole essence or nature of which is simply to think, and which, in order to exist, has no need of any place nor depends on any material thing. Thus this "I," that is to say, the soul through which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body and is even easier to know than the body, and even if there were no body at all, it would not cease to be all that it is.[39]

In the fourth part of the *Discourse*, Descartes establishes a complete identification between the *I* and the *thought*. In few words, the French philosopher rephrases the Scholastic soul in terms of *conscience* or, even better, *mind*. In fact, the *cogito* is the immediate awareness of one's own actions and states of mind which is more primal that reasoning or speaking. So primal that Descartes goes to define it as a separated substance which nature is «simply to think» and «which, in order to exist, has no need of any place nor depend on any material thing.»

Once he got hold of the concept of mind as separated *res* in relation to the matter, Descartes can finally develop the outstanding questions of *The World*, pushing the spectre of materialism away. As Antonio Damasio sagaciously pointed out:

> When we put Descartes' statement back where it belongs, we might wonder for a moment whether it might mean something different from what it has come to stand for. Might one read it instead as an acknowledgment of the superiority of conscious feeling and reasoning, without any firm commitment as to their origin, substance, or permanence? Might the statement also have served the clever purpose of accommodating religious pressures of which Descartes was keenly aware?[40]

Body and *Cogito*, *soul* and *matter*: these are the two ontological dimensions which define the human. Their respective autonomy is established upon what one can do or not compared to the other. The body can everything but thinking, while the *cogito* can only think, albeit such a singularity certifies its immateriality and, therefore, its divine origin. Descartes' perspective is very intriguing. Unlike the traditional mind-body dualism, the French philosopher does not degrade the body to a totally passive material substrate to maintain the

[39] Ibidem, p. 61.

[40] Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error. Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, New York, Avon Books, 1994, pp. 248.

ontological primacy of soul. Descartes conceived the living body as a flawless *automa* capable of countless and astonishing functions. In other word, the body, since it is created by God, has its own ontological dignity whether it is joined or not with a soul.[41]

Nevertheless, the importance of body in Descartes is fundamental to understand the question of the *animal-machine*.

> These are all the same features in which one can say that animals lacking reason resemble us. But I could not on that account find there any of those functions, which, being dependent on thought, are the only ones that belong to us as men, although I did find them all later on, once I had supposed that God created a rational soul and joined it to this body in a particular manner that I described.[42]

From here on, Descartes, since he finally owns a «clear and distinct» concept of thought, proceeds with a more accurate compared anatomy between the human body and the animal ones. For this research, Descartes' presupposition (or prejudice?) is essential: a living body can carry out its vital functions without a soul, but if such a body is joined to a soul, as the human being *only* is, then it is capable of things whereof matter, the substance of the body, is essentially not. All living bodies are *de facto* machines, but only the human body is joined with a soul which enables it to perform functions that are mechanically impossible.

> If there were such machines having the organs and the shape of a monkey or of some other animal that lacked reason, we would have no way of recognizing that they were not entirely of the same nature as these animals; whereas, if there were any such machines that bore a resemblance to our bodies and imitated our actions as far as this is practically feasible, we would always have two very certain means of recognizing that they were not at all, for that reason, true men.

Descartes' answer is well-know: these two "anthropological markers" are language (both verbal and gestural) and thought (consciousness). In case one might build machines capable of articulate sounds like words, however such *automata* will be never able to «respond to the sense of all that will be said in its presence, as even the dullest men can do.» Moreover, and this is a crucial aspect, although these machines «might perform many tasks very well or perhaps better than any of us, such machines would inevitably fail in other tasks; by this means one would discover that they were acting, not through knowledge, but only through the disposition of their organs.» Indeed, according to Descartes, reason «is a *universal instrument* that can be of help in all sorts of circumstances», while «organs require some particular disposition for each particular action.» In other words, the functions whereof the *cogito* is capable do not depend on organs since matter, although highly performing, cannot produce by itself skills such as symbolic communication and self-consciousness. By

[41] My summary reconstruction of Descartes' thought focuses on the animal question. For this reason, in order to preserve a certain analytic relevance, I do not mean to deal with two important issues: the demonstration of the existence of God and the union between the mind and the body. In the fourth part of the *Discourse* and in the *Third Mediation*, Descartes provides an ontological argument for the demonstration of the existence of God, where the presence of the idea of perfection, or of a perfect being (God), within the human mind can be explained only by presuming that «this idea had been placed in me by a nature truly more perfect than I was and that it even had within itself all the perfections of which I could have any idea, that is to say, to explain myself in a single word, that it was God» (Cf. Descartes, *Philosophical Essays*, p. 61). Beside this ontological demonstration, Descartes attempted also to provide a physiological explanation (outlined in a "final" form within 1649 *Passions of the Soul*): God placed soul within human body, but their connection does not involve constant intervention (unlike Malebranche's Occasionalism). They interact by following mechanic dynamics as the soul is located within the «pineal gland» and conveys with the corporeal organs by mean of the nervous system (actual tube within which «animal spirits» flow).

[42] Descartes, *Philosophical Essays*, p. 67.

assuming this radical dualism, Descartes eventually deactivated the materialistic hypothesis: «*the rational soul* […] *can in no way be derived from the potentiality of matter*.»[43]

Within history of western philosophy, these pages of the *Discourse* mark a point of no return. By attributing, on the one hand, what Derrida would call «the proper of man» only to the *res cogitans* and, on the other hand, the animal life (whereof human beings take part with their body) to the sole *res extensa*, Descartes solved all the conceptual contradictions of scholastic understanding of soul. Nevertheless, Descartes still employs a scholastic grammar: indeed, his concept of *cogito* is obtained by isolating the rational souls from the vegetative soul and the sensitive soul. The latter are compressed on matter, making the distinction between "form" and "substance" become a matter of organic configurations. Finally, the rational soul is redefined in terms of «consciousness» - *I think, therefore I am* -, which is a very narrow field compared to the countless – and essential for the endurance of life – functions which body is capable of. Yet, it is enough to circumscribe a separated ontological dimension which only the human being can access to.

However, the definition of the *cogito* not only deactivates the materialistic hypothesis; it rather aims to provide a stronger theological justification. Indeed, the scholastic understanding of soul could not properly manage with the difference between human beings and animals, ending up with fomenting forms of animal idolisation which were both, according to Descartes, epistemologically naïve and theologically ambiguous. Not by chance, the main polemic front in the fifth part of the *Discourse* is Montaigne's 1576 *An Apology for Raymond Seibond*. In these well-known pages of the *Essays*, Montaigne contested the anthropocentric paradigm of the *rational animal*, bestowing language, thought and reason on animals.

> The natural, original distemper of Man is presumption. Man is the most blighted and frail of all creatures and, moreover, the most given to pride. This creature knows and sees that he is lodged down here, among the mire and shit of the world, bound and nailed to the deadest, most stagnant part of the universe, in the lowest storey of the building, the farthest from the vault of heaven; his characteristics place him in the third and lowest category of animate creatures, yet, in thought, he sets himself above the circle of the Moon, bringing the very heavens under his feet. The vanity of this same thought makes him equal himself to God; attribute to himself God's mode of being; pick himself out and set himself apart from the mass of other creatures; and (although they are his fellows and his brothers) carve out for them such helpings of force or faculties as he thinks fit. How can he, from the power of his own understanding, know the hidden, inward motivations of animate creatures? What comparison between us and them leads him to conclude that they have the attributes of senseless brutes? When I play with my cat, how do I know that she is not passing time with me rather than I with her? […] Why should it be a defect in the beasts not in us which stops all communication between us? We can only guess whose fault it is that we cannot understand each other: for we do not understand them any more than they understand us. They may reckon us to be brute beasts for the same reason that we reckon them to be so. It is no great miracle if we cannot understand them: we cannot understand Basques or Troglodytes![44]

Montaigne deflates human alleged ontological primacy, highlighting how such a primacy is mostly caused by an anthropocentric presumption. Indeed, what reasons do human beings have to exclude animals from the community of speakers? What are the criteria that allow us to consider ourselves rational and, on the contrary, to judge animals as brutes lacking reason? We do not have any epistemological certainty of this distinction because of the intrinsic limits of human knowledge. Therefore, Montaigne's scepticism decentralises the

[43] Ibidem, p. 73. It is interesting to note how this quotation continues: «it is not enough for it to be lodged in the human body like a pilot in his ship, unless perhaps in order to move its members, but rather that it must be more closely joined and united to the body in order to have, in addition to this, feelings and appetites similar to our own, and thus to constitute a true man.»

[44] Michel De Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, ed. Michael A. Screech, London, Penguin Books, 2003, Book II, Chapter XII.

paradigm of the rational animal, extending it to all animals: the ontological equality between all the living beings is more plausible than any hierarchies of the living. Descartes contests Montaigne's sceptical perspective since it lacks an appropriate understanding of the body. According to Descartes, the author of the *Essays* establishes a very hasty equality between human beings and animals, focusing especially on the performance of certain abilities. On the contrary, a mechanist explanation of corporeal functions can equalize humans and animals even more, recognising though fundamental differences as, for example, the fact that symbolic language - that is the power to create concepts and to express them in language - does not depend on organs configuration. Yet, this little survey of abilities brings to light a huge qualitative difference between human beings and animal.

For these reasons, in my opinion, Descartes' reflection cannot be considered a fully-fledged form of anthropocentrism. As Desmond Hosford suggested, we should rather talk of «uneasy anthropocentrism» in Descartes.[45] The radicality of his ontological dualism, where the *res cogitans* stands for humanity and the *res extensa* stand for animality, subtends an unsolved tension between materialism (the equalisation of all living bodies) and hyper-rationalism (human exceptionality) which constantly complicate the human-animal relationship[46]. Such a tension becomes further clear during the process of *epoché*, where the main issue is exactly the tricky relationship between the *I* and the *body*. Here, the traditional anthropological definition of *rational animal* turns out to be obsolete.

> What then did I formerly think I was? A man, of course. But what is a man? *Might I not say a "rational animal"? No, because then I would have to inquire what "animal" and "rational" mean*. *And thus from one question I would slide into many more difficult ones* [...]. Now it occurred to me first that I had a face, hands, arms, and this entire *mechanism of bodily members*: the very same as are discerned in a corpse, and which I referred to by the name "body." It next occurred to me that I took in food, that I walked about, and that *I sensed and thought* various things; *these actions I used to attribute to the soul*. But as to what this soul might be, I either did not think about it or else I imagined it a rarefied I-know-not-what, like a wind, or a fire, or ether, which had been infused into my coarser parts. But as to the body I was not in any doubt. On the contrary, I was under the impression that I knew its nature distinctly. Where I perhaps tempted to describe this nature such as I conceived it in my mind, I would have described it thus: by "body," I understand all that is capable of being bounded by some shape, of being enclosed in a place, and of filling up a space in such a way as to exclude any other body from it; of being perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste, or smell; of being moved in several ways, not, of course, by itself, but by whatever else impinges upon it. *For it was my view that the power of self-motion, and likewise of sensing or of thinking, in no way belonged to the nature of the body. Indeed I used rather to marvel that such faculties were to be found in certain bodies*.[47]

As is known, in the Second Meditation (1641), Descartes ends up understanding the *I* as a «thing that thinks», a thing that «doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and that also imagines and senses.» More precisely, this subjectivity is «who senses or who is cognizant of bodily things as if through the senses.» Yet, as Descartes points out, such a sensing is «nothing other than thinking.»[48] Hence, the human beings, as living bodies, are not that different than animals. However, they are endowed with a mind, an immaterial substance which attests some cognitive skills that matter cannot provide, that is the awareness of one's own sensing. As we noticed before, Descartes addressed the vegetative soul and the sensitive soul to the *res extensa*. This means that matter is sentient, but it is not aware of its sensations. According to Descartes, such a consciousness is exactly what we

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[45] Desmond Hosford, *Uneasy Anthropocentrism: Cartesianism and the Ethics of Species Differentiation in Seventeenth-Century France*, in «Jac» 3-4/2010, pp. 515-538.
[46] John Cotthingam, *Cartesian Dualism: theology, metaphysics, and science*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, ed. John Cotthingam, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 236ff.
[47] Descartes, *Philosophical Essays*, pp. 108-109. Emphasis mine.
[48] Ibidem, p. 110.

cannot find in animals. Therefore, the Cartesian anthropological definition is not simply the *cogito*. The human being is not a compound of matter and spirit[49], but rather a *living body that thinks*, while all the other "animals" – a label that Descartes considers to be vague – are "only" *living bodies*.[50]

According to Descartes, Montaigne's perspective conceals also a basic conceptual ambiguity which entails potential and "dangerous" atheistic drift. Indeed, within western thought, bestowing soul on animals is not that simple. It implicates a whole string of consequences in moral terms that can even put into question the very existence of God and with, that, the endurance of traditional values. As is known, in the third part of the *Discourse*, Descartes claims that extending the *epoché* – the methodical doubt - to ethics and politics would have been thoughtless. Therefore, he eventually decides to formulate a «provisional code of morals» in compliance with «the laws and the customs of my country, constantly holding on to the religion in which, by God's grace, I had been instructed from my childhood.» This precautionary moral philosophy underlies the concluding observations of the fifth part, where Descartes, for the first time, addresses the question of animal soul:

> As to the rest, I elaborated here a little on the subject of the soul because it is of the greatest importance; for, after the error of those who deny the existence of God (which I think I have sufficiently refuted), there is none at all that puts weak minds at a greater distance from the straight path of virtue than to imagine that the soul of beasts is of the same nature as ours, and that, as a consequence, we have nothing to fear or to hope for after this life any more than do flies and ants. On the other hand, when one knows how different they are, one understands much better the arguments which prove that our soul is of a nature entirely independent of the body, and consequently that it is not subject to die with it. Then, since we do not see any other causes at all for its destruction, we are naturally led to judge from this that it is immortal.[51]

According to Descartes, the question of the soul of brutes is essentially atheistic since it denies the intrinsic moral character of soul. Indeed, the idea of immortal soul is related to theism, for which God is supremely good, merciful, and just (the same reason why Descartes refused the idea of the deceiving God). In other words, despite his innovative revaluation of body, Cartesian anthropological thought maintains the hardest bias to dispel: that the soul must be saved from the body in order to safeguard human being's moral life.

It is interesting to notice that Descartes did not get involved with the main theoretical issue that the «animal soul» entails: the question of animal suffering. Indeed, Descartes focused his critique to Montaigne only on the matter of abilities (Can they talk? Can they reason?). He left out though, and I think deliberately, the considerations Montaigne developed in the essay that precedes *An Apology for Raymond Seibond*. Indeed, in *On Cruelty*, Montaigne deals with the moral implications of animal suffering. As the author states, «anything beyond the straightforward death-penalty seems pure cruelty.»[52] According to Montaigne, more than mortality, the experience of suffering is what attests, with awful patency, the vulnerability, and the precariousness of the human condition. In the face of suffering, the traditional rational understanding of virtue proves to be incapable of managing with the «monstrous» human desire «to commit murder for the sheer fun of it.» Nevertheless,

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[49] Ibidem, p. 73: «After that, I described the rational soul and showed that it can in no way be derived from the potentiality of matter, as can the other things I have spoken of, but rather that it must be expressly created; and how it is not enough for it to be lodged in the human body like a pilot in his ship, unless perhaps in order to move its members, but rather that it must be more closely joined and united to the body in order to have, in addition to this, feelings and appetites similar to our own, and thus to constitute a true man.»

[50] Maria Franca Spallanzani, *Descartes e il "paradosso" degli animali-macchina,* in «Bruniana & Campanelliana», 1/2011, pp. 185-195.

[51] Descartes, *Philosophical Essays,* p. 73.

[52] Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, Chapter XI.

such a cruelty is not only moral reprehensible when it is inflicted to our human fellows. It is even worse when carried out on animals: «I have not even been able to witness without displeasure *an innocent defenceless beast which has done us no harm* being hunted to the kill […] that has always seemed to me the most disagreeable of sights.» In these pages, Montaigne conceives a parallelism that many following philosophers, from Kant to Schopenhauer, will constantly refer to:

> Natures given to bloodshed where beasts are concerned bear witness to an inborn propensity to cruelty. In Rome, once they had broken themselves in by murdering animals they went on to men and to gladiators. I fear that Nature herself has attached to Man something which goads him on towards inhumanity. Watching animals playing together and cuddling each other is nobody's sport: everyone's sport is to watch them tearing each other apart and wrenching off their limbs.

Nevertheless, such a respect towards animals is not due to a naïve sympathy. As Montaigne points out, «theology herself ordains that we should show some favour towards them; and when we consider that the same Master has lodged us in this palatial world for his service, and that they like us are members of his family.» According to Montagne, we ought moral consideration to animal neither because of an alleged virtuous paternalism nor because of, although more plausible, the ontological equality among all living beings. As he concludes:

> Even if all of that remained unsaid, there is a kind of respect and a duty in man as a genus which link us not merely to the beasts, which have life and feelings, but even to trees and plants. We owe justice to men: and to the other creatures who are able to receive them we owe gentleness and kindness. Between them and us there is some sort of intercourse and a degree of mutual obligation.

Therefore, unlike *An Apology of Raymond Seibond*, in *On Cruelty* Montaigne conceives the equality between human beings and animals by stressing not their common abilities, but the state of passivity and vulnerability that they share since as finite beings. In other words, all living beings are equal because they are all sentient and, therefore, they are all endowed with a soul. In the *Discourse*, Descartes does not straightforwardly deal with the question of suffering, especially the animals' one.[53] As we noticed before, the zoological definition of the *animal-machine*, which stand for *living body*, highlighted more the lack of consciousness than the inability to suffer. Yet, Descartes' positions on this point are not that "clear and distinct", and this missed in-depth analysis is exactly what will cause the several misunderstandings we have told of in the previous section. If we consider that *The World* is a posthumous work, the fifth part of the *Discourse* is the only moment where Descartes deals with the animal question publicly. Animals were not a compelling issue for Descartes. The heuristic model of the machine provided an easy solution: animals are living bodies, whose abilities do not require the presence of a soul, because what we believe a soul can do, such as motion, sensing and even memory, is within reach of matter. This is the philosophical content of the *bête machine*. Descartes did not develop further the animal question, even though he has built his understanding of the human being upon and in opposition to it.

[53] Sergio Landucci, *La Teodicea nell'età Cartesiana*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 1986, pp. 19-25. Descartes devoted to the question of suffering, the human suffering, few but important passages of the fourth and, above all, of the sixth meditations. In the latter, Descartes deal with the mind-body connection and the «physical evil» turns out to be the trickiest issue, especially for its contradictory nature with the theological principle of the «goodness» of God. On Descartes' Theodicy of error see also Michael J. Latzer, *Descartes' Theodicy of Error*, in *The Problem of Evil in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Elmar J. Kremer and Michael J. Latzer, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2001, pp. 35-48; Michael W. Hickson, *A Brief History of Problems of Evil*, in *The Blackwell Companion to The Problem of Evil*, ed. Justin P. Mcbrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder, Oxford, Wiley, 2013, p. 12.

Although not systematic, some other Descartes' public remarks on animals are developed within the *Objections and Replies* to the *Meditation on First Philosophy*. In the fifth objection, the theologian Pierre Gassendi, who has never hidden his fascination with materialism (in his reply, Descartes nicknamed him «Flesh»), not by chance focuses on the passage of the second meditation previously mentioned:

> You may cite human operations that far surpass what the animals do; but that shows only that man is the finest animal, not that he isn't an animal. Similarly, though you show yourself to be the finest of imaginative faculties, you still count as one of them. Give yourself the special label 'mind' if you like, but your having this grander name doesn't mean that your nature is different, i.e. that you are radically different. To prove that—i.e. to prove that you are not a body—you need to do something quite different in kind from anything the brutes do—something that takes place outside the brain or at least independently of it. That's what you need to do, and you don't do it […].[54]

Here Gassendi is outlining the "perspective of gradualness", that is the idea that there are only quantitative differences within the living world. Different levels of complexity that, despite the great distance which separates some living beings from others, mark no qualitative leap out. The "perspective of gradualness" suits with a materialistic ontology since it conceives the human mind only as the highest level of complexity that matter can reach, and not as a separate immaterial substance. As Gassendi highlights, such a materialistic ontology easily comes out of Descartes' understanding of body:

> So I ask you, Soul (or whatever name you want to go by!), have you at this stage corrected your earlier thought that you were like a wind diffused through the parts of the body? Certainly not! So why isn't it possible that you are a wind, or rather a very thin vapour.... diffused through the parts of the body and giving them life? Mightn't it be this vapour that sees with the eyes, hears with the ears, thinks with the brain, and does all the other things that would ordinarily be said to be done by you? And if that is so, why shouldn't you have the same shape as your whole body has, just as the air has the same shape as the vessel that contains it? Why shouldn't you think that you are enclosed within whatever it is that encloses your body, or within your body's skin? Why shouldn't you occupy space—the parts of space that the solid body or its parts don't fill?[55]

In his objections, Gassendi continuously insists on this point because he is aware that the materialistic drift is the raw nerve of Descartes' reasoning. Indeed, the theoretical strength of the *cogito* is only ostensible, and the more its hetero substantiality is stressed, as Hobbes' objection shows[56], the more it turns out to be a *petitio principii.* And the question of animal soul is exactly what shorts Descartes' dualism the most.

> You may say that you are radically different from the brutes in that you are free, and have the power to prevent yourself from running away and the power to prevent yourself from charging forward. But the cognition-generator in an animal does just the same: a dog, despite its fear of threats and blows may rush forward to snap up a bit of food it has seen—just like a man! You may say that a dog barks simply from impulse, whereas a man speaks from choice. But there are causes at work in the man too—ones that we might describe by saying that he also speaks from some impulse. What you attribute to choice occurs as a result of a stronger impulse, and indeed the brute also chooses, when one impulse is greater than another. You say that the brutes don't have reason. Well, of course they don't have human reason, but they do have their own kind of reason. So it doesn't seem right to call them 'non-rational' except in contrast with us or with our kind of reason; and anyway reason seems to be something general that can be attributed to animals just as well as can the cognitive faculty or internal sense. You may say that

[54] René Descartes, *Objections to the Meditations and Descartes' Replies*, Jonathan Bennet, 2007, p. 95. Text available at <www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1642_3.pdf>.
[55] Ibidem, pp. 87-88.
[56] Ibidem, p. 43: «Knowing the proposition 'I exist' thus depends on knowing the proposition 'I think'; and knowing 'I think' depends on our inability to separate thought from the matter that is thinking. So the right conclusion seems to be that the thinking thing is material rather than immaterial.» Text available at <www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1642_2.pdf>.

> animals don't engage in reasoning. But although they don't reason as perfectly or about as many subjects as man does, they do still reason, and the difference between their reasoning and ours seems to be merely one of degree. You may say they don't speak. Well, of course, not being human beings they don't produce human speech, but they still produce their own form of speech, which serves them just as our speech serves us. You may say that even a delirious man can still string words together to express his meaning, which even the wisest of the brutes cannot do. But it's not fair to expect the brutes to use human language and turn one's back on the kind of language that they do have.[57]

Gassendi uses Montaigne against Descartes to put the latter's ontology of the body under stress: by their actions, animals demonstrate that they are not simply stirring-reaction machines, but that they have a will and a certain awareness of the external world. Hence, if it is true that they are machines, then they are "machines that think", and, therefore, there is no reason to believe that human being should be something different.

In his reply, Descartes finally clarifies his position regarding whether animals are endowed with soul: «Your questions about the brutes are out of place in this context because the mind, when engaged in private meditation, can experience its own thinking but can't have any experience to settle whether or not the brutes think. It must tackle that question later on, by an empirical investigation of their behaviour.»[58] Here Descartes seems to step back: human mind can *only* know «its own thinking», but it cannot comprehend what there is inside other minds. In other words, we can empirically investigate animals' actions, trying even to deduce their states of mind. Yet, we will never be sure of our hypothesis. Surely, according to Descartes, the mechanic explanation of their functions and behave seems to be exhaustive so far.

However, even though Descartes is reluctant before the materialistic radicalisation of his thesis, he turns out to be more astonished in front of some theologians' scepticism towards his thesis. Indeed, in the sixth objection – made by a group of theologians, among which there stands Mersenne – we find the following remark:

> You may say that a dog doesn't know that it is running or thinking, but you can't prove this; and the dog might well think the same about us, namely that when we are running or thinking we don't know that that's what we are doing. You don't see the dog's internal mode of operation any more than the dog sees yours; and there have been plenty of distinguished men who have been prepared to allow that the beasts have reason. *We don't accept that all their operations can be satisfactorily explained in terms of mechanics, without invoking sensation, life or soul—indeed we'll bet you anything you like that this ridiculous claim is impossible. And if it is maintained that apes, dogs and elephants can perform all their operations by mechanical means, lots of people will say that man himself lacks sensation and intellect, and can do everything by means of mechanical structures, without any mind. For the limited reasoning power to be found in animals differs from human reason only in degree; it doesn't imply any essential difference*.[59]

This objection claims the main theological concern toward Descartes' dualistic ontology. Once again, animals prove to represent the most insidious question: if Descartes is right, then, one day, some might end up extending his materialism even to human being. As if these theologians forecasted the publication of La Mettrie's 1747 *Machine Man*[60]:

> Actually, though, the brutes don't have any thought. My critics imply that this is merely something that I said; but I didn't just say it—I proved it by very strong arguments that so far no-one has refuted. As for the charge of 'saying without proving', the boot is on the other foot: my critics say, as if they were

[57] Ibidem, pp. 95-96.
[58] Ibidem, p. 344.
[59] Ibidem, pp. 149-150. Emphasis mine. Text available at <www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1642_4.pdf>.
[60] Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *Machine Man and Other Writings*, ed. Ann Thomson, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

present in the animals' hearts, that 'dogs when awake know that they are running, and in their dreams know that they are barking'. They go on to say that they don't believe that the behaviour of the beasts can all be 'explained in terms of mechanics, without invoking sensation, life or soul' (*I take this to mean 'without invoking thought'; for I accept that the brutes have what is commonly called 'life', and a corporeal soul and organic sensation*); moreover, they are ready to bet any amount that this 'ridiculous claim' is impossible.[61]

In his response, Descartes claims a very important statement: supporters of the soul of brutes are basically anthropocentric; they think they know what and how animals think. As Descartes remarks, he did bestow life, «corporeal soul and organic sensation», on animals, but not «thought», that is, according to his definition, consciousness. As we noticed before, in front of materialist philosophers such as Gassendi, Descartes totters, retracting and softening his more radical statement. On the contrary, in front of theologians he becomes more confident and resolved:

This isn't an argument that proves anything, except perhaps that some muddled people are so strongly wedded to their preconceived opinions (or their pre-adopted sentences) that rather than change them they will deny truths about themselves - truths that they must continually experience within themselves as true. We can't fail to experience constantly within ourselves that we are thinking. When it is shown that animate brutes can do everything they do without any thought, no-one should infer from this that he himself doesn't think! Here is my diagnosis of someone who does make that inference: *He used to attribute thought to the brutes, which helped to convince him that he operates in exactly the same way as the brutes do*. Then*, when it is pointed out to him that the brutes don't think, he has a choice between giving up 'I think' and giving up 'Men and the brutes operate in the same way'; and he actually - bizarrely - prefers to deny that he thinks, because he is so wedded to the sentence 'Men and the brutes operate in the same way' that he won't give it up*.[62]

According to Descartes, it is surprising how theologians, since they are supporters of human exceptionality, cannot accept the idea that thought is «distinct from corporeal motion.» They seem not to understand that the "perspective of gradualness" they endorse - «*animals differ from human reason only in degree*» - is closer to materialism, and so to atheism, than his dualism between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, which, on the contrary, wants to be a defence of the very Christian understanding of soul.

The rest of the debate on Descartes' animal-machine occurred in private correspondences. Along with the fifth part of the *Discourse*, these letters compose the main reference for animal studies scholarship. One of the most quoted is the correspondence with the English theologian Henry More. In a letter dated December 11th 1648, More focuses his critiques to Descartes' mechanism especially on the consequences that such an ontological perspective entails for the understanding of animals:

For the rest, my spirit, through sensitivity and tenderness, turns not with abhorrence from any of your opinions so much as from that deadly and murderous sentiment which you professed in your *Method*, whereby you snatch away, or rather withold, life and sense from all animals, for you would never concede that they really live. Here, the gleaming rapier-edge of your genius arouses in me not so much mistrust as dread when, solicitous as to the fate of living creatures, I recognize in you not only subtle keenness, but also, as it were, the sharp and cruel blade which in one blow, so to speak, dared to despoil of life and sense practically the whole race of animals, metamorphosing them into marble statues and machines.[63]

According to More, the inflamed coherence whereby Descartes outlines his dualistic ontology, ends up, on the side of the *res extensa*, objectifying «the whole race of animals.»

[61] Ibidem, p. 150. Emphasis mine.
[62] Ibidem, pp. 150-151. Emphasis mine.
[63] Leonora D. Cohen, *Descartes and Henry More on the Beast Machine. A Translation of Their Correspondence Pertaining to Animal Automatism*, in «Annals of Science», 1/1936, p. 50.

As many other critics, More contests the heuristic validity of the animal-machine by evoking the "common sense". Nevertheless, More is aware that such a «cruelty» is not directed to animal as such, but it is due to very larger philosophical requirements:

> But I perceive clearly what drives you to hold that beasts are machines. It is simply a way of demonstrating the immortality of our souls, which reasoning, since it assumes that the body is in no wise able to cogitate, concludes that wherever there is cogitation there must needs be substance quite distinct from body, and hence immortal. From whence it follows that brutes, if they cogitate, have annexed to themselves immortal substances. Nay but I beseech you, most discerning friend, since from this way of reasoning it is necessary to deprive living brutes of sense, or to bequeath to them immortality, why do you prefer to make of them inanimate machines rather than bodies activated by immortal soul? Especially since such a position, hardly harmonious with the phenomena of nature, plainly is unheard of until now.[64]

In few words, as More stresses, without the hypothesis of the animal-machine, Descartes' mechanist zoology could easily work for a radical materialist ontology, thereby leading to the negation of the immortal souls and, with it, of the existence of God.[65] As Platonist, More concludes his letter, exhorting Descartes to account the «opposite view»: that of «the wisest man of antiquity» (Pythagoras, Plato etc.), where animals were endowed with an immortal souls. This more harmonious perspective would not reduce a «distinguished genius» as Descartes' to a very excessive dilemma: «that if it does not concede immortal souls to brutes, it necessarily makes of universal animal life insensible machines.» More's critique stresses the deviation in Descartes between theological demands and epistemological validity, between philosophical truth and common sense. On the contrary, according to him, the ancient view is more consistent, more capable of combining Christian metaphysic with the undeniable evidence of senses.

In his response, dated February 5th 1649, Descartes reiterates the heuristic validity of the *res cogitans-res extensa* dualism.

> But to no prejudice are we all more habituated than to that which has persuaded us from earliest childhood that living animals think. No reason indeed moved us to this belief save that seeing that numerous parts of the animal body are not far different from ours in external configuration and motion, and believing that in us there is but a single principle of motion, namely, the soul, which same substance moves the body and cogitates, we doubted not that just such a soul might be found in animals.[66]

Nevertheless, such a paradigm does not entail a radical objectification. As Descartes states: «*although I hold for certain that it cannot be proven that any cogitation exists in brutes, I do not thereby judge that the absence of thought can be demonstrated, since the human mind can never penetrate into the inmost recesses of the animal being*»[67]. Moreover, Descartes' continues:

> I speak of cogitation, not of life or sense; for to no animal do I deny life, inasmuch as that I attribute solely to the heat of the heart; nor do I deny sense in so far as it depends upon the bodily organism. *And thus my opinion is not so much cruel to wild beasts as favourable to men, whom it absolves, at least those not bound by the superstition of the Pythagoreans, of any suspicion of crime, however often they may eat or kill animals.*

I think that these words summarize Descartes' zoological thesis efficaciously: animals have «sense in so far it depends upon the bodily organism» and, therefore, they suffer,

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[64] Ibidem, p. 51.
[65] Cf. Charles Webster, *Henry More and Descartes: Some New Sources*, in «The British Journal for the History of Science», 4/1969, pp. 359-361.
[66] Cohen, *Descartes and Henry More on the Beast Machine*, pp. 51-52.
[67] Ibidem, p. 52. Emphasis mine.

rejoice, sadden and remember as human beings do. Perhaps, as Descartes writes to the Marquis of Newcastle in 1646, these passions are for them even «more violent than they are in man.»[68] Animals' states of mind are *qualitatively* different though. In a letter to Plempius dated 1637, Descartes claims that «brutes do not see as we do when we are aware that we are seeing.»[69] In other words, animals have no consciousness of what they sense inasmuch they lack the *res cogitans*, but they do sense. These considerations show not only how complex Descartes' position is, but also how contemporary harsh judgments are deceptive. As Cottingham pointed out, «the inference from "x is an automaton" to "x is incapable of feeling" is a mistaken one.»[70] Even thought, nowadays, we would be inclined to refute the ease with which Descartes justifies animal killing in his response to More, I think we can all agree with Elisabeth De Fontenay when she asks: «If Descartes finally bestow a sensation of their body on animal, should we not acknowledge that is much ado about nothing»[71]?

Did the Animal-Machine Actually Exist?

Although summarily, in the previous section I have tried to reconstruct the genesis and the development of the animal-machine paradigm. I did not mean to provide an apology for Descartes, but I rather attempted to clean his thesis on the *animal-machine* out from those contemporary harsh judgements that ended up overlapping excessively the moral repulsion on the philosophical analysis. Descartes' position was less radical that what animal studies scholars maintain. The French philosopher articulated his arguments with more uncertainty, wavering between rigid standpoints and partial retractions. Moreover, he always held off moral considerations, dealing with suffering more as a cognitive experience than as a moral question. In my opinion, Descartes radical division between the proper of human and animality aims exactly to avoid establishing lines of continuity that would morally mean little. In his response dated March 5th 1649, Henry More contests Descartes' idea that language and reason could establish an ontological difference between human beings and animals. As he writes, «Nor do any babies, at least for the space of a few months, although they may cry, laugh, grow angry, etc. Nevertheless, you continue to believe, I take it, that babies are alive and that they possess rational souls.»[72] Descartes replays on April 5th 1649, claiming that «Babies and brutes are not the same thing: nor would I judge that babies are endowed with mind unless I perceived that they are of the same nature as adults; brutes, however, never grow up to the level where any certain sign of cogitation is to be found in them.»[73] This exchange of opinions summarises a diatribe on what is the threshold over which inhumanity ends and morality starts that still today is far from being resolved.[74]

The misrepresentation of Descartes' philosophy is also due to the tendency to mistake Descartes' philosophy for Cartesianism or, better, to lay on Descartes the radical rationalism of the following authors. A paradigmatic case is surely Malebranche, the theorist of Occasionalism. Malebranche is considered the most radical executor of Descartes' zoological discourse; a sort of extremist Cartesian who even kicked a bitch regardless its pregnancy because it has no feeling at all. Even though such an anecdote is probably a fake,

[68] Descartes, *Philosophical Essays*, p. 276.
[69] Ibidem, p. 84.
[70] Cottingham, *"A Brute to the Brutes?*, p. 553.
[71] Fontenay, *Le Silence des Bêtes*, p. 281. Translation mine. See also Gordon P. Baker and Katherine J. Morris, *Descartes Unlocked*, in «British Journal for the History of Philosophy», 1/1993, pp. 5-27.
[72] Cohen, *Descartes and Henry More on the Beast Machine*, p. 54.
[73] Ibidem, p. 55.
[74] E. De Fontenay, *Without Offending Humans. A Critique of Animal Rights*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2012, pp. 52-54.

it has always stood for the coherent actualisation of Cartesian perspective on animal. As Malebranche writes in 1674 *The Search after Truth*:

> The movements of animals and plants indicate intelligence, but this intelligence is not material; it is distinct from animals, as the intelligence that arranges the wheels of a watch is distinct from the watch. For a bottom this intelligence appears infinitely strong, and is the same one that formed us in our mothers' womb and gives us growth to which we cannot, by all the efforts of our mind and will, add a cubit. Thus, in animals, there is neither intelligence nor souls as ordinary meant. They eat without pleasure, cry without pain, grow not even know what must be done digest what we eat; that it cannot make it sense, since matter is incapable of sensation, and so forth.[75]

As Cottingham underlines, Cartesians such as Malebranche understand the concept of «automaton» more radically than Descartes, ruling out the possibility that a «creature who act in a mechanical fashion» could have feelings foursquare.[76] Nevertheless, Malebranche's position is more complex. Indeed, according to Nicholas Jolley, Malebranche's theory of sensations «broke with Cartesian orthodoxy.» The latter understands sensation only as a product of «purely intellectual awareness.» In other words, a living being must be endowed with mind to have sensation of a kind. Instead, in 1674 *The Search After Truth*, Malebranche conceives his occasionalistic gnoseology by distinguishing sensations and intellect. As Nicolas Jolley stressed:

> Perception involves the mind's relationship to ideas, and ideas, as has been seen, are entities in God. Thus, there can be no perception without divine illumination. Sensation, by contrast, is a nonintentional and nonrelational state of the soul. Thus, by virtue of his innovations in this area Malebranche had the resources to avoid the Cartesian doctrine of the beast-machine. Indeed, it seems that Malebranche was in a position to advance a rather intriguing theory of animal consciousness. He said that though animals have no capacity for judgment, or seeing that, they do have the capacity to feel sensations such as pain and hunger.[77]

Therefore, according to Malebranche, «the mental life of animals could be one of buzzing, blooming confusion», but it entails «a more minimal form of consciousness to animal than that which most of us are inclined to attribute, but at least it would do justice to the profoundly anti-Cartesian intuition that animal feels pain and hunger.» Yet, as Jolley points out, «Malebranche did not exploit the resource of his theory in this way; he continued to toe the party line of the beast-machine doctrine», stating the absence of feelings in animals «more dogmatically than Descartes himself did.» Such a schizophrenia between the philosophy of mind and the unconditional support to the *animal-machine* is essentially due to theological requirements. Indeed, according to Malebranche, «the ascription of sensations to animals is inconsistent with the principle that under a just God the innocent will not suffer.»[78] Once again, the *animal-machine* paradigm turns out to be more a moral precaution than an actual epistemological thesis. All the Cartesians, no matter how radical, were aware of its clear disagreements with the experience. They provided theoretical justification of a thesis which they were not actually committed to simply to avoid the dangerous drifts of atheism and of materialism, that is the idea of a fully material living world, upon which there is no transcendental tutelage.

In conclusion, I think it is possible to state that, from a historical-philosophical point of view, the concept of animal-machine did not receive the committed support that

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[75] Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search After Truth*, ed. T. M. Lennon and P. J. Olscamp, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 495-496. Emphasis mine.
[76] Cottingham, *"A Brute to the Brutes?*, p. 553.
[77] Nicholas Jolley, *Malebranche on the Soul*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Malebranche*, ed. Steven Nadler, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 41-42.
[78] Ibidem, p. 43.

contemporary interpreters are used to maintaining. And this for two reasons: first, because, on the basis of Descartes' works, the *animal-machine* does not entail an objectivation of the living animal; subsequently, because, during modern age, the *animal-machine* stood for a "theistic clause" to hinder the rising of a strong materialistic discourse which found its starting point exactly in the *animal-machine*. The mechanic understanding of living bodies represented the possibility to conceive the relationship between the human being and the animal in a more egalitarian way. If the *bête machine* is absolutely hyper-conservative from a theological point of view, it can rather be highly revolutionary in the field of anthropological philosophy instead.

The Suffering Animal: The Route of the Res extensa

With Descartes, the paradigm of the *rational animal* lost his heuristic efficacy. From its very beginning, modern age rejected the ontological concord between form and substance, fostering instead a strict either-or distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, between *cogito* and *body-machine*. Unlike Descartes, modern philosophers have tended not so much to solve this tension by seeking a physiological or metaphysical union, as rather by emphasising one dimension at the expense of the other. In other words, Descartes ushered in the main guidelines for the following anthropological reflection: on the one hand, the *route of res cogitans*, where the concept of humanity has been always more identified with an immaterial understanding of mind. As I will try to show later, this is the tradition which resulted finally in idealism. On the other hand, the *route of res extensa*, where humanity and animality become a matter of material configurations. The latter resulted in the less systematic and more colourful tradition of *modern materialism*.[79] If the *route of res cogitans* has kept on sharpening the ontological division between human being and animal, the *route of res extensa* has kept on instead moving close animals and human beings. Such an approach was not carried out under the banner of classic theriophily ("human beings are the same as animals", "animals are better than humans", etc.), but it rather attempted to extend all the theological and moral implication of the *animal-machine* to the human being[80]. In other words, I think we can consider modern materialism as the attempt to develop further all those insights and contradictions on the *animal-machine* that Descartes, on purpose or not, left unresolved.

Surely, according to a well-established vulgate historical interpretation, Spinoza - an «actual child of *L'Homme*»[81] - is the author who, more than anybody else tackled Descartes' ontology head on, proving that a materialistic and atheist monism is the most coherent outcome of its dualist presuppositions.[82] As Harry Wolfson highlighted, within western thought, Spinoza represents a fundamental moment of synthesis which is impossible to go back from. Indeed, with 1677 *Ethics*, Spinoza provided strong argumentations for the demolition of finalism, of human free will, of God's spirituality, of mind-body dualism, and

[79] Cf. Falk Wunderlich, *Varieties of Early Modern Materialism*, in «British Journal for the History of Philosophy», 5/2016, pp. 797-813, and John W. Yolton, *Thinking Matter. Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983, pp. XI-XII.

[80] I took inspiration from Emanuela Scribano, who maintained that there are two «parallel souls» within Descartes' reflection: the neurophysiological inquiry and metaphysics. Cf. Scribano, *Macchine con la mente*, p. 10.

[81] Ibidem, p. 148 [Translation mine].

[82] On Spinoza's atheism see also Gianluca Mori *L'ateismo dei moderni. Filosofia e negazione di Dio da Spinoza a d'Holbach*, Carocci, Roma, 2016, p. 35ff.

of Christian axiology.[83] The positive sense of such an epoch-making deconstruction is the understanding of the living bodies, human and animal, as «modes» which express different levels of intensity of the infinite attributes whereof the substance is composed. The doctrine of parallelism between the mind and the body stands for Spinoza's answer to the animal soul question:

> For the things I have shown up to here have been completely general and apply not only to man but to other individuals (though all individuals are to some degree alive). Of each thing there must be an idea in God, of which God is the cause in the same way as God causes the idea of the human body; so everything I have said so far about the idea of the human body also holds for the idea of any thing. Still, we can't deny that ideas differ among themselves, just as the objects of ideas do, and that one idea is more excellent and contains more reality than another idea, just as the object of the former is more excellent and contains more reality than the object of the latter. And so (I repeat) to determine how the human mind differs from the others, and how it excels them, we must know the nature of its object, that is, of the human body.[84]

As Giles Deleuze amply showed, Spinoza's «ethological» presuppositions entail several moral possibilities through which overcoming western metaphysics and conceive ethics far from the rigid scheme of judgement, that is far from the idea that good and evil are principle which transcend and shape the «plane of immanence.»[85] Therefore, starting from Descartes' thesis on animals, the triangulation between morality, animality and atheism became the transcendental of modern anthropological reflection.

In my opinion, the author who really understood the philosophical stake of modern animal question is Pierre Bayle. The article *Rorarius* of 1697 *Dictionnaire historique et critique* can be considered indeed the most clear and incisive attempt «to examine a matter no less difficult than important»[86] such as the huge debate on the soul of brutes. According to Bayle, Gerolamo Rorarius «wrote a book that deserves to be read» since «he undertook to show there not only that beasts are rational creatures, but also that they make better use of reason than man do.»[87] Indeed, Rorarius' treatise *Quod animalia bruta ratione untantur melius homine* is considered one of the most significative examples of modern theriophily.[88] In few words, according to this perspective, animals are not only equal to human beings, but they are even better, lacking all the decays caused by languages and reason which removed human beings from the original and harmonious unity with nature. In this article, Bayle uses Rorarius as a more plausible alternative perspective both to Descartes and to Scholastic. Nevertheless, as he claims, «It is too bad that Descartes' view is so difficult to maintain and so far from being probable; for it is otherwise of very great advantage to the true faith, and this is the only reason that keeps some people from giving it up. *It is not liable to the very dangerous consequences of the ordinary opinion*.»[89] According to Bayle, «Everyone knows how difficult it is to explain how pure machines can accomplish what animals do»[90], but the counter-intuitive character of Descartes' arguments is due to the attempt to overcome the «great difficulties» which Scholastics find themselves in «when they have to justify their

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[83] Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza. Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning*, II, New York, Schocken Books, 1934, pp. 331ff.
[84] Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics Demonstrated in Geometrical Order*, Jonathan Bennet, 2017, p. 29. Text available at <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/spinoza1665.pdf>.
[85] Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza. Practical Philosophy*, San Francisco, City Light Books, 1988.
[86] Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary. Selections*, ed. Richard H. Popkin, New York, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1995, p. 219.
[87] Ibidem, p. 213.
[88] On the concept of theriophily see George Boas, *The Happy Beast in French Thought of the Seventeenth Century*, New York, Octagon Books, 1933.
[89] Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, pp. 215-216.
[90] Ibidem, p. 214.

attitude.» In fact, when a «Peripatetic», aims to contest the idea that animals are machine, he starts to provide examples of animal behaviours («dog who has been beaten for touching a dish of meat will not touch it again when he sees his master threatening him with a stick») which attest the necessary presence *only* of a sensitive soul since the rational one *must* remain a human privilege. Yet, as Bayle questions, «Can we explain this situation by simply supposing a soul that is capable of feeling, but not of reflecting on its actions, but not of recalling past events, but not of comparing two ideas, but not of drawing any conclusion?» They even go to assert, as Rorarius did, that «that beasts compare ends with means, and that they prefer on some occasions what is just to what is useful; in a word, that they are guided by the rules of equity and gratitude.» Therefore, anti-Cartesians «prove too much» and «all their disputes against the disciples of Descartes is wasted effort.»

As Bayle concludes, «Only the skill employed by Pereira is needed.» Gómez Pereira is the protagonist of another article of the *Dictionnaire*. He was a Spanish physician who maintained that «that beasts are mere machine, and [rejected] the sensitive souls which is ascribed to them.»[91] For Bayle, this article represents the opportunity to stress Descartes' philosophical innovation: «there is no resemblance between the doctrine which makes [animal] machine, and what ancient say.»[92] According to Bayle, the comparison between Descartes' position and the ancients' one highlights how bestowing soul on brutes is «dangerous» right because «it is impossible to keep a medium»[93], that is a position capable of balancing between epistemological irrationality and materialist heresy.[94] This is the reason why Descartes' paradigm of *animal-machine* is fundamental. Especially for what concerns «the true faith.»

> Every man knows that he thinks, and consequently, if he reasons in the Cartesian way, he cannot doubt that what thinks in him is distinct from the body; from which it follows that he is immortal in this respect; for the mortality of creatures consists only in that they are composed of several parts of matter that separate from one another. Here is a great advantage for religion; but it will be almost impossible to preserve this advantage by philosophical reasons if one admits that beasts have a material soul that perishes with the body, a soul, I say, whose sensations and desires are the cause of the actions that we see them do […]. The theological advantages of Descartes' view that beasts are automata do not stop there. They extend to many important principles that cannot be maintained with any strength once it is admitted that beasts have sensitive souls.[95]

Finally, Bayle faces his main philosophical concern: the confutation of theodicy. A question which the author of the *Dictionnaire* dealt with in many articles (especially *Manichean* and *Paulician*). As Gianluca Mori pointed out, Bayle provides, behind very effective rhetorical strategies, the most powerful conceptual structure for modern atheism.[96] Bayle lays across two different arguments: first, by evoking the classic Epicurean quadrilemma against the truthful criterions of Cartesian theology, he uses the incontrovertible and evident reality of evil and suffering to collide the fundamental attribute of Christian God, that is omnipotence and goodness. Later, Bayle transposes such a logical contradiction to the level of individual consciousness, where suffering becomes a fully-fledged "*sensitive cogito*" which frustrates any attempt by theodicy to undo, as Augustine

[91] Id., *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, IV, London, 1734, p. 545.
[92] Ibidem, p. 552-553.
[93] Ibidem, p. 548.
[94] On this see also the article *Dicearchus* (Remark L). Cf. J. W. Yolton, *Thinking Matter*, pp. 21-22.
[95] Id., *Historical and Critical Dictionary. Selections*, pp. 216-217.
[96] Mori, *L'ateismo dei moderni*, pp. 91-94. See also D. Anthony Larivière and Thomas M Lennon, *Bayle on the Moral Problem of Evil*, in *The Problem of Evil in Early Modern Philosophy*, pp. 101-118. For a less radical interpretation of Bayle's philosophical atheism see Elena Muceni, *Apologia della virtù sociale. L'ascesa dell'amor proprio nella crisi della coscienza europea*, Milano, Mimesis, 2018, pp. 116-130.

did, the very reality of evil. In other words, Bayle redefines the Cartesian *cogito* through sensitivity - in one formula: *I suffer, therefore I am* -, making suffering (psychic or physical) become a "clear and distinct" principle which denies the existence of God. In the note C of *Rorarius*, Bayle uses the question of animal soul to make this line of reasoning even stronger[97]. Once again, his polemic front is Augustine, who endowed sensitive soul on animals, claiming, at the same time, that «the soul of beasts, more noble than their body, has no other goal than their body.» Bayle's critique is illuminating, and it clearly recaps what is at stake with the animal question within modern philosophy:

> This, you will say, is of little importance for religion. You are mistaken, it will be answered, for all the proofs of original sin drawn from illness and death to which little children are subject collapse as soon as you suppose th-.t animals have sensations. They are subject both to pain and death. They, however, have never sinned. Thus your reasoning is faulty when you say, «Young children suffer evil and die; they are therefore guilty»; for you suppose a false principle that is contradicted by the condition of beasts, namely, «that which has never sinned cannot suffer evil.» This is nevertheless a most evident principle. It follows necessarily from the ideas we have of the justice and goodness of God. It agrees with the immutable order, with that order from which we clearly conceive God never departs. *The soul of beasts conflicts with this order and overthrows these very distinct ideas*. It must then be granted that the automata of Descartes favor greatly the principles by which we judge about the infinite being and by which we maintain orthodoxy. […] According to common opinion, the souls of beasts are annihilated the instant the beasts cease to live. Where then is God's constancy? He creates souls and soon he destroys them. He does not do the same thing with regard to matter, for he never destroys it. He therefore conserves the less perfect substances and destroys the more perfect. Is this acting like a wise agent? The soul of beasts has not sinned, and yet it is subject to pain and misery. It is subject to all the irregular desires of creatures who have sinned. How do we treat beasts? We make them tear each other apart for our pleasure. We kill them to nourish ourselves. We dissect their entrails while they are living to satisfy our curiosity, and we do all this as a result of the dominion God has given us over the beasts. How disordered this is that the innocent creature should be subject to the capricious temper of the criminal creature! Now is it not cruel and unjust to submit an innocent soul to so many evils? [98]

Therefore, according to Bayle we must choose between two options: either animals do not think and sense at all, and therefore they are mere *automata*; or they think and sense as human beings do, that is «there is only a difference of degree between them and us.» In fact, as Bayle underlines, «Nothing can be more diverting than to see with what authority the Schoolmen endeavour to set limits to the knowledge of beasts», asserting, for instance, that animals sense, but they are not aware of such a sense.

> What do they hope to show? *Do they think that they will prevail by this means with any person who knows how to argue, and get him to agree that man's soul is not of the same type as that of a beast? This claim is altogether illusory*. It is evident to anyone who knows how to judge things that every substance that has any sensation knows that it senses, and it would not be more absurd to maintain that the soul of man actually knows an object without knowing that it knows it than it is absurd to say that the soul of a dog sees a bird without seeing that it sees it. *This shows that all the acts of the sensitive faculties are by their nature and essence reflexive on themselves*.[99]

There is no doubt: Scholastic understanding of soul leads to materialism as well as Descartes' paradigm of the man-machine: «as soon as a soul is capable of having one thought, it is capable of having every thought.» As Bayle states: «It is then by accident that [human beings] surpassed the beasts; it is because their organs, on which their thoughts depend, acquired such and such modifications, which do not happen to the organs of

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[97] Harrison, *Theodicy and Animal Pain*, in «Philosophy», 64/1989, pp. 79-81.
[98] Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary. Selections*, pp. 218-221. Emphasis mine. On the "tragicomic" character of medieval debate on the souls of brutes Agamben, *The Open*, pp. 17ff.
[99] Ibidem, pp. 221-222. Emphasis mine.

beasts.»[100] Nevertheless, he continues: «This doctrine is the necessary and inevitable result of what is taught in the Schools regarding the knowledge of beasts. It follows from this that if their souls are material and mortal, the souls of men are so also, and if the soul of man is an immaterial and spiritual substance, the soul of beasts is so also. These are horrible consequences no matter which way one looks at them.»[101] Therefore, as he concludes, «the arguments of the Cartesians lead us *to judge that other men are machines*.»[102]

Such a consequence «is like a peacock's feet, whose ugliness mortifies the vanity that the brilliance of the plumage has inspired», because it put the existence of God in danger right after it saved it. Bayle leaves the question open though: according to him, *matter* and *mind* «can be reduced to a contradictory opposition»; they do not «admit of something in between.»[103] In other words, either the *cogito*, conceived as a separated substance, spreads throughout the being, or there are only different and autonomous material configurations.[104] The latter perspective compels us not so much to accept that «man are machines» - which is probably not a big deal; it rather put a whole tradition into question, leading us to accept that there is no just and merciful god and that we, as well as any other animals, suffer for nothing.

Starting from Bayle, materialism and atheism are the poles within which the modern reflection on animality developed. I cannot go into a fully-fledged historical-philosophical reconstruction of such a tradition.[105] Nevertheless, I do think that, despite the different levels of radicality, if one accounts the perspectives elaborated by all those materialists who dwelled upon the relationship between the human being and the animal, it is possible to characterize a certain consolidated philosophical discourse. From Bayle's anti-theodicy to Condillac's sensationism, from La Mettrie's radical materialism to Voltaire's rationalism, and even Hume's empiricism, the ontological division between humanity and animality is *de facto* considered an outmoded theological heritage to overcome. Instead, they all endorse the "perspective of gradualness", according to which there are only differences of degree between humans and animals. Differences which depend on the material arrangements of bodies, and which, in Spinoza's words, determine the intensity of the power of minds and what bodies are capable of. Therefore, reason, or better, mind loses its metaphysical character, thereby becoming an immanent cognitive performance. As Hume states in 1739 *A Treatise of Human Nature*: «*reason is nothing but a wonderful and unintelligible instinct in our souls*.»[106] Moreover, suffering is finally acknowledged as a universal experience which attests the common vulnerability and passivity that all living beings share. Yet, if all living beings suffer – since there are no valid reason to state the contrary -, then immanence is the only dimension in which life and morality are contained. As d'Holbach claims in the *Good Sense*: «Under an infinitely good and powerful God, is it possible to conceive that a single man should suffer? One animal, or mite, that suffers, furnishes invincible arguments against divine providence and its infinite goodness.»[107]

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[100] Ibidem, p. 224.
[101] Ibidem, p. 225.
[102] Ibidem, p. 231.
[103] Ibidem, p. 233.
[104] Stefano Brogi, *Bayle in cerca del materialismo*, in «Rivista di filosofia», 3/1998, p. 392. In the last section of *Rorarius*, Bayle accounts Leibniz's «monadism» - which also stands for the attempt to solve the question of animal soul without running into materialism, and so atheism -, as a possible alternative for the strict dualism between mind and matter. As Bayle states «This hypothesis removes part of our difficulties. There is no longer the problem of answering the weighty objections made to the Scholastics» (p. 236). Cf. Richard Fry, *Bayle's "Rorarius", Leibniz and the Animal Soul,* in «Lo Sguardo», 2/2015, pp. 113-127.
[105] For a very detailed reconstruction see Fontenay, *Le Silence des Bêtes*, pp. 395ff.
[106] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Lewis Selby-Bigge, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960, p. 179.
[107] Paul H. T. d'Holbach, *Good Sense*, Boston, J. P. Mendum, 1856, p.45.

Therefore, modern materialism developed a very in-dept understanding of the relationship between human being and animal. It also laid the foundations for the decisive development of biology and of moral philosophy. Indeed, a materialistic understanding of life undermines the traditional explanatory models, such as creationism, fissism or preformism. The latter provided ontologies that perfectly suited with theological requirements, thereby justifying and reinforcing the dualisms between transcendence and immanence, spirit and matter, human beings and animals. Instead, the thinking matter paradigm will become the philosophical background for a whole series of biological insights that will finally results in Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection.[108]

Moreover, materialism provided very important and innovative insights for western moral reflection. As Michel Onfray pointed out, modern materialists outlined a «*arsenal conceptual*» which lead to «*la mort de Dieu*.»[109] As Voltaire states in the voice *Matter* of the *Philosophical Dictionary*:

> Happily, which ever system a man embraces, it is in no way hurtful to morality; for what imports it whether matter is made or arranged? God is still an absolute master. Whether chaos was created out of nothing, or only reduced to order, it is still our duty to be virtuous; scarcely any of these metaphysical questions affect the conduct of life. It is with disputes as with table talk; each one forgets after dinner what he has said, and goes whithersoever his interest or his inclination calls him.[110]

Despite his well-known materialistic hesitations[111], Voltaire's words express one of the great concerns within western culture: in Dostoevsky's words, «if god does not exist, everything is permitted.» As we noticed before, starting from Descartes, the animal question represented the main danger for the endurance of western traditional morality. The materialist link between atheism, suffering and animality has theoretically upheld the end of such an axiological order. In fact, whichever way one dwells upon this triangulation, the regulatory ideas of God, of immortal souls and of transcendent good become unsustainable. In my opinion, the moderns attempted an original philosophical operation whereby neutralizing metaphysic once and for all. As Michel Onfray acutely highlighted, from Spinoza to the «*ultras des lumières*» (Meslier, La Mettrie, Marpertuis, Helvétius, d'Holbach)[112], we assist to the establishing of a «consequentialist»[113] understanding of ethics, according to which, unlike Platonism, good and evil are not absolute values. Instead, they are understood in a relative and individualistic sense, that is related to a certain situation and to a certain body. In other words, good is what causes pleasure and wellness, while evil is what causes pain. This is not a naïve form of naturalism, which hopes for the return to an ethics on this side of good and evil. This is not a way to say: "human beings are animals, therefore they should behave according to natural laws". Rather, this utilitarian ethics of «pleasure» and «pain» tries to go «beyond good and evil». In other words, it is the attempt to emancipate life (human and animal) from the precariousness and the vulnerability which characterize it.[114]

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[108] Dennet, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, pp. 23ff. On the link between modern materialism and Darwin's philosophy see also Michel Onfray, *Cosmos. Une ontologie matérialiste*, Paris, Flammarion, 2015, part. III.
[109] Michel Onfray, *Contre-histoire de la philosophie. Les ultras del Lumiéres*, IV, Grasset, Paris, 2007, Intro-chap. VIII.
[110] Voltaire, *Matter. Section II*, in *The Works of Voltaire. A Contemporary Version*, VI, New York, E. R. DuMont, 1901.
[111] Mori, *L'ateismo dei moderni*, pp. 225ff.
[112] Onfray, *Les ultras del Lumiéres*, part. II-chap. I.
[113] Gertrude E. M. Anscombe, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, in «Philosophy» 33/1958, pp. 1-16.
[114] Michel Onfray, *Contre-histoire de la philosophie. Les libertins baroques*, III, Paris, Grasset, 2007, Intro-chap. VII.

It is kind of paradoxical that, at the end of this reconstruction, Bentham's question - «Can they suffer?» - turns out to be the outcome of the tradition developed starting from exactly Descartes' materialist hesitation. As I have attempted to show, the animal-machine is inextricably tied to the question of suffering. Bayle pointed out clearly: the disjuncture of the two terms leads to fideism; instead, their complementarity drives to materialism. Thus, the choice is between the irrationality of the faith and the rationality of philosophy. A dilemma which contains itself the answer. The always greater interest in the animal question within the contemporary thought is surely the sign of a crucial awareness. In my opinion, the deconstruction of the humanist grammar carried out by the twentieth-century *animal studies* established two inescapable points of no return: the recognition of the moral status of animals and the unsustainability of anthropocentrism. Nonetheless, considering this as a "turn" is somewhat precipitous. As I have claimed before, modern materialism is the philosophical background of contemporary debate on animality. If one might need to trace a moment of turn, it would coincide with the cartesian concept of machine. In my opinion, by downplaying such a continuity, the *animal studies* end up obscuring the modern triangulation between materialism, atheism and animality. An issue which seems to be outstanding nowadays.

Starting from Descartes, the question of materialism or, better, of the material origin of mind will amply characterize the development of modern mora philosophy. The trigger of this *ante litteram* "death of god" is exactly the animal, the living being which finitude, on the one hand, questions the alleged metaphysical nature of the human. On the other hand, it contests the goodness and the omnipotence of God. After all, what is the purpose of the creation of life if the latter, even beyond the borders of humanity, is marked by suffering? For these reasons, I think it is possible to consider modern materialism as the starting point of a conceptual sideslip that we are still witnessing today and that the *animal studies*, due to their scarce focus on the history of philosophy, seem to be not aware of. It is the transition from the paradigm of the *rational animal* to that of the *suffering animal*: if animals, like humans, suffer and, because of this, are moral subject, then, as the modern materialist states, everything fall through. The concepts of God, of soul, of good and evil fall through. Paraphs, if animals did not exist, God would have more chance to survive. What is left over is a desacralized life, an *animal which suffer uselessly*.

The Great Retreat: The Route of the Res Cogitans

In a letter dated 1634, Descartes wrote to Mersenne: «I want to live in peace and to continue the life I have begun under the motto *Bene vixit, bene qui latuit* [Latin, by Ovid, meaning 'He lives well who is well hidden'].»[115] It is impossible to reduce the *cogito* to a metaphysical clause hiding a secret materialist vocation. Descartes' commitment to the *cogito* was undoubtedly authentic: it was the trace of his theoretical workings on the edge between Scholastic and modernity. However, Descartes' reflection on the *cogito* established a new way of thinking about the relationship between the human being and the animal. This is what I have previously named the *route of res cogitans*, which is the tendency, antithetical to the *route of res extensa*, to sharpen the ontological difference between the human and the rest of the living world. Unlike materialism, this tradition has been able to develop on a safer ground. Starting from Malebranche's and Bayle's remarks, it was clear that Descartes' *animal-machine* could provide a "conservative innovation" for western anthropological philosophy. Indeed, the rational account of the *cogito* allowed to reinforce a whole series of

[115] Descartes, *Selected Correspondences of Descartes*, Johnathan Bennett, 2017, p. 29. Text available at <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1619_1.pdf>.

dualisms whereof humanism has been always nourished (mind-body, free will-instinct, spirit-matter, transcendence-immanence). In fact, at the end of Descartes' *epoché*, the very concept of humanity turns out to be totally purged of all the material and spiritualistic remains of the previous tradition. From here on, humanity will be always more identified with consciousness, that ineffable mental phenomenon where the *I* reflects itself, and which eludes any physical explanation. Such a disjunction between the self and the outward, between humanity and animality, will transform the anthropological inquiry in a fully-fledged *metaphysics of the human*.

If materialism entailed a radical reconsideration of human condition, on the contrary, Cartesian humanism kept on rationalizing the obscure categories of scholastic theology, establishing a very effective balance between modern gnoseology and traditional axiology. The *route of res cogitans* has been a successful play between conservation and *Aufhebung* that has held the materialistic course toward the "death of God" back. Cartesian humanism tried to prevent any attempt to push morality "beyond" (consequentialism) or "this side of" (theriophily) good and evil, reaffirming instead their transcendent and normative character. As we know, such moral questions entail a functional zoological definition. Among Cartesian humanism, the paradigm of the *animal-machine* loses its radicality – whether it ever had it! -, preserving though the ontological gap with the human. Indeed, one principle seems to be undeniable: mind, i.e., consciousness, is irreducible to the sole matter. Therefore, it does not matter whether animals might think or not: they might have ideas, representations and thoughts, but they cannot be, as non-human being, *subjects*, that is they have no sovereignty on their self. In other words, the *route of res cogitans* is the laboratory wherein the modern category of *subject* has been assembled and strengthened.

In my opinion, Kant's anthropological philosophy can be considered the moment of major retrenchment. As Kant states in 1788 *Critique of Practical Reason*:

> The human being insofar as he belongs to the world of sense is a needy being, and to this extent his reason does indeed have a mandate from the side of sensibility which he cannot reject, to attend to its interest and to frame practical maxims also with a view to happiness in this life and, if possible, in a future life as well. Yet he is not so entirely an animal as to be indifferent to all that reason says on its own, and so as to use reason merely as an instrument for satisfying his needs as a being of sense. For, that he has reason does not at all elevate him in worth above mere animality if reason is to serve him only for the sake of what instinct accomplishes in animals; reason would in that case be only a particular manner that nature had employed in order to equip the human being for the same purpose to which it has destined animals, without destining him to a higher purpose. Hence he does indeed need reason, according to this arrangement that nature happens to have made for him, in order to take into consideration always his well-being and woe. But besides this he has it also for the sake of something higher, viz., in order not only to include in his deliberation what is in itself good or evil—about which solely pure and sensibly not at all interested reason can make a judgment—but to distinguish this judging entirely from the former and to make it the supreme condition thereof.[116]

In this passage, Kant is clearly distancing himself from modern consequentialism. Indeed, the distinction between a phenomenal understanding of good and evil (*Whole* and *Uebel*) and their noumenal meaning (*Guten* and *Bösen*) aims, on the one hand, to push the "spectre" of materialism away and, on the other, to reaffirm, even though Kant rejects spiritualism likewise, the two-dimensional character of human condition.[117]

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[116] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Cambridge, Hackett, 2002, p. 83.

[117] Id., *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), ed. Paul Guyer, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p.119: «Through criticism alone we can sever the very root of materialism, fatalism, atheism, of freethinking unbelief, of enthusiasm and superstition, which can become generally injurious, and finally also of idealism and skepcticism […].» On the question of materialism in Kant see also Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Refutation of Materialism*, in «The Monist», 2/1898, pp. 190-208; Eric Watkins, *Kant on Materialism*, in «British Journal for the History of Philosophy», 5/2016, pp. 1035-1052.

Unlike Hume, for Kant *reason* is not a «wonderful and unintelligible *instinct* in our souls», but the «*the prompting whereby we become aware of the predisposition of the talents in us, which is elevated above animality*.»[118] In 1798 *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, Kant defines the human being as an «*animal rationabile*», an «animal endowed with *the capacity of reason*.»[119] Such a definition entails a performative understanding of the human condition. In other words, the human being is constantly suspended between animality (necessity) and rationality (autonomy), and, due to such a hybrid nature, none of these extremes can be permanent. Therefore, as Kant claimed in 1790 *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, animals «are still of the same genus as human beings (as living beings)»[120]; however, the human being is the only «organized being» who is a «final end.»[121] And this because humankind is endowed with the «consciousness of freedom of his power of choice»[122]:

> The fact that the human being can have the "I" in his representations raises him infinitely above all other living being on heart. Because of this he is a *person*, and by virtue of the unity of consciousness through all changes that happen to him, one and the same person – i.e., through rank and dignity entirely different being from *things*, such as irrational animals, which one can do as one likes. This holds even when he cannot say "I", because he still has it in thought.[123]

Beside all details, there is no doubt that, in Kant, the difference between animals and human beings is well-defined: animals are *things*, whereas humans are *persons*. From this point of view, Kant is a radical Cartesian: there is no reason outside humanity; otherwise, it would be the same as the human one. The conclusion of such a syllogism is predictable: animals do not "think" at all – in Cartesian sense. In my opinion, after Descartes' definition of the *cogito*, the problem of the animal mind - the enquiry on the cognitive abilities that humans and animals share - becomes utterly irrelevant. Indeed, as Kant's zoological discourse shows, it does not matter if they have sensation, memory, representations, or ideas of a kind. The fundamental separation point is given by the "fact" that animals lack a unitary experience of their cognitive states. In other words, they have no consciousness, no self-awareness.[124]

Kantian definition of the human-animal relationship wavers between a sort of gnoseological prudence, as the «paralogism on the pure reasons» amply shows[125], and a greater certainty in the practical sphere. Indeed, the "moral clause" is what allows Kant's philosophy of mind to go beyond the boundaries of pure reason. As is known, such a transcendency is feasible only by "postulating" the immortality of soul, the free-will and theism - «*une demarche moyennement philosophique*.»[126] Of course, Kant does not conceive the human being as a spiritual being. As he states in the *Anthropology*: within the human being «animality still manifests itself earlier and, at the bottom, more powerfully than pure

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[118] Id., *Critique of Practical Reason* p. 201. Emphasis mine.
[119] Id., *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, in Id., *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöller and Robert B. Louden, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 417.
[120] Id., *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. P. Guyer, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.328.
[121] Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy. The Doctrine of the Faculties*, London, Athlone, 1984, pp. 69-72.
[122] Kant, *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, p. 419.
[123] Ibidem, p. 239.
[124] Cf. Naomi Fisher, *Kant On Animals Minds*, in «Ergo», 15/2017, pp. 441-462. In this respect, we should consider Kant's definition of «instinct», i.e., the only motive of animal agency, as «a felt need to do or enjoy something of which we still do not have a concept such as the drive in animals to build or the drive to sex.» Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason And Other Writings*, ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 53.
[125] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 411ff.
[126] Onfray, *Les Ultras des Lumières*, intro-chap.VI.

humanity.»[127] According to Kant, the "proper of the human" cannot be deduced empirically, that where the human being behaves, most of the time, as an animal among others. The human beings reveal their humanity only when they behave as a moral agent, i.e., when they resort to the «pure practical reason.»

Kant's anthropological reflection is organized into a phenomenology of human agency. In the 1793 *Religion Within the Boundaries of the Mere Reason*, the human condition is defined through a tripartite pattern which, once again, shows how Kant simply «fait litière de l'"âme" des métaphysiciens.»[128]

> We may justifiably bring this predisposition, with reference to its end, under three headings, as elements of the determination of the human being:
>
> 1. The predisposition to the *animality* of the human being, as a *living being*;
> 2. To the *humanity* in him, as a living and at the same time *rational* being;
> 3. To his *personality*, as a rational and at the same time *responsible* being.[129]

The «predisposition to animality» is a «physical or merely mechanical» impulse to the preservation of the self and of the species «for which reason is no required.»[130] Moreover, the «predisposition to humanity» is that attitude which leads to sociability and «for which reason is not required» as well. Finally, «the predisposition to personality is the susceptibility to respect for the moral law *as of itself a sufficient incentive to the power of choice*.»[131] According to this pattern, the human being fulfil his humanity only when s/he behaves as a *person*, as a sovereign subject who disavows his or her own animality. From the point of view of anthropological philosophy, «autonomy» - the mantra of modern subjectivity - is such a level of introspection, not to say an «autism»[132], which makes the definition of the "self" independent the surrounding space. I think we can acknowledge here the same strategy Descartes resorted to: to grant animality a lot (self-preservation, and even sociability), while, at the same time, reducing humanity to a field which is as narrow as it is ontologically determining.

Such a tripartite pattern becomes even more problematic in the field of anthropology, which Kant, not by chance, considers in pragmatic terms:

> Among the living *inhabitants of the heart* the human being is markedly distinguished from all other living beings by his *technical* predisposition for manipulating things (mechanically joined with consciousness), by his *pragmatic* predisposition (to use other human beings skilfully for his purposes), and the *moral* predisposition in his being (to treat himself and others according to the principle of freedom under laws). And any of these three levels can by itself alone already distinguish the human being characteristically as opposed to the other inhabitants of the earth.[133]

Here the hierarchical tripartition between animality, humanity and personality is redefined in terms of *adjustment* (technical predisposition), *acculturalisation* (pragmatic predisposition) and *moralisation* (moral predisposition). From the point of view of

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[127] Kant, *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, p. 422.
[128] Fontenay, *Le Silence des Bêtes*, p. 519.
[129] Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, p. 50.
[130] See also Id., *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 218: «The *first*, though not the principal, duty of man to himself as an animal being is to *preserve himself* in his animal nature.»
[131] Id., *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*., pp. 51-52.
[132] Cf. Adriana Cavarero, *Inclination. A Critique of Rectitude*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2016, pp. 30-31: «As a moral philosopher, [Kant] seems obsessed by an autistic model of a self that legislates from itself and upon itself—a straight and self-balanced self that takes its place in a straight line alongside every other self, over the earth's entire surface, all of which are likewise autarchic and at the same time replicas of one other.»
[133] Kant, *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, p. 417.

anthropological philosophy, it is interesting here how Kant deals with natural sciences. As any other considerable philosopher of the time, Kant could not exempt from dwelling upon the increasing development of natural sciences, which were providing, from Linnaeus to Buffon, new and challenging explanations of the living world. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*[134], Kant attempts a theoretical justification of teleology against the "risk" of mechanist determinism.[135] This operation is clearly aimed to safeguard the meaning of human existence:

> Now we have in the world only a single sort of being whose causality is teleological, i.e., aimed at ends and yet at the same time so constituted that the law in accordance with which they have to determine ends is represented by themselves as unconditioned and independent of natural conditions but yeas as a necessary in itself. The being of this sort is the human being, though considered as noumenon: *the only natural being in which we can nevertheless cognize, on the basis of its own constitution, a supersensible faculty (freedom) and even the law of the causality together with the object that it can set for itself as the highest end (the highest good in the world)*. […] Now of the human being (and thus of every rational being in the world), as a moral being, it cannot be further asked why (*quem in finem*) it exists. His existence contains the highest end itself, to which, as far as he is capable, he can subject the whole of nature, or against which at least he need not hold himself to be subjected by any influence from nature. – Now if things in the world, as dependent beings as far as their existence is concerned, need a supreme cause in accordance with ends, *then the human being is the final end of creation; for without him the chain of ends subordinated to one another would not be completely grounded* […].[136]

In the *Anthropology*, Kant revokes the Aristotelian adage, according to which «man is the most intelligent animal because he possesses hands, but he has hands because he is the most intelligent animal.»[137] It is a teleological understanding of the mind-body relationship which has been always antithetical to Epicurean functionalism (especially Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*[138]), whereof, not by chance, modern materialists were estimator. Within Kant's argument, there is a circularity between reason and the structure of the human body that only a teleological perspective can break up. Indeed, the noumenical nature of reason makes any material explanation completely unnecessary. As Kant claims «The question whether the human being was originally destined to walk on four feet, or on two feet; - whether the gibbon, the orangutan, the chimpanzee, and so on are destined for this […] – *the answer to these questions is of no consequence*.»[139] In other words, biological questions are totally irrelevant for the definition of the concept of humanity as the material features of the subject, i.e., its animality, do not eventually determine its super-sensibility. Let's consider, for instance, the well-known conclusion of *Critique of practical reason*:

> Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more frequently and persistently one's meditation deals with them: the starry sky above me and the moral law within me […]. The first sight, of a countless multitude of worlds, annihilates, as it were, *my importance as an animal creature* that, after having for a short time been provided (one knows not how) with vital force,

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[134] Id., *Appendix. Methodology of the Teleological Power of Judgment*, in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, pp. 286ff.
[135] For an in-depth analysis see Daniel Kolb, *Kant, Teleology, and Evolution*, in «Synthese», 1-2/1992, pp. 9-28.
[136] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 302. Emphasis mine.
[137] Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*, London, Harvard University Press, 1961, p.371 (IV, 10, 687 a8-b5).
[138] Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, Cambridge, Hackett, 2001, pp. 122-123 (IV, vv. 823-831): «I am extremely anxious that you should carefully avoid the mistake of supposing that the lustrous eyes were created to enable us to see; or that the tapering shins and thighs were attached to the feet as a base to enable us to walk with long strides; or again that the forearms were jointed to the brawny upper arms, with ministering hands provided on either side, to enable us to perform the tasks necessary for the support of life. All such explanations are propounded preposterously with topsy-turvy reasoning. In fact, no part of our body was created to the end that we might use it, but what has been created gives rise to its own function.»
[139] Kant, *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, p. 417.

> must give back again to the planet (a mere dot in the universe) the matter from which it came. The second sight, on the contrary, elevates infinitely my worth as that of an intelligence by my personality, in *which the moral law reveals to me a life independent of animality and even of the entire world of sense* […].[140]

Behind Kantian dualism between animality and humanity there stands the flaw of form of modern anthropological philosophy: to consider the contributions of natural sciences indecisive for the definition and the comprehension of the human condition inasmuch the latter is considered to be a metaphysical exception within natural world. This is a drift of the so-called "continental philosophy" which maintains the possibility to dissociate science and philosophy within anthropological reflection. As Raymond Corbey highlighted:

> [Continental philosophers] engage in Kantian criticism rather than evolutionary epistemology, in phenomenology or hermeneutics rather than naturalistic philosophy of mind. […] They do have one thing in common: they all, in one way or another, draw a strict boundary line between animals and humans, and assume the gap between both is unbridgeably wide. They do so because, in the process of analysing according to their specific methods, they encounter a characteristic which in their eyes is uniquely human - reason, mind, rationality, intentionality, self-consciousness, or whatever term they use for it. They all see no possibility of fully accounting for this characteristic in terms of gradual differences or continuity with characteristics found in animals, the central nervous system, organic processes in general, or indeed anything three-dimensional and physical. In their eyes, the human, rational, self-conscious mind is a qualitatively different, irreducible phenomenon that gives to the entity which possesses it a very special place in nature compared to those who do not.[141]

Nevertheless, it is worth repeating again that such a disjunction between natural science and human science is the product of that radicalisation of Descartes' discourse on *cogito* and not of modern philosophy as a whole. However, with Kant the *route of res cogitans* reveals its true face: a rational humanism which "safe God's live" and, with it, a whole axiological order wherein the human being *must* something more than «a two-legged animal without feathers.»[142]

For all these reasons, it is surprising how contemporary animal studies did not address to Kant the same rancour they have towards Descartes. This because, as Paola Cavalieri suggested, Kant's moral doctrine seems to provide a suitable model for animal ethics once «we bring Kantian reason back to Earth.»[143] As we noticed before, Kant's zoological discourse develops in the shadow of his anthropology. Indeed, for human beings, animality stands for the possibility to fall back into the necessity from which their humanity attempt to free itself: «The reason why the habits of another stimulate the arousal of disgust in us is because here the animal in the human being jumps out far too much, and because here one is led *instinctively* by the rule of habituation, exactly like another (non-human) nature, and so runs the risk of falling into one and the same class with the beast.»[144]

Some might say that «Kant, unlike Descartes, considers nonhumans as conscious beings.»[145] Honestly, I do not acknowledge any relevant difference between the terms «means» and «machine.» Indeed, one should not confuse Kantian gnoseological grants with materialist perspective of gradualness inasmuch, as we noticed before, the latter entails not

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[140] Id., *Critique of Practical Reason*, 203. Emphasis mine.
[141] Corbey, *Ambiguous Apes*, p. 135.
[142] Voltaire, *Chain of Created Beings*, in *Philosophical Dictionary*, IV, London 1843, p. 255.
[143] Cavalieri, *The Animal Question*, p. 48.
[144] Kant, *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, p. 261.
[145] Cavalieri, *The Animal Question*, p. 49. On the potentiality of Kant's moral doctrine in the field of animal ethics see also Alexander Broadie and Elizabeth M. Pybus, *Kant's Treatment of Animals*, in «Philosophy», 190/1974, pp. 375-383; Nelson Potter, *Kant on Duties to Animals*, in «Annual Review of Law and Ethics», 13/2005, pp. 299-311; Matthew C. Altman, *Animal Suffering and Moral Salience: A Defense of Kant's Indirect View*, in «The Journal of Value Inquiry», 53/2019, pp. 275-288.

only a gradual arrangement of cognitive abilities, but also of consciousness as such. As Kant claims in the *Critique of Practical Reason*: «Respect always applies only to persons, never to things. *Things can arouse in us inclination and, if they are animals* (e.g., horses, dogs, etc.), even love - or else/ear, like the sea, a volcano, a beast of prey - *but never respect*.»[146] Therefore, animals are clearly placed outside the «ethical circuit»: they lack all the qualities to be moral subjects, i.e., the self-awareness which could make them autonomous being. However, they are living beings and, thus, they deserve to be respected for their sensibility. As Kant points out in 1797 *Metaphysics of Morals*:

> With regard to the animate but nonrational part of creation, violent and cruel treatment of animals is far more intimately opposed to man's duty to himself, and he has a duty to refrain from this; for it dulls his shared feeling of their pain and so weakens and gradually uproots a natural predisposition that is very serviceable to morality in one's relations with other men. Man is authorized to kill animals quickly (without pain) and to put them to work that does not strain them beyond their capacities (such work as man himself must submit to). But agonizing physical experiments for the sake of mere speculation, when the end could also be achieved without these, are to be abhorred. Even gratitude for the long service of an old horse or dog (just as if they were members of the household) belong *indirectly* to man's duty *with regard to* these animals; considered as a *direct* duty, however, it is always only a duty of man *to* himself.[147]

In the *Lectures on Ethics* Kant summarises this line of reasoning with the well-known formula: «*We can already know the human heart, even in regard to animals*»; that is to say, the cruelty towards animals «damages the kindly and human qualities in [the human being], *which* [it] *ought to exercise in virtue of his duties to mankind*.»[148] Not by chance, interpreters such as Peter Singer are sceptical in front of Kant's idea of *indirect duties* toward animals as a form of "moral apprentice" for humans.

> Perhaps it is true that kindness to human beings and to other animals often go together; but whether or not this is true, to say, as Aquinas and Kant did, that this is the real reason why we ought to be kind to animals is a thoroughly speciesist position. We ought to consider the interests of animals because they have interests and it is unjustifiable to exclude them from the sphere of moral concern; to make this consideration depend on beneficial consequences for human beings is to accept the implication that the interests of animals do not warrant consideration for their own sakes.[149]

Therefore, Kant provides a "mock openness": his perspective still lingers within «speciesism», a shaky form of pietistic anthropocentrism. For Kant, animal suffering is not an actual moral issue.[150] Unlike Bayle, in Kant the question whether animals suffer or not does not barely affect the traditional axiology which Kant subsumes by means of the three postulates of practical reason. In 17791 *On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy* – a work where Bayle's heritage is blatant – Kant states that the «goodness» of God contrasts «with *the countless ills and pains of the rational beings* of the world.»[151] Albeit this essay ends with claiming the unsustainability of any philosophical attempt to solve the contradiction between phenomenal evil and Providence, Kant reduces wisely the question of

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[146] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 100.
[147] Id., *Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 238.
[148] Id., *Lecture on Ethics*, ed. Peter Heath and Jerome B. Schneewind, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p.212.
[149] Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 244.
[150] On Kant's neglect of «animal's interest» see James Rachels, *Created from Animals. The Moral Implications of Darwinism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 178-179.
[151] Immanuel Kant, *On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 26. Emphasis mine.

theodicy to «ills and pains of the rational beings», that is to say that *only* human suffering questions the goodness of God and the moral order which derive from it.

For this reason, it is naïve to broaden the boundaries of the *practical reason* under the motto «utilitarianism for Animal, Kantianism for People»[152]: the doctrine of *indirect duties* lies still on the same oppressive dispositif which it tries to escape from. Moreover, as Elisabeth de Fontenay highlighted, Kant's persistence on autonomy as basic feature for moral recognition risks being dangerously extended also to humanity itself.[153] Indeed, what about the «*Cretin* of Valais», whose «mental deficiency», according to Kant, «cannot really be called sickness of soul», but rather an actual «absence of soul?»[154] In sum, when the boundaries of humanity are moral or metaphysical, they do not necessarily include all the members of the genus *Homo*, but they rather end up excluding some of them from humanity as such.

Finally, behind Kant's statements lies the philosophical awareness of the post-Cartesian debate on the *animal-machine*. Indeed, the idea that animals do suffer, and therefore humans ought them respect of a kind, became a fundamental point, which did not straightforwardly entail a «growing ethical sensitivity to animal suffering.»[155] As Condillac already stated in 1755: «*Le sentiment de Descartes sur les bêtes commence à être si vieux*.»[156] Yet, more prudent philosophers such as Kant learnt also that they could not grant too much, otherwise the postulates they considered as irrevocable would fall to pieces. Therefore, it was better to maintain due hierarchies. I have named Kant's anthropological philosophy as the "great retreat" of modern philosophical debate on animality because it was able to redefine the Cartesian dualism, defusing though Descartes' materialistic blunders. With Kant, materialism suffered a setback, receiving rather disgraceful labels such as reductionist, nihilistic, relativist and so on, which undermined its moral legitimacy. The *rational animal* is reborn, and it has never been better.

[152] Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, And Utopia*, Oxford, Blackweel, 1999, p.40. For a critical perspective see Francione, *Animal, Property, And the Law*, p. 104ff.
[153] Fontenay, *Le Silence des Bêtes*, pp. 518-521. See also, Ead., *Without Offending Humans*, pp. 30-32.
[154] Kant, *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, p. 317.
[155] Cf. Nathaniel Wolloch, *Animals in Enlightenment Historiography*, in «Huntington Library Quarterly», 1/2012, p. 55: «When a change in Enlightenment attitudes toward animals has been acknowledged, historians have often described it as a growing ethical sensitivity to animal suffering. I suggest, however, that the greater concern for animals was more a reaction to their exploitation than a demand for real improvements in their situation. As industrialization spread, animals increasingly served human needs, and in fact nascent modern civilization developed an ideological substratum that enabled the use of animals to advance human welfare—despite evident recognition of animal suffering.»
[156] Condillac, *Traité des Animaux*, Amsterdam 1755, part I-chap. I, p. 5.

Chapter II

Life is Overrated.
On Darwin's Ultimate Materialism

> I have received in a Manchester Newspaper a rather a good squib, showing that I have proved «might is right», and therefore that Napoleon is right and every cheating Tradesman is also right.
>
> Charles Darwin[1]

The Evolution of the Suffering Animal

The *route of the res extensa* has a landing place. At a certain moment, modern materialism reaches the maximum saturation point, wherein all its theoretical productions are acquired, recast and, finally, restored under a new profile into the philosophical circuit.[2] I am talking of Darwin's theory of natural selection. Furthermore, as we noticed in the previous chapter, since modern materialism corresponds to a thesis on the human-animal relationship, Darwinism stands for both the peak and the new starting point of the way whereby such a relationship will be inflected later on. In this chapter I do not intend to retrace the intellectual events which led Darwin to outline his theory of evolution by natural selection. Even I aim neither to justify nor to defend Darwin's perspective as one of the many possible ways through which philosophy can deal with the question of the living matter. I will rather assume evolution by natural selection as the only way through which, starting from Darwin, philosophy can deal with such a question. This does not mean interrupting the critical sense: I do simply believe that nowadays philosophy cannot face theoretical and moral questions, such as animality, humanity and, eventually, the meaning of life, from nowhere but the "fact" of evolution. Indeed, philosophy cannot pretend that Darwin did not exist or, better, that the theory of evolution by natural selection does not represent the most important moment of its recent history. The very contemporary split between natural science and philosophy has largely prevented a fully-fledged reception of Darwin's thesis within philosophy. As if the latter could persist in accounting Darwin's thesis as marginal notes which do not affect the quality and the validity of any philosophical statement. A negligence that nowadays turns out to be utterly untenable especially in matter of biology. Indeed, after Darwin's 1859 *Origin of the Species*, how can we still think of the human being, the animal and, more broadly, the phenomenon of life without considering what comes from evolutionary studies?

As I highlighted in the previous chapter, modern materialism laid the foundations for the decisive development of modern biology. Indeed, starting from Descartes' materialist hesitations, the idea of the «thinking matter» has provided the first fundamental step toward a discourse on life, a *bios-logos*, cleansed by any form of spiritualism and vitalism. A very Cartesian theoretical horizon wherein Darwin's inquiry on the origin of species must be located.

> We can allow «satellites», planets, suns, universe, nay whole systems of universe ‹of man› to be governed by laws, but the smallest insect, we wish to be created at once by special act, provided with its instincts its place in nature. its range, its - etc. etc. - *must be a special act, or result of laws. yet we*

[1]Charles Darwin to Charles Lyell, May the 4th1860. Text available at <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/?docId=letters/DCP-LETT-2782.xml;query=;brand=default>.

[2] Cf. Corine Pelluchon, *Les lumières à l'âge du vivant*, Paris, Édition du Seuil, 2021, Chap. II/II-I.

placidly believe the Astronomer, when he tells us satellites etc. etc. «*The Savage admires not a steam engine, but a piece*» of coloured glass is lost in astonishment at the artificer. - » Our faculties are more fitted to recognize the wonderful structure of a beetle than a Universe.[3]

Starting from early notebooks, Darwin's zoological investigation is permeated by the attempt to tear the field of biology from the metaphysical frame which, from Aristotle, has always prevented the addition of the phenomenon of life into natural sciences. Descartes' mechanism was surely a grounded step toward this direction. Yet, his hesitations regarding the hypothesis of the thinking matter tell us exactly how the fact of life could not be conceived without assuming some meta-physical exception. Because the more the world is mechanic, the more some aspects of life, such as consciousness and moral values, become a mystery that only the assumption of a superior immaterial order can solve. The existence of the human being shows that life cannot be "only" a matter of material configurations. Life is and must be "more" than this. These are the basic arguments of "vitalism", that is the biological equivalent of Spiritualism in philosophy, in opposition to which Darwin built his theory of evolution by natural selection. From a philosophical point of view, the latter represents the attempt to provide a very strong materialism capable of making the ostensible necessary postulate of vitalism unnecessary.

Astronomers might formerly have said that God ordered, each planet to move in its particular destiny.— In same manner God orders each animal create with certain form in certain country, but how much more simple, and sublime power let attraction act according to certain laws such are inevitable consequen let animal be created, then by the fixed laws of generation, such will be their successors.[4]

As we could notice in the first chapter, these kinds of materialistic reductionisms are easily exposed to the charge of atheism. A charge which can nip any theory in the bud. Indeed, as we will see later, Darwin was aware of this first and thorny obstacle. For these reasons, Darwin turns to a different strategy. As he writes in the *Notebooks N*:

To study Metaphysic, as they have always been studied appears to me to be like puzzling at Astronomy without Mechanics.— Experience shows the problem of the mind cannot be solved by attacking the citadel itself.— the mind is function of body.— we must bring some *stable* foundation to argue from.[5]

Darwin's strategy is clear: to circumvent the «citadel» of metaphysics, where the mind-matter dualism seems to be incontrovertible, by providing a «law» capable of solving the questions of metaphysic without turning to mysterious impulses or miraculous intervention. As he writes in the *Notebook B*: **«**The Grand Question, which every naturalist ought to have before him, when dissecting a whale, or classifyng a mite, a fungus, or an infusorian. is "What are the laws of life"**.**»[6] This is what Darwin will claim in the first pages of 1859 *Origin of Species*. As is known, Darwin's main work moves from a historical reconstruction of the theory of evolution. Indeed, the English biologist is not the first who theorized an alternative paradigm to creationism and fissism. In particular, Darwin confronts with Lamarck:

Lamarck was the first man whose conclusions on the subject excited much attention […]. he upholds the doctrine that all species, including man, are descended from other species. He first did the eminent service of arousing attention to the probability of all change in the organic, as well as in the inorganic world, being the result of law, and not of miraculous interposition […]. With respect to the means of

[3] Paul H. Barrett et. al. (ed), *Charles Darwin's Notebooks 1836-1844*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, N36, p. 573.
[4] Ibidem., B101, p. 195.
[5] Ibidem, N5, p. 564. See also M19, p. 524: «It is an argument for materialism. that cold water brings on suddenly in head, a frame of mind, analogous to those feelings. which may be considered as truly spiritual».
[6] Ibidem, B229, p. 228. See also OUN34 (pp. 610-611): «life itself being, the *capability* of such matter obeying a certain and peculiar system of movements».

> modification, he attributed something to the direct action of the physical conditions of life, something to the crossing of already existing forms, and much to use and disuse, that is, to the effects of habit. To this latter agency he seems to attribute all the beautiful adaptations in nature; - such as the long neck of the giraffe for browsing on the branches of trees. But he likewise believed in a law of progressive development; and as all the forms of life thus tend to progress, in order to account for the existence at the present day of simple productions, he maintains that such forms are now spontaneously generated[7].

Lamarck will always flutter over Darwin's works (and his interpreter's) as the emblem of an evolutionary paradigm which still resorts to alleged impulses or wills to progression in order to explain all changes within the organic world.[8] To admit this, as Darwin writes, is «to enter into the realms of miracle, and to leave those of Science».[9]

Moreover, Darwin knows that behind this sort of vitalism there stands a second metaphysical prejudice: finalism. As Darwin writes in the *Notebook B*: «When we talk of higher orders, we should always say, intellectually higher. - But who with the face of the earth covered with the most beautiful savannahs and forests dare to say that intellectuality is only aim in this world»[10]. Since the beginning of his research, Darwin was aware that a scientific definition of life, i.e., a fully-fledged materialistic understanding of such a phenomenon, could be achieved only by abandoning the mental trap of teleology. A trap where even modern materialists got stuck in when, in order to contest the Cartesian metaphysical gulf between matter and mind, they turned to a perspective of gradualness, according to which mind is the highest level of complexity matter can reach. As Stephen Jay Gould pointed out: «I believe that the stumbling block to [Darwin's theory]'s acceptance does not lie in any scientific difficulty, but rather in the radical philosophical content of Darwin's message – in its challenge to a set of entrenched Western attitudes that we are not yet ready to abandon.»[11] Teleology is one of the most rooted attitudes. This explains why, although scarcely supported nowadays, Lamarck's theory often represents a sort of stereotype of Darwin's one: we easily deal with the idea of harmony between animals and their environments as it seems more sound to our mind that their changes are the outcome of their will. In other words, we hardly accept, as Darwin instead exhorts us to do, that there is no preconceived harmony in nature and that the present state of things is the outcome of chance and unintentional modifications.[12] As Darwin writes in the conclusive remarks of the *Origin of Species*: «The chief cause of our natural unwillingness to admit that one species has given birth to other and distinct species, is that we are always slow in admitting great

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[7] Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, pp. XIII-XIV. The introductory "historical sketch" will be added by Darwin starting from 1861 third edition of *The Origin of Species.* In the *Notebook B*, Darwin's judgment on Lamarck is harsher: «Has the Creator since the Cambrian formations gone on creating animals with same general structure. - miserable limited view. - With respect to how species are. Lamark's "willing" doctrine absurd». Cf. Barrett, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks*, N216, pp. 224-225. See also the letter to Joseph Dalton Hooker dated 11/01/1844: «Heaven forfend me from Lamarck nonsense of a "tendency to progression", "adaptations from the slow willing of animals" &c, - but the conclusions I am led to are not widely different from his—though the means of change are wholly so - I think I have found out (here's presumption!) the simple way by which species become exquisitely adapted to variousends». Available at <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/?docId=letters/DCP-LETT-729.xml;query=;brand=default>.

[8] Barrett, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks*, B21, p. 176: «changes not result of will of animal, but law of adaptation as much as acid and alkali».

[9] Darwin, *Origin of Species* p. 204.

[10] Barrett, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks*, B252, p. 233.

[11] Stephen Jay Gould, *Ever Since Darwin. Reflection on Natural History* (1977), New York, Norton, 2007, p. 11.

[12] Darwin, *Origin of Species*, pp. 159-160: « [The utilitarian doctrine] believe[s] that many structures have been created for the sake of beauty, to delight man or the Creator (but this latter point is beyond the scope of scientific discussion), or for the sake of mere variety, a view already discussed. Such doctrines, if true, would be absolutely fatal to my theory.»

changes of which we do not see the steps.»[13] Therefore, in Darwin, science and philosophy ally to sweep away the remnants of a metaphysics of life that seemed more a cultural obstinacy than an actual theoretical requirement. That is why I think Darwinism represents the peak of modern materialism.

With respect to the relationship between the animal and the human being, in Darwin, it seems to be rather simple: the human being is an animal; human beings and animals are all living beings connected one another by a long-lasting common history of modification and adjustment. The Cartesian project of the machine is accomplished: the principle of evolution by natural selection provides a univocal all-encompassing definition of the living. And Darwin pushed this project even further when he centred his evolutionary perspective utterly on the individual as the only ontological reality. Species do not exist. As Daniel Dennett highlighted, «The taxonomy of living things Darwin inherited was thus itself a direct descendant, via Aristotle, of Plato's essentialism. In fact, the word "species" was at one point a standard translation of Plato's Greek word for Form or Idea, *eidos.*»[14]. Radical individualism is the distinctive character of Darwin's ontology.[15] As he writes in *The Origin of Species*: «natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being.»[16] There is neither a superior reality nor a preconceived pattern: natural selection produces only individualities whose similarities, i.e., what leads us to assume the existences of species, are simply the trace of their fitness.[17]

I think these are the main theoretical features of Darwinian understanding of the human-animal relationship: radical materialism, anti-finalism and ontological individualism. As I stated before, in this chapter, I do not aim to reconstruct Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection at length: the scholarship is so immense and specialized that, in my opinion, it undermines the possibility for a philosophical inquiry to handle it being fully conscious. For these reasons, I will contain my inquiry within this question: how the paradigm of the suffering animal reaches Darwin and, successively, how the theory of evolution by natural selection redefines it. The paradigm of the suffering animal reaches Darwin as we left it in the previous chapter, that is a definition of the living which main features are: the perspective of gradualness, the suffering-atheism nexus and consequentialism. The theory of evolution by natural selection will act on every single feature, returning eventually an even more radical materialist paradigm whereby understanding the living.

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[13] Ibidem, p. 422.

[14] Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, p. 36. As Darwin's write in *The Origin of Species* (p. 426): «In short, we shall have to treat species in the same manner as those naturalists treat genera, who admit that genera are merely artificial combinations made for convenience. This may not be a cheering prospect; but we shall at least be freed from the vain search for the undiscovered and undiscoverable essence of the term species.» See also, Richard Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Heart: The Evidence for Evolution*, New York, Free Press, 2009, p. 21: «why did it take so long for a Darwin to arrive on the scene? […] The culprit was the ancient philosophical doctrine of – to give it its modern name – *essentialism*. The discovery of evolution was held back by the dead hand of Plato.»

[15] Stephen Jay Gould, *Can We Complete Darwin's Revolution?*, in *Dinosaur in a Haystack***.** *Reflections in Natural History* (1995), Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2011, p. 329: «Natural selection is a theory of ultimate individualism.»

[16] Darwin, *Origin of Species*, p. 428.

[17] Ibidem, p. 42: «I look at the term species as one arbitrarily given, for the sake of convenience, to a set of individuals closely resembling each other, and that it does not essentially differ from the term variety, which is given to less distinct and more fluctuating forms. The term variety, again, in comparison with mere individual differences, is also applied arbitrarily, for convenience' sake.»

The Coral of Life and the Chance of Equality

«The tree of life should perhaps be called the coral of life, base of branches dead; so that passages cannot be seen. — this again offers contradiction to constant succession of germs in progress — "no only makes it excessively complicated".»[18] This image of the coral of life perfectly depicts Darwin's view of evolution. A coral, not a tree. Darwin knew that the idea of a tree of life would have still recalled the classic iconography of a stable and hierarchical living world. This was not what Darwin had in mind. His research and observations composed a more complex image. As Telmo Pievani pointed out:

> Hence, neither staircases or chains of the living nor regular trees: according to Darwin, the coral is the symbol of the drama of death and survival, the plastic synthesis of the incompressible variety of nature, the most appropriate evolutionary model to portray the contingency of extinction and speciation. Yet, it is above all the antidote to the tendency to link evolution to a progress which, from few main branches, necessarily lead to the treetop of the present species. For him, every branch is equal in dignity.[19]

The first certainty Darwin acquires from his observations and insights is that Creationism is a «miserable limited view.»[20] Darwin contests the century-old claim to put in order and to classify the living world. Darwin knew that, behind such a claim, there are precise assumptions: the primacy of mind on matter, the primacy of order on chaos, the primacy of end on chance, and, as a direct consequence, human exceptionality. Darwin shatters this «view» not only because he revers such primacies. Darwin simply confutes the epistemological and ontological value of hierarchy. The image of the coral of life aims exactly to condense such an anti-hierarchical and anti-finalistic understanding of the living world. An image which hardly fits with the gnoseological structure of human mind. It is all about the conceptual nuance between the tree and coral, without which even the theory of evolution can easily be led back to a teleological perspective. As Gould pointed out:

> The familiar iconographies of evolution are all directed – sometimes crudely, sometimes subtly – toward reinforcing a comfortable view of human inevitably and superiority. The starkest version, the chain of being or ladder of linear progress, has an ancient, pre-evolutionary pedigree […]. This tradition never vanished, even in our more enlightened age […]. Nor have we abandoned this iconography in our generation […]. The march of progress is *the* canonical representation of evolution-the one picture immediately grasped and viscerally understood by all […]. The straitjacket of linear advance goes beyond iconography to the definition of evolution: the word itself becomes a synonym for progress. Life is a copiously branching bush, continually pruned by the grim reaper of extinction, not a ladder of predictable progress. Most people may know this as a phrase to be uttered, but not as a concept brought into the deep interior of understanding. Hence we continually make errors inspired by unconscious allegiance to the ladder of progress, even when we explicitly deny such a superannuated view of life.[21]

Evolution as such is essentially counterintuitive. It puts the limit of our minds to the test as it collides with the most important and well-rooted principle of western philosophy. As Darwin writes in *The Origin of Species*: «The mind cannot possibly grasp the full meaning of the term of even a million years; it cannot add up and perceive the full effects of many slight variations, accumulated during an almost infinite number of generations.»[22]. Indeed, if, for instance, we account the image that Daniel Dennett provides in *Darwin's Dangerous*

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[18] Barrett, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks*, B25-26, p. 175.
[19] Telmo Pievani, *Introduzione a Darwin*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2012. p. 53. Translation mine.
[20] Barrett, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks*, B216, p. 224.
[21] Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life. The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (1989), New York, Norton, 1990, pp. 28-35.
[22] Darwin, *Origin of Species*, p. 422.

Idea to «visualize the tree of life»[23], then we will really understand how the history of the evolution of life on this planet challenges the cultural and gnoseological limits of the human mind. Although Dennett's view is up to date with modern genetics, its ontological essence is still fully Darwinian. It even ends up increasing further our disorientation.

> The Earth is about 4.5 billion years old, and the first life forms appeared quite "soon"; the simplest single-celled organisms - the *prokaryotes* - appeared at least 35 billion years ago, and for probably another 2 billion years, that was all the life there was. bacteria, blue-green algae, and their equally simple kin. Then, about 1.4 billion years ago, a major revolution happened: some of these simplest life forms literally joined forces, when some bacteria-like prokaryotes invaded the membranes of other prokaryotes, creating the *eukaryotes*—cells with nuclei and other specialized internal bodies. These internal bodies, called *organelles* or *plastids,* are the key design innovation opening up the regions of Design Space inhabited today […]. That *second* revolution—the emergence of the first multicelled organ-isms—had to wait 700 million years or so. Once multicelled organisms were on the scene, the pace picked up. The subsequent fan-out of plants and animals—from ferns and flowers to insects, reptiles, birds, and mammals— has populated the world today with millions of different species. In the process, millions of other species have come and gone. Surely many more species have gone extinct than now exist—perhaps a hundred extinct species for every existent species.[24]

Moreover, as Dennett immediately points out, «the vertical dimension in Design Space as a measure of amount of Design, so that *higher = more designed*, we must be careful to note that in the Tree of Life (drawn right-side-up, as I propose to do) *higher = later* (and nothing else).»[25] In other words, we easily tend to identify the notion of "higher" with "more evolved", and, successively, to glimpse the trace of a *telos* behind such a "more". Evolutionary ontology compels us to deal with a complexity which collides with our need for simplification and purpose. That is why evolution is commonly portrayed as a progression which goes from the four-legged condition to erect posture, from nature to culture, from insentience to rationality, and so on. As I stated before, such a prejudice is still operating in modern materialism, where the perspective of gradualness, despite its anti-metaphysical character, kept on equating the major complexity of matter with mind. As if the latter were the maximum point, starting from which, it is possible to define a lower point. On the contrary, evolution tells us that what moderns meant with "gradualness" is actually, by using Darwin's words, «accumulation of beneficial *differences*.»[26] Every living being represents an evolutionary outcome, where fitness does not stand for betterness, but only for a contingency selected by natural selection «for the good of each being.». And since such a fitness is contingent, then, as all the pruned branches of the coral of life show, it is always revocable. There is no tendency to progress, no preconceived destination. Evolution by natural selection is a massive attempts producer[27], an incessant production of differences.[28]

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[23] Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, pp. 87-89.
[24] Ibidem, pp. 85-86.
[25] Ibidem, p. 87.
[26] Darwin, *Origin of Species*, p. 132. Emphasis mine. Dennett talks of «Accumulation of Design». Cf. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, p. 68. See also, Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker. Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design* (1986), New York, Norton, 1996, pp. 43ff.
[27] Ibidem, p. 163: «Natural selection will not produce absolute perfection, nor do we always meet, as far as we can judge, with this high standard under nature.»
[28] The production of differences also entails another feature which further anchors Darwin's theory in a radical materialism: the refusal of saltation (a biological perspective that even Darwin endorsed in his early *Red Notebook*). As Darwin writes «As natural selection acts solely by accumulating slight, successive, favourable variations, it can produce no great or sudden modifications; it can act only by short and slow steps. Hence the canon of "Natura non facit saltum," which every fresh addition to our knowledge tends to confirm, is on this theory intelligible. We can see why throughout nature the same general end is gained by an almost infinite diversity of means, for every peculiarity when once acquired is long inherited, and structures already modified

Darwin both redefines and deconstructs traditional materialism. Evolutionary materialism does not simply claim the self-productive capacity of matter. It rather stresses the anti-finalistic character of such a productivity. In order to be a truly alternative to metaphysics, materialism needs to remove any sort of teleological allusion, or even, as the case of Spinozism, any sort of fatalism of necessity. Hence, chance is what can really defeat metaphysic. It does not mean claiming the existence of a free first cause, but rather of a structural contingency of the living matter. In other words, Darwin was aware that a fully-fledged materialism must be established upon *chanc*e – although, for Darwin, change was actually the name for our ignorance of causes[29] -, and that such a chance must be made productive if we really attempt to cleanse any *bio-logos* from vitalism. Darwin succeeds to define the productive contingency of matter, by means of the principle of the natural selection. As Dennett pointed out, «This was Darwin's great idea, not the idea of evolution, but the idea of evolution *by natural selection*.»[30] In other word, «Darwin was offering a skeptical world what we might call a get-rich-slow scheme, a scheme for creating Design out of Chaos without the aid of Mind.»[31] Natural selection is an «algorithm», a «certain sort of formal process that can be counted on—logically—to yield a certain sort of result whenever it is "run" or instantiated.»[32] Such an algorithm can be expressed in the following way:

> *substrate neutrality:* […] The power of the procedure is due to its *logical* structure, not the causal powers of the materials used in the instantiation, just so long as those causal powers permit the prescribed steps to be followed exactly.
> *underlying mindlessness:* Although the overall design of the procedure may be brilliant, or yield brilliant results, each constituent step, as well as the transition between steps, is utterly simple. How simple? Simple enough for a dutiful idiot to perform—or for a straightforward mechanical device to perform […].
> *guaranteed results*: Whatever it is that an algorithm does, it always does it, if it is executed without misstep. An algorithm is a foolproof recipe.[33]

Therefore, «life on Earth has been generated over billions of years in a single branching tree - the Tree of Life - by one algorithmic process or another.»[34] Dennett might do not agree with that, but Darwin's attempt to define the «law» which subtend the development and conservation of «life» turns out to be the peak of Descartes' materialism. Dennett himself – who probably has a very rigid (and standard) understanding of Descartes' philosophy – seems to conceive Darwin's project in this direction:

> Here, then, is Darwin's dangerous idea: the algorithmic level *is* the level that best accounts for the speed of the antelope, the wing of the eagle, the shape of the orchid, the diversity of species, and all the other occasions for wonder in the world of nature. It is hard to believe that something as mindless and mechanical as an algorithm could produce such wonderful things. No matter how impressive the products of an algorithm, the underlying process always consists of nothing but a set of individually

in many different ways have to be adapted for the same general purpose. We can, in short, see why nature is prodigal in variety, though niggard in innovation» (Ibidem, p. 414).

[29] Ibidem, p. 106: «I have hitherto sometimes spoken as if the variations - so common and multiform with organic beings under domestication, and in a lesser degree with those under nature - were due to chance. This, of course, is a wholly incorrect expression, but it serves to acknowledge plainly our ignorance of the cause of each particular variation.»

[30] Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, p. 42.

[31] Ibidem, p. 50.

[32] Ibidem.

[33] Ibidem, pp. 50-51.

[34] Ibidem, p. 51.

> mindless steps succeeding each other without the help of any intelligent supervision; they are «automatic» by definition: the workings of an automaton.[35]

Natural selection is the «law» Darwin was looking for. Natural selection, not evolution. Since Darwin was aware of the counter-intuitive character of his theory, the terminological reflection plays a fundamental role within his work. First of all, starting from the title of his main work (*The Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection*), Darwin rarely turns to the term of evolution, highlighting many times that the core of his theory is natural selection. At his time, evolution was a term imbued with preformist, progressive and teleological meanings. An acceptation which still today, even in the field of contemporary philosophy, lead to consider Darwin's theory not as the peak of the anti-metaphysical thought – what I named «ultimate materialism» in the title of this chapter -, but rather as the peak of modern faith in progress.[36] Yet, Darwin was neither sure about the term natural selection. As he writes in *The Origin of Species*:

> Several writers have misapprehended or objected to the term Natural Selection. Some have even imagined that natural selection induces variability, whereas it implies only the preservation of such variations as arise and are beneficial to the being under its conditions of life. No one objects to agriculturists speaking of the potent effects of man's selection; and in this case the individual differences given by nature, which man for some object selects, must of necessity first occur. Others have objected that the term selection implies conscious choice in the animals which become modified; and it has even been urged that, as plants have DO volition, natural selection is not applicable to them! In the literal sense of the word, no doubt, natural selection is a false term; but who ever objected to chemists speaking of the elective affinities of the various elements? - and yet an acid cannot strictly be said to elect the base with which it in preference combines. It has been said that 1 speak of natural selection as an active power or Deity; but who objects to an author speaking of the attraction of gravity as ruling the movements of the planets? Every one knows what is meant and is implied by such metaphorical expressions; and they are almost necessary for brevity. So again it is difficult to avoid personifying the word Nature; but I mean by Nature, only the aggregate action and product of many natural laws, and by laws the sequence of events as ascertained by us. With a little familiarity such superficial objections will be forgotten.[37]

As is known, Darwin will even go to acknowledge Herbert Spencer's notion of *survival of the fittest* as a «more accurate» term[38]. Darwin's terminological tribulations rise from the

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[35] Ibidem, p. 59.

[36] Cf. Telmo Pievani, *Anatomia di una rivoluzione. La logica della scoperta scientifica di Darwin*, Mimesis, Milano, 2013, pp. 131-137.

[37] Darwin, *Origin of Species*, p. 63. Darwin will come back on this question in 1868 *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication*. Cf. Charles Darwin, *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 6: «This preservation, during the battle for life, of varieties which possess any advantage in structure, constitution, or instinct, I have called Natural Selection; and Mr. Herbert Spencer has well expressed the same idea by the Survival of the Fittest. The term "natural selection" is in some respects a bad one, as it seems to imply conscious choice; but this will be disregarded after a little familiarity. No one objects to chemists speaking of "elective affinity"; and certainly an acid has no more choice in combining with a base, than the conditions of life have in determining whether or not a new form be selected or preserved. The term is so far a good one as it brings into connection the production of domestic races by man's power of selection, and the natural preservation of varieties and species in a state of nature. For brevity sake I sometimes speak of natural selection as an intelligent power; - in the same way as astronomers speak of the attraction of gravity as ruling the movements of the planets, or as agriculturists speak of man making domestic races by his power of selection. In the one case, as in the other, selection does nothing without variability, and this depends in some manner on the action of the surrounding circumstances on the organism. I have, also, often personified the word Nature; for I have found it difficult to avoid this ambiguity; but I mean by nature only the aggregrate action and product of many natural laws, - and by laws only the ascertained sequence of events.»

[38] Ibidem, p. 49: «I have called this principle, by which each slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term Natural Selection, in order to mark its relation to man's power of selection. But the expression often used by

difficulty to express in words a conceptual and ontological reality in front of which western philosophical lexicon seems to be silent. Nevertheless, as Darwin writes to Asa Gray in a letter dated November 29th 1857, a term, whether it is accurate or not, is necessary:

> I had not thought of your objection of my using the term «natural Selection» as an agent; I use it much as a geologist does the word Denudation, for an agent, expressing the result of several combined actions. I will take care to explain, not merely by inference, what I mean by the term; for I must use it, otherwise I should incessantly have to expand it into *some such* (here miserably expressed) formula as the following, «the tendency to the preservation (owing to the severe struggle for life to which all organic beings at some time or generation are exposed) of any the slightest variation in any part, which is of the slightest use or favourable to the life of the individual which has thus varied; together with the tendency to its inheritance.» Any variation, which was of no use whatever to the individual, would not be preserved by this process of «natural selection.»[39]

I attempted to outline what, in my opinion, is the conceptual structure which sustains Darwin's ontological perspective. Without such coordinates (contingency, anti-finalism, individualism), it is impossible to understand Darwin's definition of the relationship between humanity and animality.

As Thomas Huxley claimed, «the question of the relation of man to the lower animals resolves itself, in the end, into the larger question of the tenability or untenability of Mr. Darwin's views.»[40] How does Darwin define such a relationship? What is the philosophical meaning of the terms of humanity and of animality from the point of view of evolution by natural selection? I would like to start by stating an obvious fact: Darwin did not write a book on animality, *The Origin of the Species* (1859), and, later, a book on humanity, *The Descent of Man* (1871). Darwin's solution to the question on the human-animal relationship was rather simple: the question does not exist. Indeed, Darwin's materialism deactivated all those theoretical conditions that, from Aristotle, to Descartes, and even Kant, allowed to establish an ontological difference between the human being and the animal. Hence, Darwin rebutted not only the possibility to arrange the living into hierarchy, but also the idea that qualitative features (as the epithet *Sapiens* for the species *Homo* within Linnaeus' taxonomy[41]) can eventually mark ontological differences out among the living. As if, after all, the century-old relationship between the human being and the animal were no less than the projection of a conceptual misrepresentation on the living matter, where the latter is understood starting from the plurality of the present living forms. What if we invert the order, if we start by considering the living matter and its laws? Well, as Darwin says, the question does not arise: the difference between the human being and the animal is simply that between two different products of evolution. We are still in the line of the Cartesian paradigm of the body-machine, even though without all those philosophical requirements which compelled Descartes to reject ontological equality. It does not make sense to talk of human beings and

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Mr. Herbert Spencer of the Survival of the Fittest is more accurate, and is sometimes equally convenient.» As is known, Spencer conceived the notion of *survival of the fittest* in 1864 *Principle of Biology* after having read Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Cfr. Herbert Spencer, *Principle of Biology*, London, Williams and Nortgate, 1864, XII-165, pp. 444-445. In a letter dated July 2nd 1866, Alfred Wallace will suggest Darwin to use Spencer's notion to avoid the personalization of nature that "natural selection" seems to entail (<https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/DCP-LETT-5140.xml#back-mark-5140.f5>). Darwin will use the notion of *survival of the fittest* in the fourth edition of *The Origin of Species* and in 1868 *Variation of Domestic Animals* (<https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/DCP-LETT-5145.xml#mark-5145.f3>).

[39] Charles Darwin to Asa Gray, November the 29th 1857. Text available at <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/?docId=letters/DCP-LETT-2176.xml;query=;brand=default>.

[40] Thomas H. Huxley, *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature* (1863), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2009, p. 106.

[41] Agamben, *The Open*, pp. 25-26.

animals, but rather of the "individual x" and the "individual y". As Darwin writes in the *Notebook N*: «Arguing from man to animals is philosophical.»[42] To suppose the existence of a great difference between the human being and the other animals is meaningless. First of all, what animal? If anything, there are animals.[43] In few words, we should talk of the difference between the human being, as member of the species *Homo sapiens*, and, for instance, the cat, as member of the species *Felis catus*. As, from the point of view of the coral of life, it does not make sense, both epistemologically and ontologically, to question the difference between "branches" which are far away from each other. Indeed, we would end up dealing with very different forms of life that the difference among them would tell us anything tangible. As Frans De Wall maintains in *The Bonobo and the Atheist*:

> To understand this obsession with human origins, keep in mind that the Judeo-Christian tradition arose with little or no awareness of other primates. Desert nomads knew only antelopes, snakes, camels, goats, and the like. No wonder that they saw a yawning gap between human and animal, and reserved the soul just for us. Their descendants were shocked to the core of their beliefs when, in 1835, the first live anthropoid apes went on display at the London Zoo. People were offended, unable to hide their disgust. Queen Victoria judged the apes «painfully and disagreeably human.»[44]

This is the fundamental methodological naivety of anthropocentrism: to compare forms of life which are so far one another, then they obviously end up appearing ontologically different. A distortion which is equally misleading when, as it often happens within political thought, the comparison between human beings and animals aims to establish more continuities than differences. As De Wall points out:

> We have the emotions of a social animal, and not just any animal, but mammal. Previous attempts at biological explanations of human behavior have suffered from […] too many comparisons with social insects. Don't get me wrong, ants and bees are wonderful cooperators, and the study of them has greatly advanced our understanding of altruism. It is a triumph of evolutionary that its logic applies across such a vast array of species. Yet, insects possess none of the neural circuitry that mammals evolved from empathy and caring. Even if insect behavior resamples ours on the surface, it doesn't rely on the same processes. It's like comparing the chess play of computer and grandmasters: they may come up with the same moves, but get there in totally different ways.[45]

Here, the last feature of Darwin's ultimate materialism emerges: the epistemological and methodological confutation of anthropocentrism. The coral of life does not concede any preferred vantage point and, therefore, any similarity or difference must be judged only from the point of view of natural selection. Within evolution the concept of difference should be inflected as an adaptive alternative of a common plot of selected features (fitness) which, contingently, eventually permit individuals to survive. As Darwin writes in the conclusion of *The Origin of Species*: «When I view all beings not as special creations, but as the lineal descendants of some few beings which lived long before the first bed of the Cambrian system was -deposited, they seem to me to become ennobled.»[46] This is what, in my opinion, the egalitarian character of Darwin's materialism consist in: the idea that, at the bottom of the colourful coral of life, there are nothing but *surviving living bodies*.

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[42] Barrett, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks*, N49, p. 576.
[43] As Cristian Fuschetto pointed out, Darwin's critique to the typological notion of species resembles Derrida's well-known neologism of «*animot*» exposed in *The Animal that Therefore I am.* Cf Cristian Fuschetto, *Darwin teorico del postumano. Natura, Artificio, Biopolitica*, Milano, Mimesis, 2010, pp. 103-115.
[44] Frans De Waal, *The Bonobo and the Atheist: In Search of Humanism Among the Primates*, New York, Norton, 2013, p. 87
[45] Ibidem, p. 196.
[46] Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 428.

For these reasons, I believe that *The Origin of Species* should not be conceived as a discourse on animality, i.e., according to the Cartesian-Kantian meaning of this term, a discourse on the biological level of the living. If it were so, then we should consider *The Descend of Man* as a work born of the need to account the human question. Darwin reasoned beyond such a logic. For him, *The Origin of Species* was a self-contained work. Of course, many were the unresolved questions, especially regarding hereditary, and the theoretical cruxes which need a better clarification (natural selection, fitness, and, above all, the role of God). *The Origin of Species* contains many oscillations which will be revised and corrected by contemporary Darwinism. However, more radically than Descartes in the Second Mediation, Darwin affirms the heuristic sterility not only of the terms of human and of animal, but also of any "anthropological markers" such as language and reason.[47] On the chance that the latter were exclusive feature of the *Homo sapiens*, however they would be conceived within a theoretical frame that processes them as nothing but products of natural selection.

Therefore, what is left of the philosophical question on relationship between humanity and animality after Darwin? Is it still possible for philosophy to pose such a question? Or it rather musts pass the baton to ethology or primatology?

> Human exceptionalism is still very much alive in the social sciences and the humanities. They remain so resistant to comparisons of humans with other animals that even the word "other" bothers them. The natural sciences, in contrast, having suffered less religious contamination, march inexorably toward ever greater human-animal continuity. Carl Linnaeus placed *Homo sapiens* firmly within the primate order, molecular biology revealed human and ape DNA to be nearly identical, and neuroscience has yet to find a single area in the human brain without an equivalent in the monkey's. It is this continuity that is controversial. If we biologist could just debate evolution without ever mentioning humans, no one would lose a night's sleep over it. It would be like our discussing how chlorophyll works or whether the platypus counts as a mamma. Who cares?[48]

Perhaps, nowadays, an anthropological philosophy "after Darwin" must be the sole responsibility of primatologists. Yet, Darwin's *The Descent of Man* proves that philosophy still has a lot to say. Darwin was not a philosopher, and his knowledge of history of philosophy was limited and, especially in his biological works, utterly irrelevant. That is why the philosophical interpretation of Darwin's theory is always exposed to misunderstandings and distortions. Nevertheless, in *The Descent of Man*, Darwin fully draws from philosophy in order to face a question even trickier than the origin of species: the material origin of culture and consciousness. As if, after evolution, philosophy needs neither to disavow itself, thereby becoming a subspecies of ethology or neuroscience, nor to invent a new vocabulary. Philosophy – that philosophy which pertains to the tradition of the *suffering animal* - has developed categories and concepts which can, more than any other disciplines, help evolutionary science to solve such a question.

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[47] In order to prove the «lower» descent of the human being, Darwin will turn to a very intriguing strategy: the analysis of the expression of emotions. This is the subject of 1872 *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animal* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009) where Darwin, unlike the humanist tradition, does not prove the animality of the human being by tracking down the "anthropological markers" of language and consciousness in other animals. Instead, Darwin, in line with a Humean revaluation of emotions, uses the expression of emotion to attests the presence of the same expressive modalities in a wide range of animals. This does not only show the «lower origin» of the human being, but also the common descent of all living forms. See Paul White, *Darwin's Emotions. The Scientific Self and the Sentiment of Objectivity*, in «Isis», 4/2009, pp. 811-826.

[48] De Wall, *The Bonobo and the Atheist*, p. 87.

«Read monkey for preexistence.» [49] Since his first notes, Darwin knew that, at that point, the field of natural science was ready to accept his theory of natural selection. Quite the contrary, the field of the so-called human science was utterly not. Especially in his England, where theories of Design *à la* Paley allowed metaphysics to flourish despite the development of biology. After all, as we have seen with the moderns, the very existence of God is at stake here: the continuity between animals and human being necessarily lead to atheism. Therefore, a spectre is haunting *The Origin of Species*: the question on the origin of the human being.

Darwin did not know Descartes well, but he knew that, starting from the French philosopher, the question on the human was not a zoological question anymore. To state that the human body is a machine like that of animals, or that the human being is a member of the animal world was not challenging at all. Only a naïve understanding of modern humanism could maintain that its goal was to claim the non-animal character of the human being. Cartesian humanism, rather attempted to defend the «citadel of Metaphysics», that is the immateriality of mind and, with that, the immaterial origin of morality. In other words, Darwin knew that the relationship between humanity and animality basically consists in an inquiry on the origin, either material or immaterial, of morality. As I have pointed out before, from Darwin's point of view the traditional question on human-animal relationships is an issue which requires to be processed without turning to any "ism". Yet, Darwin could not pretend that the question did not exist. Hence, within *The Origin of Species*, the absence of the human question, as that on the very existence of God, should be understood as precautions aimed to avoid troublesome standpoints.

Chapter VIII of *The Origin of Species* on «instinct» is where such a tension becomes evident. As I highlighted before, either the theory of evolution by natural selection can explain everything about the living or, in case there were only one exception, it must be rejected. It is a rigid, but coherent standpoint. Therefore, the question on the origin of instinct – a question which entails others such as freedom and rationality – represents exactly the moment of highest exposure for Darwin's theory. As Darwin states: «I may-here premise, that I have nothing to do with the origin of the mental powers, any more than I have with that of life itself. We are concerned only with the diversities of instinct and of the other mental faculties in animals of the same class.»[50] Darwin's starting statement is smart: he intends to talk neither of the «origin» of human mind nor of the «origin» of life. Instead, he will focus only on instincts and the mental faculties of animals. As we noticed before with Kant, the recognition of mental faculties in animals did not undermine human exceptionality: indeed, unlike Descartes, human consciousness was not the foundation of rationality, but it rather became the transcendental of freedom, that is an emancipation from instincts which is utterly precluded to animals. That was the moral tone whereby the *route of res cogitans* could restore the heuristic validity of the paradigm of the *rational animal*. Thus, Darwin knew he could grant animals a lot without establishing tricky continuities.

Starting from his studies in Edinburgh[51], Darwin acquired a philosophical awareness typical of the so-called Scottish Enlightenment. For Darwin, Edinburgh environment represented a fertile break from Cambridge strict theism. Here is where he encounters the ideas of Hume and Adam Smith, which will become fundamental for the definition of his theory. From this point of view, the so-called *Metaphysical Enquiries* (notebooks *M*, *N*, and

[49] Barrett, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks*, M128, p. 551.
[50] Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 205.
[51] On the period Darwin spent in Edinburgh see Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin*, London, Penguin, 1992, pp. 45ff.

Old and Useless Notes) are extremely fascinating. They contain a philosophical laboratory wherein Darwin strengthens the theoretical character of his biology. The following are some of the most interesting notes: «*I verily believe free-will and chance are synonymous* »[52]; «*To avoid stating how far, I believe, in Materialism, say only that emotions, instincts degrees of talent, which are heredetary are so because brain of child resemble, parent stock*»[53]; «*free will is to mind, what chance is to matter*[54]»; «*Origin of man now proved.— Metaphysic must flourish.— He who understands baboon will would do more towards metaphysics than Locke*»[55]; «*Seeing a dog and horse and man yawn, makes me feel how "much" all animals "are" built on one structure*»[56]; «*The distinction "as often said" of language in man is very great from all animals - but do not overrate*»[57]; «*Expression, is an heredetary habitual movement consequent on some action, which the progenitor did, when excited or disturbed by the same cause, which "now" excites the expression*»[58]; «*the mind of man is no more perfect, than instincts of animals to all and changing contingencies, or bodies of either. - Our descent, then, is the origin of our evil passions!! - The Devil under form of Baboon is our grandfather!*»[59]; «*Simple happiness "as of child" is large proportion of pleasant to unpleasant mental sensations in any given time " - compared to what other people experience*»[60]; «*read monkeys for preexistence*»[61]; «*thought, however unintelligible it may be, seems as much function of organ, as bile of liver*»[62]; «*It would indeed be wonderful, if, mind of animal was not closely allied to that of men, when the five senses were the same*»[63]; «*Our happiness, our wellbeing depends upon the "habitual reason".— This power of the mind, faintly approaches to instinct*»[64]; «*Instinct appear like heredetary memory*»[65].

These extemporaneous notes tell us a lot about Darwin's philosophical background. Moreover, they prove what we saw in the previous chapter on moderns: that given certain anti-metaphysical and anti-dualistic premises, then a discourse on the human-animal relationship will necessarily lead to a consequentialist perspective. And thanks to Anglo-Saxon empiricism, such a consequentialism not only re-defines ethics, but also allows to reconstruct the genealogy of human consciousness. Within Darwin's notebooks, the massive presence of Hume is what, both directly and indirectly, connects Darwin's metaphysical enquiries with the long-lasting materialist tradition I named the *route of res extensa*. Hence, if philosophy seemed largely useless for the "Darwin-biologist" who attempts to define the laws of life; instead, it becomes essential for the "Darwin-moralist" who attempts to insert human morality into the course of natural history.

The Origin of Species will smother the philosophical radicality of the notebooks *M* and *N*. Nevertheless, here Darwin outlines a definition of instinct which in *The Descend of Man* will provide his ultimate charge to metaphysics.

> Thus, as I believe, the most wonderful of all known instincts, that of the hive-bee, can be explained by natural selection having taken advantage of numerous, successive, slight modifications of simpler

[52] Barrett, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks*, M31, p. 526. Emphasis mine.
[53] Ibidem, M57, pp. 532-533. Emphasis mine.
[54] Ibidem, M72, p. 536. Emphasis mine.
[55] Ibidem, M84, p. 539. Emphasis mine.
[56] Ibidem, M85, p. 540. Emphasis mine.
[57] Ibidem, M96-97, p. 542. Emphasis mine.
[58] Ibidem, M107, p. 545. Emphasis mine.
[59] Ibidem, M123, pp. 549-550. Emphasis mine
[60] Ibidem, M124, p. 550. Emphasis mine
[61] Ibidem, M128, p. 551. Emphasis mine
[62] Ibidem, OUN 36, p. 614. Emphasis mine
[63] Ibidem, OUN8, p. 600. Emphasis mine.
[64] Ibidem, OUN11, p. 602. Emphasis mine.
[65] Ibidem, OUN37, p. 614.

> instincts; natural selection having, by slow degrees, more and more perfectly led the bees to sweep equal spheres at a given distance from each other in a double layer, and to build up and excavate the wax along the planes of intersection; the bees, of course, no more knowing that they swept their spheres at one particular distance from each other, than they know what are the several angles of the hexagonal prisms and of the basal rhombic plates; the motive power of the process of natural selection having been the construction of cells of due strength and of the proper size and shape for the larvse, this being effected with the greatest possible economy of labour and was; that individual swarm which thus made the best cells with least labour, and least waste of honey in the secretion of wax, having succeeded best, and having transmitted their newly-acquired economical instincts to new swarms, which in their turn will have had the best chance of succeeding in the struggle for existence.[66]

Hume's empiricism is echoed behind these sentences: instinct is not a preconceived pattern produced by a single act of creation. Instinct is rather a consolidated, and therefore transmitted to descendants, habit which resulted favourable for the survival of the individual. In other words, instincts are the outcome of a process of selection which tends to reject inconvenient habits and to preserve the convenient ones. Instincts are consolidated habits.

> Finally, it may not be a logical deduction, but to my imagination it is far more satisfactory to look at such instincts as the young cuckoo ejecting its foster-brothers,—ants making slaves,—the larvee of ichneumonidse feeding within the live bodies of caterpillars,—not as specially endowed or created instincts, but as small consequences of one general law leading to the advancement of all organic beings,—namely, multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die.[67]

Such a Humean understanding of instinct allows Darwin to outline an ethological frame potentially capable of explaining the origin and the development of any animal behaviour. At this point, the human question can no longer be avoided. As Darwin writes at the beginning of *The Descent of Man*:

> We ought frankly to admit their community of descent: to take any other view, is to admit that our own structure and that of all the animals around us, is a mere snare laid to entrap our judgment. This conclusion is greatly strengthened, if we look to the members of the whole animal series, and consider the evidence derived from their affinities or classification, their geographical distribution and geological succession. It is only our natural prejudice, and that arrogance which made our forefathers declare that they were descended from demi-gods, which leads us to demur to this conclusion. But the time will before long come when it will be thought wonderful, that naturalists, who were well acquainted with the comparative structure and development of man and other mammals, should have believed that each was the work of a separate act of creation.[68]

Unlike what one might expect, in the first part of *The Descent of Man*, Darwin does not dwell upon the "origin" of the human being: «man bears in his bodily structure clear traces of his descent from some lower form.»[69] In other words, the animality of the human being is so evident that, if it were not, we should even recover Descartes' wicked demon. Indeed, as Darwin points outs, «it may be urged that, as man differs so greatly in his mental power from all other animals, there must be some error in this conclusion». Therefore, as if we were still fixed in Descartes, the humanity of the human-animal, i.e., mind, is what challenge any naturalistic explanation. Yet, evolution by natural selection showed how the human-animal relationship can be still considered an epistemological criterion only if properly framed within the coral of life.

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[66] Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 227.
[67] Ibidem, p. 235.
[68] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981, pp. 32-33.
[69] Ibidem, p. 34.

> If no organic being excepting man had possessed any mental power, or if his powers had been of a wholly different nature from those of the lower animals, then we should never have been able to convince ourselves that our high faculties had been gradually developed. But it can be clearly shewn that there is no fundamental difference of this kind. We must also admit that there is a much wider interval in mental power between one of the lowest fishes, as a lamprey or lancelet, and one of the higher apes, than between an ape and man; yet this immense interval is filled up by numberless gradations […]. My object in this chapter is solely to shew that there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties.[70]

We can understand human being's mental faculties, as in their peculiarities as in their similarities with other species, only if we compare them with that of «animals which come next to him in the series»[71], that is «higher mammals». The starting point of Darwin's comparative analysis is once again Hume:

> As man possesses the same senses with the lower animals, his fundamental intuitions must be the same. Man has also some few instincts in common, as that of self-preservation, sexual love, the love of the mother for her new-born offspring, the power possessed by the latter of sucking, and so forth.[72]

Therefore, by following a very basic Humean line of reasoning, «the lower animals, like man, manifestly feel pleasure and pain, happiness and misery.»[73]

> The fact that the lower animals are excited by the same emotions as ourselves is so well established, that it will not be necessary to weary the reader by many details. Terror acts in the same manner on them as on us, causing the muscles to tremble, the heart to palpitate, the sphincters to be relaxed, and the hair to stand on end. Suspicion, the offspring of fear, is eminently characteristic of most wild animals. Courage and timidity are extremely variable qualities in the individuals of the same species, as is plainly seen in our dogs. Some dogs and horses are ill-tempered and easily turn sulky; others are good-tempered; and these qualities are certainly inherited.

Here, Darwin is the ethologist who knows how to make the most of the deconstructive potential of empiricism. This is what Frans De Waal named «evolutionary parsimony»:

> It posits that if closely related species act the same, the underlying mental processes are probably the same, too. The alternative would be to assume the evolution of divergent processes that produce similar behavior, which seems a wildly uneconomic assumption for organisms with only a few million years of separate evolution. If we normally do not propose different causes for the same behavior in, say, dogs and wolves, why should we do so for humans and chimpanzees?[74]

This is a good use of anthropomorphism which, since not established on dualism, does not misattributes human qualities to animals, but rather describes «animal behavior in human, hence intentionalistic, terms.»[75] Therefore, «lower animals» imitate, memorize, focus and imagine as human beings do. Yet, we know that even Descartes went to endow the *animal-machine* with these abilities. Reason is always what establishes the ontological difference between the human-animal and all the other living beings. As De Waal points out:

> Presume, be admitted that *Reason* stands at the summit. Few persons any longer dispute that animals possess some power of reasoning. Animals may constantly be seen to pause, deliberate, and resolve. It is a significant fact, that the more the habits of any particular animal are studied by a naturalist, the more

[70] Ibidem, pp. 34-35.
[71] Ibidem, p. 37.
[72] Ibidem.
[73] Ibidem, p. 40.
[74] Frans De Wall, *Primates and Philosophers. How Morality Evolved*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 62.
[75] Ibidem, p. 63. See also Rachels, *Created from Animals*, pp. 164-171.

> he attributes to reason and the less to unlearnt instincts […] No doubt it is often difficult to distinguish between the power of reason and that of instinct.[76]

Despite his scarce familiarity with the history of philosophy, Darwin deeply knew the strategy of metaphysics *à la* Descartes: to reduce all the abilities that humans and animals share to instinct, granting even language, self-consciousness and belief in God, while considering human reason as something utterly different, that the fleeing, and therefore indefinable, ability to raise upon instincts. Such an understanding of human reason introduces the nexus between freedom and necessity, that is the dualism between morality and naturality. As we noticed with Kant, the post-Cartesian understanding of mind established a moral definition of the human: humanity means morality.

> I fully subscribe to the judgment of those writers who maintain that of all the differences between man and the lower animals, the moral sense or conscience is by far the most important. This sense […] it is summed up in that short but imperious word *ought*, so full of high significance. It is the most noble of all the attributes of man, leading him without a moment's hesitation to risk his life for that of a fellow-creature; or after due deliberation, impelled simply by the deep feeling of right or duty, to sacrifice it in some great cause. Immanuel Kant exclaims, «Duty! Wondrous thought, that workest neither by fond insinuation, flattery, nor by any threat, but merely by holding up thy naked law in the soul, and so extorting for thyself always reverence, if not always obedience; before whom all appetites are dumb, however secretly they rebel; whence thy original?» This great question has been discussed by many writers of consummate ability; and my sole excuse for touching on it is the impossibility of here passing it over, and because, as far as I know, no one has approached it exclusively from the side of natural history.[77]

In the third chapter of the first part of *The Descent of Man*, Darwin provides a genealogy of morality which combines modern consequentialism, Humean understanding of instinct and Adam Smith's theory of sympathy. Moreover, in accordance with the epistemology of the coral of life, he confines his attention «to the higher social animals, excluding insects, although these aid each other in many important ways.»[78] Morality is a widespread phenomenon within the coral of life, but it reaches a very intense level within the field of higher social animals, among which the human being stands out for its even more intense moral sense. Obviously, human morality does not represent any sort of pinnacle. As Darwin reiterates: «I do not wish to maintain that any strictly social animal, if its intellectual faculties were to become as active and as highly developed as in man, would acquire exactly the same moral sense as ours.»[79] Therefore, like any other ability, human morality can be understood in its peculiarity only if compared with that of contiguous social animals. Indeed, if compared with a general "animal", human morality would easily and rightly appear to be absolutely different. Instead, Darwin's ethological method can naturalize the exceptionality of human morality without minimize its indisputable difference. Here follows Darwin's argumentation:

> For, *firstly*, the social instincts lead an animal to take pleasure in the society of its fellows, to feel a certain amount of sympathy with them, and to perform various services for them […]. But these feelings and services are by no means extended to all the individuals of the same species, only to those of the same association. *Secondly*, as soon as the mental faculties had become highly developed, images of all past actions and motives would be incessantly passing through the brain of each individual […]. *Thirdly*,

[76] Ibidem, p. 46.
[77] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, pp. 70-71. Kant's quotation is from *Metaphysic of Ethics*, translated by John William Semple, Edinburgh, 1836, p. 136. It is am English collection of Kant's main moral works. Here, Darwin quotes a well-known passage from the third chapter of the first book of *Critique of Practical Reason* (*On the Incentives of Pure Practical Reason*). Cf. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 111.
[78] Ibidem, p. 74.
[79] Ibidem, p. 73.

> after the power of language had been acquired and the wishes of the members of the same community could be distinctly expressed, the common opinion how each member ought to act for the public good, would naturally become to a large extent the guide to action […]. *Lastly,* habit in the individual would ultimately play a very important part in guiding the conduct of each member; for the social instincts and impulses, like all other instincts, would be greatly strengthened by habit, as would obedience to the wishes and judgment of the community.[80]

In this passage, Darwin reconstructs the history of a long-lasting apprenticeship where embryonic «social instincts» and an «instinctive sympathy», through an intricate play of pleasure and pain, blame and praise, gradually sediment into consolidated and always more complex social practices passed down from generation to another.

> The moral sense perhaps affords the best and highest distinction between man and the lower animals; but I need not say anything on this head, as I have so lately endeavored to shew that the social instincts, —the prime principle of man's moral constitution —with the aid of active intellectual powers and the effects of habit, naturally lead to the golden rule, «As ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them likewise»; and this lies at the foundation of morality.[81]

Since the beginning of this chapter, Darwin had challenged Kant, the philosopher who placed the moral sense so deep inside the human being that it ended up becoming metaphysical. Darwin endorses the anti-deontological perspective of consequentialism, strengthening it with Hume and Smith. As we noticed before, Hume inspired Darwin with a theory of instincts which, by insisting on the productive character of habit, can be easily applied to moral sense. On the other side, Adam Smith provided Darwin with the fundamental concept of «sympathy.» This is a category that Darwin directly derives from Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, where sympathy is the passion that individuals feel when put themselves in another individual's case.[82] Sympathy is not a mere emphatical response likewise pity and compassion. It rather arises from the view of the «situation which excites it.» Adam Smith was already a fundamental source for *The Origin of Species*: he provided an ontological perspective which derives order from chaos spontaneously. As Stephen Jay Gould pointed out:

> I would advance the even stronger claim that the theory of natural selection is, in essence, Adam Smith's economics transferred to nature. We must also note the delicious (and almost malicious) irony residing in such an assertion. Human beings are moral agents and we cannot abide the hecatomb*—the death through competition of nearly all participants—incurred by allowing individual competition to work in the untrammeled manner of pure *laissez-faire.* Thus, Adam Smith's economics doesn't work in economics. But nature need not operate by the norms of human morality. If the adaptation of one requires the deaths of thousands in amoral nature, then so be it. The process may be messy and wasteful, but nature enjoys time in abundance, and maximal efficiency need not mark her ways […]. The analog of pure *laissez-faire* can and does operate in nature—and Adam Smith's mechanism therefore enjoys its finest, perhaps its only, full application in this analogous realm, not in the domain that elicited the original theory itself.[83]

Therefore, Darwin confirms Smith's «invisible hand» in biology, albeit contesting him in sociology. Sympathy, along with other social instincts, re-modulates the laws of natural selection. Indeed, within the reign of social animal, we witness the development of relational

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[80] Ibidem, pp. 72-73.
[81] Ibidem, p. 106.
[82] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 11ff.
[83] Stephen Jay Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (2002), Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002, pp. 122-123. See also Gregory Radick, *Is the Theory of Natural Selection Independent of Its History?*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, ed. Johnatham Hodge and Gregory Radick, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 143-167.

dynamics which somehow lessens the brutal indifference of natural selection. As Darwin writes:

> Adam Smith formerly argued […] that the basis of sympathy lies in our strong retentiveness of former states of pain or pleasure. Hence, «the sight of another person enduring hunger, cold, fatigue, revives in us some recollection of these states, which are painful even in idea.» We are thus impelled to relieve the sufferings of another, in order that our own painful feelings may be at the same time relieved. In like manner we are led to participate in the pleasures of others.[84]

Once again, Darwin contests Kant: if the German philosopher characterises moral Duty as essentially unselfish – after all, the moral law «strikes down» self-love [85]-, the English biologist characterises it instead as relative, confined to a certain group of counterparts, and grounded on selfishness. Darwin proves to be a shrewd interpreter of modern consequentialism.[86] Indeed, for Darwin, sympathy is not a disinterested incentive, but rather, as Michael Ghiselin pointed out, it is a «form of ultimate self-interest.»[87] Sympathy is a passion grounded on selfishness that leads us to empathize with the condition, either of pain or of joy, of our counterparts. In few words, "I do not sympathize for your pain as such, but because such a pain could become mine."

> As sympathy is thus directed, the mutual love of the members of the same community will extend its limits. No doubt a tiger or lion feels sympathy for the sufferings of its own young, but not for any other animal. With strictly social animals the feeling will be more or less extended to all the associated members, as we know to be the case. With mankind selfishness, experience, and imitation probably add […] to the power of sympathy; for we are led by the hope of receiving good in return to perform acts of sympathetic kindness to others; and there can be no doubt that the feeling of sympathy is much strengthened by habit.[88]

Hence, sympathy is a very effective social glue which balance individual selfishness by promoting altruistic behaviour, i.e., an interest, no matter how genuine, in the «good of others.»[89] However, sympathy is a situated instinct. Individuals are not universally interested in the pain of others. Individuals tend to confine their sympathy within the group they live in. Individuals are interested in the pain of their counterparts. Here is where the question on humanity comes into play.

> As man advances in civilisation, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races. If, indeed, such men are separated from him by great differences in appearance or habits, experience unfortunately shews us how long it is before we look at them as our fellow-creatures. Sympathy beyond the confines of man, that is humanity to the lower animals, seems to be one of the latest moral acquisitions.[90]

As life gradually evolves towards always fitter forms of life, as human moral sense tends to «advances in civilization.» Yet, what does such a civilization consist of? It is a constant extension of sympathy which can even go «beyond the confines of man.» Darwin identifies

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[84] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, p. 81.
[85] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 96-97.
[86] According to Andrea Clemente, Darwin's understanding of moral sense can be understood as the peak of the century-old philosophical reflection on «self-love». See Andrea Clemente and Simone Ghelli, *Amor proprio. Attualità politica di una passione moderna*, in «Lo Sguardo», 2/2018, pp. 120-121.
[87] Michael T. Ghiselin, *Darwin and Evolutionary Psychology: Darwin initiated a radically new way of studying behavior*, in «Science», 179/1979, p. 967.
[88] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, p. 82
[89] Ibidem, p. 93.
[90] Ibidem, pp. 100-101.

such an extended sympathy with «*the very idea of humanity*». As he claims, «This virtue, one of the noblest with which man is endowed, seems to arise incidentally from our sympathies becoming more tender and more widely diffused, until they are extended to all sentient beings.»[91] Here, Darwin establishes a very intriguing equivalence between civilisation, extension of sympathy, and humanity. As we noticed in the previous chapter, with Kant, the Cartesian understanding of humanity lost it substantiality, although immaterial, becoming instead a moral attribute which makes the human-animal exceptional. In other words, humanity became a noumenical reality which materializes phenomenally through the practice of freedom. This was an effective way to restore the heuristic validity of the paradigm of the *rational animal*: humanity becomes ineffable, indefinable and, because of that, out of reach of materialism. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin's target is exactly this understanding of humanity. Indeed, the identification between humanity and the extension of sympathy, namely, the development of civilization, aims to naturalize what for Kant was essentially unnatural. As Darwin wrote to Frances Power Cobbe, he who sent him the copy of Kant's *Metaphysic of Ethics* quoted in *The Descent of Man*:

> It has interested me much to see how differently two men may look at the same points, though I fully feel how presumptuous it sounds to put myself even for a moment in the same bracket with Kant;—the one man a great philosopher looking exclusively into his own mind, the other a degraded wretch looking from the outside thro' apes and savages at the moral sense of mankind.[92]

For Darwin, humanity is a manner in which living being relate one another. Against Kant, Darwin provides an ethological definition of humanity which even goes to establish a moral relationship between human being and animals – what Kant considered impossible. However, by inspecting «apes and savages», Darwin comprehends that civilisation inscribes a sort of torsion within natural selection. Like any other instinct and organ, sympathy is nothing but a selected feature for the good of individuals. A selection which rewrites the very criterions of natural selection though. As if morality established a different modality of selection. A sort of "civil selection".[93]

> With savages, the weak in body or mind are soon eliminated; and those that survive commonly exhibit a vigorous state of health. We civilized men, on the other hand, do our utmost to check the process of elimination; we build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed, and the sick; we institute poor-laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skill to save the life of everyone to the last moment. There is reason to believe that vaccination has preserved thousands, who from a weak constitution would formerly have succumbed to small-pox. Thus the weak members of civilized societies propagate their kind. […] The aid which we feel impelled to give to the helpless is mainly an incidental result of the instinct of

[91] Ibidem, p. 101.

[92] Charles Darwin to Frances Power Cobbe, March the 23th 1870. Text available at https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/?docId=letters/DCP-LETT-7145.xml;query=;brand=default.

[93] As Darwin states in his autobiography: «Every one who believes, as I do, that all the corporeal and mental organs (excepting those which are neither advantageous or disadvantageous to the possessor) of all beings have been developed through natural selection, or the survival of the fittest, together with use or habit, will admit that these organs have been formed so that their possessors may compete successfully with other beings, and thus increase in number.» As the editor Nora Barlow underlines, the sentence «together with use or habit» was added later by Darwin. According to her, «The many corrections and alterations in this sentence show his increasing preoccupation with the possibility of other forces at work besides Natural Selection.» In my opinion, Darwin's allusion to «habit» also imply the perspective outlined in *The Descent of Man*, where habits are the foundation of moral sense, and, successively, of the process of civilisation. Hence, the idea that civilisation establishes a different modality of selection does not entail the presence of a dialectical perspective, but rather of the compresence of different selective principle. Cf. Nora Barlow (ed.), *The autobiography of Charles Darwin 1809-1882. With the original omissions restored. Edited and with appendix and notes by his grand-daughter Nora Barlow*, London, Collins, 1958, pp. 88-89.

> sympathy, which was originally acquired as part of the social instincts, but subsequently rendered, in the manner previously indicated, more tender and more widely diffused.[94]

This is what Patrick Tort named *effet réversif de l'évolution*: natural selection, the guiding principle which entails the suppression of the weaker in the struggle for life, produces, especially among the human beings, a form of social life whereof march toward civilization tends to increasingly exclude eliminator behaviours.[95] As Tort points out, one might understand such a «reverse effect of evolution» in terms of dialectical opposition between nature and morality.[96] As we noticed before, within the perspective of natural selection, nothing can withdraw from the pattern of evolution: «On the theory of natural selection we can clearly understand the full meaning of that old canon in natural history, "*Natura non facit saltum*".»[97] Humanity is a contingent product of natural selection. Our moral sense and our civilization, as they are at the moment, could have been different as they could either develop further or be drastically revoked: «we are apt to look at progress as the normal rule in human society; but history refutes this».[98] Therefore, civilization is nothing but a fact, an undeniable evolutionary adaptive solution which allows Darwin even to glimpse a scenario of irrefutable moral development:

> Looking to future generations, there is no cause to fear that the social instincts will grow weaker, and we may expect that virtuous habits will grow stronger, becoming perhaps fixed by inheritance. In this case the struggle between our higher and lower impulses will be less severe, and virtue [that is humanity] will be triumphant.[99]

Perhaps, «civilization» is a tricky concept for contemporary philosophical anthropology. It is a word imbued with eurocentrism and which recalls dark times of Western history such as slavery, imperialism and racism. An ambiguity that we already find in Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* when he states, for instance, that «It is impossible for an Englishman to behold these distant colonies, without a high pride and satisfaction. To hoist the British flag, seems to draw with it as a certain consequence, wealth, prosperity, and civilization».[100] Not by chance, in *The Descent of Man*, Darwin himself, after having highlighted the virtuous reversive effective of civilisation on natural selection, promptly claims:

> Hence we must bear without complaining the undoubtedly bad effects of the weak surviving and propagating their kind; but there appears to be at least one check in steady action, namely the weaker and inferior members of society not marrying so freely as the sound; and this check might be indefinitely increased, though this is more to be hoped for than expected, by the weak in body or mind refraining from marriage.[101]

Surely, Darwin's use of the category of civilisation should be properly contextualised. Nevertheless, such a blatant eugenic remark is what it is and nothing else: a eugenic remark.

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[94] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, p. 168.
[95] Patrick Tort, *La pensée hiérarchique et l'évolution*, Paris, Aubier Montaigne, 1983, p. 191.
[96] Ibidem, p. 192.
[97] Darwin, *The Origin of Species* p. 166.
[98] Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 166.
[99] Ibidem, p. 104. According to Gregory Moore, here Darwin is applying a «theistic notion» to evolution, «an ever-upward progression away from earlier forms of animal life and toward spiritual and social perfection.» As we will see, such an evolutionary optimism "towards the best" «came to be inseparable from the way Darwinism was received and interpreted», especially by a severe critic of Darwinism as Nietzsche. Cf. Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Spencer, and the Ethics of Evolution*, in «Journal of Nietzsche Studies», 23/2002, p. 2.
[100] Charles Darwin, *Journal of Researches into the Geology and Natural History of the Various Countries Visited by H. M. S. Beagle*, London, John Murray, 1860, p. 505. Text available at <http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/frameset?itemID=F20&viewtype=text&pageseq=1>.
[101] Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 168.

As John Greene pointed out «it seems fair to conclude that what we call "social Darwinism" - the belief that competition between individuals, tribes, nations, and races has been an important, if not the chief, engine of progress in human history - was endemic in much of British thought in the mid-nineteenth century, that Darwin's *Origin of Species* gave a powerful boost to this kind of thinking, and that Darwin himself was deeply influenced by this current of thought.»[102] This inner tension of Darwin's *The Descent of Man* has become the subject of a wide spectrum of interpretations which tend to oscillate between hagiography (where the thorny passages are considered as "oversights" which does not affects the moral value of Darwin's social-political reflection) and repudiation (where, on the contrary, Darwin represents the forefather of a eugenic tradition which will culminate in contemporary forms of state racism). According to Antonello La Vergata, such an interpretative split is largely due to the misleading notion of «social Darwinism»: an historical-theoretical entity within which one might find everything and its opposite. As La Vergata explains:

> In general, with [social Darwinism] we usually understand the application of Darwinian ideas, especially those of struggle for existence and natural selection (or survival of the fittest), to society and politics. Normally, such a transposition is believed to have been of help to justify interests of class and racial or imperialist politics. In the extreme forms, it is considered a biologisation or even a bestialisation of the human being and of social relations […]. "Social Darwinism" was born as a polemic term used by the opponent of individualism and competition. It will end up being an infamy mark which, until today, will brand individualism, brute competition, imperialism, militarism, eugenic, racism, the primacy of nature on culture, authoritarianism, the brutalisation of politics, fascism, American interference in Vietnam, the belief in a correlation between race and intelligence quotient, ethological theory on inner aggressivity, sociobiology, Nixon and Ford presidencies, the *Reaganomics*, Thatcherism… In summary, social Darwinism is an awful thing: whenever we do not like something related to biology or society, the label is ready for use.[103]

In his seminal reconstruction, La Vergata highlights the existence of many forms of social Darwinism. The Liberist one *à la* Spencer is only the most famous and neither the most influential as it is largely believed.[104] Because of this polymorphism, La Vergata goes to state that Darwin is «*de facto* the only and real social Darwinist, since social Darwinism was a very complex, heterogeneous, inconsistent and barely Darwinian.»[105] I do not intend to talk of social Darwinism at length. By taking inspiration from La Vergata's illuminating reconstruction, I would rather like to stress a conceptual point which will be fundamental in the development of the following research. Besides its historical-philosophical variations, social Darwinism always entails a certain definition of the nature-morality relationship. A definition which aims to adjust one term to the other. Why do we consider social Darwinism as an awful thing? Because we mostly understand it in the Liberist-Spencerian variation, namely the idea that our society should replicate the cruel agonism of nature in order to develop the best social arrangement and the best individuals. We blame this because it wants natural selection, i.e., the struggle for existence which produces masses of unfits and narrow circles of fittests, to be the leading principle of morality. Besides stereotypes and simplifications (Spencer counted on sympathy, but did not hope for its institutionalisation[106]), what we really do not accept is the fact that an "evil" image of nature provides the moral model upon which grounding our society. Yet, it would be a form of

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[102] John C. Greene, *Darwin as a Social Evolutionist*, in «Journal of the History of Biology», 1/1977, p. 26.
[103] Antonello La Vergata, *Colpa di Darwin? Razzismo, eugenetica, guerra e altri mali*, Torino, UTET, 2009, pp. 73-75. Translation mine.
[104] Ibidem, p. 76.
[105] Id., *I dibattiti sull'evoluzione dell'uomo tra Ottocento e Novecento*, in «Rivista di filosofia», 2/2009, p. 241. Translation mine. See also Cristian Fuschetto, pp. 61-67.
[106] Herbert Spencer, *The Man Versus the State*, Caldwell, Caxton Printers, 1960. On this see La Vergata, *Colpa di Darwin?*, p. 47.

social Darwinism also the opposite, that is to adjust our society to a "good" image of nature, where solidarity and altruism represents evolutionary evidence which compel us to morality.[107] After all, a Darwinian understanding of nature sees a strong tension between social instincts and struggle for life, and therefore, it is only a matter of highlight one aspect more than the other. We have social Darwinism anytime we adjust morality to a certain Darwinian understanding of nature, no matter how brutal or pleasant it is. Hence, a real alternative to social Darwinism is a definition of the nature-morality relationship capable of avoiding what George Edward Moore named «naturalistic fallacy.»[108]

Did Darwin commit such a naturalistic fallacy? Did he aim to adjust human society to his new image of nature? As we noticed, there is no doubt that he somehow attempted to gather leading principles for human society from the laws ruling nature. Within *The Descent of Man*, Darwin intercepts typical themes of British nineteenth-century social debate: the wealth distribution, the forms of state governance, the management of social question (education, charity, salary) and, especially, the question of «the survival of the unfit in civilized society.»[109] Darwin was certainly a liberal thinker, and therefore, as every liberalism, his thought was permeated with justification of some kind of social and political inequality.[110] Nevertheless, Darwin was also he who wrote *The Descent of Man* to contest slavery[111] and who even worked for a just legislation on vivisection.[112] In my opinion, these two aspects do not contradict one another. Darwin was a man of his time, and tensions we might consider as inconsistent and compromising today could instead easily coexist in him. As Stephen Jay Gould states:

> Darwin was a meliorist in the paternalistic tradition, not a believer in biologically fixed and ineradicable inequality. Either attitude can lead to ugly statements about despised peoples, but practical consequences are so different. The meliorist may wish to eliminate cultural practices, and may be vicious and uncompromising in his lack of sympathy for differences, but he does view "savages"

[107] Ibidem, pp. 81ff.
[108] George Edward Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1922, pp. 17-21 and 57-58 (on Darwin and Spencer).
[109] Greene, *Darwin as a Social Evolutionist*, p. 10.
[110] Diane B. Paul, *Darwin, Social Darwinism and Eugenics*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, pp. 235-237. See also Stephen Jay Gould, *The Moral State of Tahiti - and of Darwin*, in *Eight Little Piggies. Reflections in Natural History* (1993), New York, Norton, 1994, cap. XVIII. See also Gabriella Silvestrini, *Contro l'utopia. Mandeville e la pubblica felicità divisa nel minor numero*, in «Filosofia politica», 1/2020, pp. 25-42.
[111] As Darwin writes in *The Voyage of the Beagle*: «It is argued that self-interest will prevent excessive cruelty; as if self-interest protected our domestic animals, which are far less likely than degraded slaves, to stir up the rage of their savage masters. It is an argument long since protested against with noble feeling, and strikingly exemplified, by the ever illustrious Humboldt. It is often attempted to palliate slavery by comparing the state of slaves with our poorer countrymen: if the misery of our poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin; but how this bears on slavery, I cannot see; as well might the use of the thumb-screw be defended in one land, by showing that men in another land suffered from some dreadful disease. Those who look tenderly at the slave-owner, and with a cold heart at the slave, never seem to put themselves into the position of the latter;—what a cheerless prospect, with not even a hope of change! picture to yourself the chance, ever hanging over you, of your wife and your little children—those objects which nature urges even the slave to call his own—being torn from you and sold like beasts to the first bidder! And these deeds are done and palliated by men, who profess to love their neighbours as themselves, who believe in God, and pray that his Will be done on earth! It makes one's blood boil, yet heart tremble, to think that we Englishmen and our American descendants, with their boastful cry of liberty, have been and are so guilty: but it is a consolation to reflect, that we at least have made a greater sacrifice, than ever made by any nation, to expiate our sin.» Cf. Darwin, *Journal of Researches*, p. 500. On Darwin's anti-slavery see Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin's Sacred Cause. Race, Slavery and the Quest for Human* Origin, London, Allen Lane, 2009.
[112] Cf. *Darwin and Vivisection* at <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/commentary/life-sciences/darwin-and-vivisection>.

(Darwin's word) as "primitive" by social circumstance and biologically capable of "improvement" (read "Westernization").[113]

«We do not honor Darwin by hagiography.»[114] Darwin does not need to be saved from himself. In my opinion, we should not dwell upon what to maintain or to reject of Darwin's moral theory. More simply, for what concerns morality and politics, Darwin can no longer be an example for us, and, Darwinianly, I would say that it is for the best.

Nevertheless, I do think that Darwin's oscillation between "social evolution" and "reverse effect of evolution" hides philosophical problems which have not been still properly stressed within Darwinian scholarship. Let's come back to the "eugenic" passages of *The Descent of Man* where Darwin exhorted us to «bear without complaining the undoubtedly bad effects of the weak surviving and propagating their kind.» Why should we beat such effects? Why should we risk degenerating of our species?

> The aid which we feel impelled to give to the helpless is mainly an incidental result of the instinct of sympathy, which was originally acquired as part of the social instincts, but subsequently rendered, in the manner previously indicated, more tender and more widely diffused. Nor could we check our sympathy, if so urged by hard reason, without deterioration in the noblest part of our nature. The surgeon may harden himself whilst performing an operation, for he knows that he is acting for the good of his patient; but if we were intentionally to neglect the weak and helpless, it could only be for a contingent benefit, with a certain and great present evil.[115]

Therefore, as Darwin himself seems to suggest, if we deliberately let natural selection act in our society, we risk «deteriorating» the «noblest part of our nature», i.e., that highly developed moral sense that we call «humanity». Is Darwin basically assuming here a Kantian perspective on morality? As we noticed before, for Darwin, moral sense is the outcome of a selective process which fostered altruistic behaviours at the expanse of selfish and eliminative ones. Hence, in Darwin's view, we contravene with natural selection both by supporting the survival of the fittests alone and by supporting the survival also of the unfits. In my opinion, this is not an unsolved ambivalence. Darwin is rather stressing the tendency of nature and of morality to develop, albeit starting from the same laws (those of natural selection), along parallel paths that eventually end up conflicting. Therefore, more than a reversive movement, Darwin is alluding to a real antagonism made of diverging finalities. By doing so, Darwin was aware that such a perspective could have led to establish a *saltus* capable of endanger his theory.

Here, Darwin's philosophical modernity is rather emerging clearly. In order to understand Darwin's definition of the nature-morality relationship we should deepen the conceptual problematicness subtended to the nexus between sympathy and suffering. The view of others' suffering is what triggers the development of social instinct towards always more extended and inclusive moral practices. As we noticed, according to Darwin, civilisation could even go to extend sympathy to all «sentient being.» Therefore, in Darwin, the suffering-sympathy nexus can be considered the moral translation of the ontological egalitarianism established in *The Origin of Species*.

> Animals - whom we have made our slaves we do not like to consider our equals. - «Do not slave holders wish to make the black man other kind?» Animals with affections, imitation, fear ‹of death›. pain, sorrow for the dead. - respect […] « - the soul by consent of all is superadded, animals not got it, not look forward» if we choose to let conjecture run wild then ‹our› animals our fellow brethren in pain, disease death & suffering «& famine»; our slaves in the most laborious work, our companion in our

[113] Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981), New York, Norton & Company, 1996, p. 419.
[114] Id., *Punctuated Equilibrium*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 13.
[115] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, pp. 168-169.

amusements, they may partake, from our origin in ‹there› one common ancestor we may be all netted together.[116]

An ontological egalitarianism grounded on suffering which evolutionary reflects in the field of social instinct. Such a universalistic perspective bears the name of civilisation, a process of extension of social instincts which latest outcomes is the «virtue of humanity.» Hence, Darwin's naturalistic understanding of moral sense restores the heuristic validity of the term of humanity. The latter is neither an ontological indicator nor a metaphysical attribute. Darwin did not seek the attribute of humanity dignity. From the point of view of evolution by natural selection, the very concept of dignity is meaningless. As James Rachels claimed, «Darwinism furnishes the "new information" that undermines human dignity by taking away its support.»[117] Indeed, the research of dignity is preconceived: first, we assume to be dignified, then we seek what makes us so. By doing so, dignity becomes an artifice passed off as a fact, an "ought" passed off as an "is". Therefore, evolution by natural selection does not pose the question whether human dignity exists or not. Simply, as for the human-animal question, Darwin showed that there are no prerequisites to pose such a problem. Darwin's definition of humanity does not restore the concept of dignity in the light of evolution by natural selection. Humanity is *simply* an ethological categories. Humanity is a highly intense sympathetic *habitus* which potentially has no boundaries of species.

This leads to question of the boundaries of civilisation, perhaps the trickiest moral issue of Darwin's *The Descent of Man*. In my opinion, in order to understand Darwin's perspective we should stress another conceptual nexus: that of between selfishness and altruism. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin draws a genealogy of moral sense capable of thinking human morality, its origin and even its possible development, in naturalistic terms. Indeed, one of the most effective argument in favour of the metaphysic character of morality was the latter's tendency to oppose to the cruel law which despotically rules natural world: self-preservation. In other words, morality fosters altruistic behaviours which oppose to biological selfishness. Furthermore, as Kant aimed to prove, the more morality is purged by selfishness the more it certifies its meta-phenomenal character: the golden rule cannot be a natural product. On the contrary, Darwin's inquiry on moral sense showed how altruism, even the most disinterested (to sacrifice one's own life), can be produced solely by the laws natural selection. Nevertheless, such a perspective apparently contradicts one of the main presuppositions of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection: the ontological individualism. Indeed, as Frans De Waal pointed out: «We are facing the profound paradox that genetic self-advancement at the expense of others—which is the basic thrust of evolution—has given rise to remarkable capacities for caring and sympathy.»[118] Starting from *The Descent of Man*, this question has become one of the trickiest issues for the following evolutionary reflection on morality. Andrew Brown talked of «the Darwin war»[119]: an intense debate at the centre of which there stands the altruism-selfishness binomial. According to Brown, contemporary Darwinism has been characterized by a very intense debate between two opposite interpretations of Darwin's understanding of morality. On the one hand, there stand the «Dawkinsians», that is those interpreters who, under the influence of Richard Dawkins' seminal theory of the «selfish gene»[120], conceive altruism as an advantageous outcome for the preservation of the genes which the living beings are made of. Thanks to modern

[116] Barrett, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks*, B231-231, pp. 228-229.
[117] Rachels, *Created from Animals*, p. 98.
[118] Frans De Wall, *Good Natured. The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 5.
[119] Andrew Brown, *The Darwin War. The Scientific Battle for the Soul of Man*, London, Touchstone, 1999. See also Kim Sterelny, *Dawkins Vs. Gould. Survival of the Fittest*, Icon Books, Cambridge, 2001.
[120] Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (1976), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.

synthesis, the neo-Darwinian theory of selfish gene pushed Darwin's individualism deeper into the genes as the only reality which counts for evolution. As Dawkins states: «An apparently altruistic act is one that looks, superficially, as if it must tend to make the altruist more likely (however slightly) to die, and the recipient more likely to survive. It often turns out on closer inspection that acts of apparent altruism are really selfishness in disguise.»[121] On the other hand, there stand the «Gouldians», that is those interpreters who refute Darwin's rigid ontological individualism (and, more harshly, Dawkinsians genetics), instead turning to a multi-level understanding of evolution by natural selection. As Gould points out in *The Panda's Thumb*:

> The world of objects can be ordered into a hierarchy of ascending levels, box within box […]. Life, too, operates at many levels, and each has its role in the evolutionary process. Consider three major levels: genes, organisms, and species. Genes are blueprints for organisms; organisms are the building blocks of species. Evolution requires variation, for natural selection cannot operate without a large set of choices. Mutation is the ultimate source of variation, and genes are the unit of variation. Individual organisms are the units of selection. But individuals do not evolve-they can only grow, reproduce, and die. Evolutionary change occurs in groups of interacting organisms; species are the unit of evolution.[122]

Within such a perspective, «Evolution is a struggle among groups, not individuals. And groups survive if they regulate their populations by the altruistic acts of individuals.»[123] Therefore, for Gouldians, altruism is not a delusion, but rather an actual product of natural selection. Living beings not only can be truly altruistic, but they had better be so if they want to survive.

I cannot deepen here the question about which of those two perspectives is eventually more "Darwinian". Yet, this is certainly a question whereof philosophy should oversee more. There is no doubt – and we already encountered some example - that Darwin's moral theory in *The Descent of Man* is patchy and conceptually unstable. Nevertheless, «the Darwin war» orbits a fundamental question: given the phenomenon of altruism, whether deceptive or not, what is the relationship between morality and natural selection? Do they oppose one another? And if so, how can such an opposition rise from the continuity of natural history?

Thomas Henry Huxley, known also as Darwin's bulldog for the famous 1860 *Oxford Debate*[124], provided one of the first effective interpretation of Darwin's moral theory. In the *Prolegomena* for the1893 lecture on *Evolution and Ethics*, Huxley depicts morality as a «garden» which countervails the «natural process» ruled by the laws of evolution by natural selection. As Huxley claims:

> Not only is the state of nature hostile to the state of art of the garden; but the principle of the horticultural process, by which the latter is created and maintained, is antithetic to that of the cosmic process. The characteristic feature of the latter is the intense and unceasing competition of the struggle for existence. The characteristic of the former is the elimination of that struggle, by the removal of the conditions which give rise to it. The tendency of the cosmic process is to bring about the adjustment of the forms of plant life to the current conditions; the tendency of the horticultural process is the adjustment of the conditions to the needs of the forms of plant life which the gardener desires to raise.[125]

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[121] Ibidem, p. 4.
[122] Stephen Jay Gould, *The Panda's Thumb. More Reflections in Natural History* (1980), New York, Norton, 1992, p. 85.
[123] Ibidem, p. 87.
[124] Ian Hesketh, *Of Apes and Ancestors. Evolution, Christianity, and the Oxford Debate*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2009.
[125] Thomas H. Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics. Prolegomena*, in *Evolution and Ethics. And Other Essays*, Fairfield, 1sr World Library, 2005, p. 26.

According to Huxley, the «antagonism» between the garden of morality and the natural process of natural selection reproduces on a smaller scale «the antagonism of the results of the cosmic process in the region of life, one to another.»[126] Natural selection itself is an antagonistic principle. Indeed, as Huxley argues in *Evolution and Ethics*, «Where the cosmopoietic energy works through sentient beings, there arises, among its other manifestations, that which we call pain or suffering.»[127] Hence, such a «conscious finitude»[128] is what establishes within the course of evolution the antagonism between morality and natural selection. It «arouses the natural dislike to that which is painful, [and] much ingenuity has been exercised in devising an escape from it.»[129] By selecting the fitting individual through the struggle for life, natural selection is fundamentally a producer of pain, and the sentient beings, who seek pleasure and run from pain, are instinctively led to go against this process. Therefore, by following what Darwin stated in *The Descend of Man*, Huxley agrees to consider morality as a specific condition ruled by laws which tends to undo the evolutionary imperative of fitness. Morality, that is civilisation, makes the unfitting individuals fitting. Morality helps and protects those weak individuals who would be otherwise ruthlessly eliminated. Finally, according to Huxley, such an antagonism is what clearly show the unsustainability of any straight application of natural selection to human society:

> There is another fallacy which appears to me to pervade the so-called «ethics of evolution.» It is the notion that because, on the whole, animals and plants have advanced in perfection of organization by means of the struggle for existence and the consequent "survival of the fittest"; therefore men in society, men as ethical beings, must look to the same process to help them towards perfection. I suspect that this fallacy has arisen out of the unfortunate ambiguity of the phrase "survival of the fittest". "Fittest" has a connotation of "best"; and about "best" there hangs a moral flavour. In cosmic nature, however, what is "fittest" depends upon the conditions […]. Men in society are undoubtedly subject to the cosmic process. As among other animals […]. The struggle for existence tends to eliminate those less fitted to adapt themselves to the circumstances of their existence. The strongest, the most self-assertive, tend to tread down the weaker. But the influence of the cosmic process on the evolution of society is the greater the more rudimentary its civilization. Social progress means a checking of the cosmic process at every step and the substitution for it of another, which may be called the ethical process; the end of which is not the survival of those who may happen to be the fittest, in respect of the whole of the conditions which exist, but of those who are ethically the best.[130]

Within the garden of morality, "civil selection" fosters a «course of conduct which, in all respects, is opposed to that which leads to success in the cosmic struggle for existence.»[131] As Huxley points out:

> In place of ruthless self-assertion it demands self-restraint; in place of thrusting aside, or treading down, all competitors, it requires that the individual shall not merely respect, but shall help his fellows; its influence is directed, not so much to the survival of the fittest, as to the fitting of as many as possible to survive. It repudiates the gladiatorial theory of existence [..]. Laws and moral precepts are directed to the end of curbing the cosmic process and reminding the individual of his duty to the community, to the protection and in fluence of which he owes, if not existence itself, at least the life of something better than a brutal savage.[132]

[126] Ibidem, p. 25.
[127] Id., *Evolution and Ethics*, in *Evolution and Ethics*, p. 64.
[128] Telmo Pievani, *Finitudine. Un romanzo filosofico su fragilità e libertà*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2020, p. 33 (digital edition).
[129] Thomas H. Huxley, *The Struggle for Existence in Human Society*, in *Evolution and ethics*, p. 246.
[130] Id., *Evolution and Ethics*, pp. 87-88.
[131] Ibidem, p. 88.
[132] Ibidem, pp. 88-89.

Huxley resorts to Darwin's equivalence between morality, humanity, and civilization: moral sense circumscribes the evolutionary path of civilisation, whereof humanity is, at the moment, the most intense outcome. Because, it is worth stressing again, evolution by natural selection «encourages no millennial anticipations. If, for millions of years, our globe has taken the upward road, yet, sometime, the summit will be reached and the downward route will be commenced.»[133] Civilisation is a fragile ecological niche, which attempt to resist, even from the inside (due to the Malthusian disequilibrium between resources and population), the ruthless and indifferent force of natural selection. Consequently, the products of civilisation, that is equality, solidarity, and aid, are fragile and contingent too. Therefore, more strongly than Darwin, Huxley stresses the political account of the Darwinian understanding of moral sense: if not carefully protected, civilisation is a potentiality of evolution by natural selection which can easily sink down again into the cosmic process.

According to Frans De Waal, in *Evolution and Ethics* Huxley ushered in a very influential interpretative trend within contemporary evolutionary reflection on morality. De Waal named it «Veneer Theory»[134], that is a dualistic understanding of the relationship between morality and naturality, at the core of which there stands a precise presupposition: morality is nothing but a «veneer beneath which we have remained as amoral or immoral as any other form of life.»[135] Nature, and, therefore, even human nature, is essentially selfish and brutal. Thus, morality is a human artifice which attempts to restrain the underlying animal impulse. According to De Waal, Huxley diverted from Darwin's own perspective, thereby reintroducing within evolutionary reflection on morality all those dualisms that evolution by natural selection attempted to dismiss. Huxley is the founding father of the contemporary «gene's-eye view» *à la* Dawkins, according to which altruism is a selfishness in disguise. De Wall is certainly right when he ascribes on Huxley a misrepresentation of Darwin's own perspective. Indeed, in Darwin we do not find the idea that social animals, especially human beings, are "evil natured" and become "good" only once they have established civilisation. As Darwin writes in *The Descent of Man*:

> It was assumed formerly by philosophers of the derivative school of morals that the foundation of morality lay in a form of Selfishness; but more recently the "Greatest happiness principle" has been brought prominently forward. It is, however, more correct to speak of the latter principle as the standard, and not as the motive of conduct. Nevertheless, all the authors whose works I have consulted, with a few exceptions, write as if there must be a distinct motive for every action, and that this must be associated with some pleasure or displeasure. But man seems often to act impulsively, that is from instinct or long habit, without any consciousness of pleasure, in the same manner as does probably a bee or ant, when it blindly follows its instincts […]. In the case of the lower animals it seems much more appropriate to speak of their social instincts, as having been developed for the general good rather than for the general happiness of the species. The term, general good, may be defined as the rearing of the greatest number of individuals in full vigour and health, with all their faculties perfect, under the conditions to which they are subjected. As the social instincts both of man and the lower animals have no doubt been developed by nearly the same steps, it would be advisable, if found practicable, to use the same definition in both cases, and to take as the standard of morality, the general good or welfare of the community, rather than the general happiness […]. Thus the reproach is removed of laying the foundation of the noblest part of our nature in the base principle of selfishness; unless, indeed, the satisfaction which every animal feels, when it follows its proper instincts, and the dissatisfaction felt when prevented, be called selfish.[136]

[133] Ibidem, p. 91.
[134] De Waal, *Bonobo and Atheist*, pp. 32-34.
[135] De Wall, *Good Natured*, p. 2.
[136] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of* Man, London, Murray, 2nd ed., 1874, pp. 120-121.

Thanks to Hume and Smith, Darwin's geometry of instincts conceives the compresence of different impulses, which prevents the reduction of social behaviors to one sole cause. Social animals are natured altruistic and selfish.[137] Nevertheless, Darwin does not establish a dualism against a monism. By drawing on a centuries-old moralist tradition, Darwin does not conceive the existence within the human mind of two "sources" of morality - altruism and selfishness - against the pessimist thesis *à la* Hobbes which reduces all moral sentiments to selfishness. Darwin's position is not only more complex, but also very concrete. As Darwin claims in *The Descent of Man*:

> It is evident in the first place, that with mankind the instinctive impulses have different degrees of strength; a young and timid mother urged by the maternal instinct will, without a moment's hesitation, run the greatest danger for her infant, but not for a mere fellow-creature. Many a man, or even boy, who never before risked his life for another, but in whom courage and sympathy were well developed, has, disregarding the instinct of self-preservation, instantaneously plunged into a torrent to save a drowning fellow-creature. In this case man is impelled by the same instinctive motive, which caused the heroic little American monkey, formerly described, to attack the great and dreaded baboon, to save his keeper. Such actions as the above appear to be the simple result of the greater strength of the social or maternal instincts than of any other instinct or motive; for they are performed too instantaneously for reflection, or for the sensation of pleasure or pain; though if prevented distress would be caused.[138]

Therefore, according to Darwin, the observation of animal behavior shows that altruistic actions are mostly instinctive, that is performed without a deliberative and intentional choice by the subject. Yet, this does not mean that in the human mind there is a genuine sentiment of altruism. Sympathy is not the trace of an alleged innate kindness. Indeed, we should not overlook what Darwin said regarding instincts in *The Origin of Species*: instincts are consolidated habits selected originally (never forget the accidental and blind character of this selection!) for their evolutionary advantage. And what is the mechanism which nourishes the working of natural selection? As Darwin always repeated: «natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being.» Therefore, sympathy, i.e., altruism, is established on selfishness. As Richard Dawkins pointed out, when we talk of altruism and selfishness within evolutionary studies, we turn to personifications that can misleadingly alludes to subjective motives. Selfishness and altruism are terms borrowed by moral philosophy to explain evolutionary dynamics «concerned only with whether the *effect* of an act is to lower or raise the survival prospects of the presumed altruist and the survival prospects of the presumed beneficiary.»[139]

In Darwin, the selfish foundations of sympathy arise in the very short range of altruistic behaviors. Indeed, we can be sympathetic towards our closer fellows (family, tribe, and cooperative groups), but it is hard to push our sympathy beyond this very limited circle of solidarity, even though, as Darwin maintains, «assuredly we can sympathize with those for whom we feel no affection.»[140] Out of there, sympathy makes way for competition for

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[137] Robert J. Richards, *Darwin on mind, morals and emotions*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, p. 109: «Richard Dawkins, a defender of Darwin, yet warned "that if you wish, as I do, to build a society in which individuals cooperate generously and unselfishly towards a common good, you can expect little help from biological nature". These sentiments, quite obviously, do not reflect Darwin's own view. Our moral instincts, he believed, would urge us to act for the benefit of others without calculating pleasures and pains for self. And since such altruistic impulses, at least in advanced societies, would not be confined to family, tribe or nation, he confidently concluded that his theory removed the "reproach of laying the foundation of the most noble part of our nature in the base principle of selfishness".»

[138] Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 87.

[139] Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, p. 4.

[140] Darwin, *The Expression of Emotions*, p. 228: «The feeling of sympathy is commonly explained by assuming that, when we see or hear of suffering in another, the idea of suffering is called up so vividly in our own minds that we ourselves suffer. But this explanation is hardly sufficient, for it does not account for the intimate alliance

existence with other groups of solidarity. This is what Samuel Bowles effectively named «parochial altruism.»[141] In other words, the extension of sympathy depends upon the material conditions wherein social relation are given. Civilisation, that is the possibility to extend the "selfish" boundaries of sympathy, is a matter of material conditions: the more the conditions of subsistence which trigger the struggle for existence (Malthus) are resolved, the more the eliminative process of natural selection makes way for solidarity. By paraphrasing Richard Dawkins, «we are capable of rebelling against our selfish genes»[142] only with a full belly! This is why in *The Descent of Man* Darwin, by following Hume and Smith, continuously remarks the necessity of government («any form of government is better than none»[143]), that is a certain socio-economical arrangement (that of England!), to give morality a chance. Not by chance, all these questions are contained, with the guaranteed paternalism which makes us turn up our noses, in the well-known conclusion of *The Descent of Man*:

> The astonishment which I felt on first seeing a party of Fuegians on a wild and broken shore will never be forgotten by me, for the reflection at once rushed into my mind - such were our ancestors. These men were absolutely naked and bedaubed with paint, their long hair was tangled, their mouths frothed with excitement, and their expression was wild, startled, and distrustful. They possessed hardly any arts, and like wild animals lived on what they could catch; *they had no government, and were merciless to every one not of their own small tribe*. He who has seen a savage in his native land will not feel much shame, if forced to acknowledge that the blood of some more humble creature flows in his veins. For my own part I would as soon be descended from that heroic little monkey, who braved his dreaded enemy in order to save the life of his keeper […]; as from a savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices, practises infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions […]. I have given the evidence to the best of my ability; and we must acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man with all his noble qualities, with sympathy which feels for the most debased, with benevolence which extends not only to other men but to the humblest living creature, with his god-like intellect which has penetrated into the movements and constitution of the solar system - with all these exalted powers - Man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin.[144]

As Frans De Waal pointed out, the chance of altruism really depends on the economic conditions wherein social animals are to cooperate. Darwin's theory of the extension of sympathy is usually depicts as an «expanding circle.» The latter is an image which has been really appreciated by contemporary progressive thinker such as, for instance, Peter Singer.[145] As we noticed before, the expanding circle of sympathy represents the possibility to extend moral obligations even towards member of other species, thereby validating the cause of animal liberation on evolutionary basis. Nevertheless, according to De Waal, such an image is quite naïve. As if the extension if sympathy were a direction which only requires to be undertaken. Indeed, as De Waal points out:

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between sympathy and affection. We undoubtedly sympathize far more deeply with a beloved than with an indifferent person; and the sympathy of the one gives us far more relief than that of the other. Yet assuredly we can sympathize with those for whom we feel no affection.» This passage clearly recalls a well-known statements from Hume's *Treatise*: «Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. Tis not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian or person wholly unknown to me». Cf. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book II, part III/III, p. 416. I will come back on this point in the fourth chapter.

[141] Samuel Bowles, *Conflict: Altruism's midwife*, in «Nature», 20/2008, pp. 326-327.

[142] Ibidem, p. XIV.

[143] Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 162.

[144] Ibidem, pp. 404-405. Emphasis mine.

[145] Peter Singer, *The Expanding circle. Ethics, Evolution, and Moral Progress*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011. See also Id. *A Darwinian Left. Politics, Evolution and Cooperation*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000.

> The form of altruism closest to egoism is care of the immediate family […]. The circle of altruism and moral obligation widens to extended family, clan, and group, up to and including tribe and nation. Benevolence decreases with increasing distance between people. Going against the grain of this natural gradient meets with sharp disapproval […] Altruism is bound by what one can afford. The circle of morality reaches out farther and farther only if the health and survival of the innermost circles are secure. For this reason, rather than an expanding circle I prefer the image of a floating pyramid. The force lifting the pyramid out of the water—its buoyancy—is provided by the available resources. Its size above the surface reflects the extent of moral inclusion. The higher the pyramid rises, the wider the network of aid and obligation. People on the brink of starvation can afford only a tiny tip of the moral pyramid: it will be every man for himself.[146]

De Waal's image of the «floating pyramid» stresses the material conditions of social instincts – not by chance, Gouldians like him are often labeled as Marxist by Dawkinsians.[147] However, such a materialistic perspective of moral sense, more concrete than any theoretical conjecture, highlights an important concurrence with Huxley's one. In my opinion, De Waal excessively emphasizes Huxley's ostensible dualism, thereby leaving out the very Darwinian character of his understanding of the relationship between civilisation and cosmic process. Huxley was not a humanist at all. Simply, even thought by resorting to a militant spirit utterly foreign to Darwin, Huxley underlines the ethical-political meaning of *The Descend of Man*: like any other products of evolution, civilisation is fragile and constantly exposed to the ruthless force of natural selection. By introducing the question of moral sense, Darwin attempts to do what he precluded himself within his biological studies. Indeed, in *The Origin of Species*, Darwin presents the mechanism of natural selection without delivering any value judgments, especially regarding its painful effects on the unfitting beings. He even goes to states that: «When we reflect on this struggle, we may console ourselves with the full belief, that the war of nature is not incessant, that no fear is felt, that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply.»[148] Instead, in *The Descent of Man*, such a sort of stoic consolation is replaced by the awareness that social instincts have drawn an evolutionary path capable of making the fitting-unfitting dualism of natural selection less inevitable. In other words, in *The Descent of Man*, Darwin judges natural selection from the point of view of sentient beings, thereby claiming a moral question toward a cosmic injustice which, until that moment, has borne the anonymous name of "law of life". Civilisation is sentient's being answer to such an injustice. Therefore, by grounding civilization on suffering, Darwin provides us with an ethological definition of civilisation which main theoretical point is the reaction against life as source of evil. A reaction immanent to life as such, and this is probably the most unstable aspect which can easily lead to believe in a rift caused by transcendental forces. Yet, the membership of civilization to the laws of life is proven by its fragility and revocability: civilization is the ultimate bank to an impetuous river of suffering. This is not a pessimistic perspective. More simply, this is a very Darwinian awareness: that we should expect nothing from life; that life has little to give when it comes to morality. For this reason – and perhaps only for this one - civilisation is the only "good" given to us by the blind laws of life.

There Is Life, Therefore God Cannot Exist

> There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of

[146] De Waal, *Good Natured*, pp. 212-213.
[147] Brown, *Darwin War*, pp. 67ff.
[148] Darwin, *Origin of Species*, p. 61.

> gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.[149]

This is the conclusion of the first edition of *The Origin of Species*. One year after, on the occasion of the second edition, Darwin will make some apparently marginal, but actually fundamental, adjustments. Indeed, the definitive conclusion will be:

> There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.[150]

In the second edition, Darwin deliberately replaces the impersonal image of life «originally breathed into a few forms or into one» with that of life «breathed *by the Creator* into a few forms or into one.» In *Darwin's Origin of Species. A Biography*, Janet Browne reconstructs the motives which led Darwin to add a brief, but clever, reference to God: it was an act of prudence; Darwin «did not wish to be perceived as an atheist.»[151] As Browne highlights, within *The Origin of Species*, Darwin intentionally avoids dealing with two fundamental issues: human origins and the first origin of life. As we noticed in the previous paragraph, *The Descent of Man* will attempt to provide an answer to the first issue. Instead, to talk of the very origin of life would have meant to talk of the first cause, that is to talk of the role of God within the course of evolution by natural selection. For this reason, the question on God was surely the most heated: Darwin always skims over it, but he never frankly faces it. As Darwin writes in *The Origin of Species*:

> It is no valid objection that science as yet throws no light on the far higher problem of the essence or origin of life. Who can explain what is the essence of the attraction of gravity? No one now objects to following out the results consequent on this unknown element of attraction; notwithstanding that Leibnitz formerly accused Newton of introducing «occult qualities and miracles into philosophy.» I see no good reason why the views given in this volume should hock the religious feelings of any one […] A celebrated author and divine has written to me that «he has gradually learnt to see that it is just as noble a conception of the Deity to believe that He created a few original forms capable of self-development into other and needful forms, as to believe that He required a fresh act of creation to supply the voids caused by the action of His laws.»[152]

God, religion, faith, theodicy: these are themes which will not find space within Darwin's works. The adjustment to the conclusion of *The Origin of Species* is symptomatic of Darwin's precautionary philosophical style. Many are the reasons of such a reluctance, from domestic pressures to his professional tendency to avoid controversies. Interpreters have largely dwelled upon Darwin's aloof approach to religion: was he atheist? Was he a believer? Was his silence aimed to protect the theory from controversies which could undermine its success? In this paragraph, I do not intend to dwell upon such questions, but rather to reconstruct Darwin's theological argument and to understand the role it plays within his biology.[153]

Darwin's theological reflection is carried out within private texts, notebooks and letters. In a letter dated July the 13th 1856 to Joseph Dalton Hooker, Darwin states: «What a book a Devil's chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blundering low and horridly cruel

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[149] Charles Darwin, *On the origin of species by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*, London, John Murray, 1st edition, 1859, p. 490.
[150] Darwin, *Origin of Species*, p. 429.
[151] Janet Browne, *Darwin's Origin of Species. A Biography*, London, Atlantic Books, 2007, p. 62.
[152] Darwin, *Origin of Species*, pp. 421-422.
[153] For an effective overview see Pievani, *Anatomia di una rivoluzione*, pp. 179-186.

works of nature»![154] Within Darwinian scholarship, the image of the «Devil's chaplain» has become the main locution whereby subsuming Darwin's position on God. Indeed, according to Darwin, natural selection is a defective law which produces several scraps, and which few effective outcomes rest on a massive production of pain. Natural selection is essentially incompatible with the very idea of God as omniscient and all-powerful cause of the living world. In a letter dated May the 22nd 1860 to Asa Gray, Darwin clearly exposes his theological distress:

> With respect to the theological view of the question; this is always painful to me. - I am bewildered. - I had no intention to write atheistically. But I own that I cannot see, as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidæ with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice. Not believing this, I see no necessity in the belief that the eye was expressly designed. On the other hand I cannot anyhow be contented to view this wonderful universe and especially the nature of man, and to conclude that everything is the result of brute force. I am inclined to look at everything as resulting from designed laws, with the details, whether good or bad, left to the working out of what we may call chance. Not that this notion *at all* satisfies me. I feel most deeply that the whole subject is too profound for the human intellect […]. Certainly I agree with you that my views are not at all necessarily atheistical […]. I can see no reason, why a man, or other animal, may not have been aboriginally produced by other laws; and that all these laws may have been expressly designed by an omniscient Creator, who foresaw every future event and consequence. But the more I think the more bewildered I become; as indeed I have probably shown by this letter.[155]

Hence, according to Darwin, there might be a certain compatibility between the idea of God and the fact of natural selection. God might be the designer of the laws ruling the evolution of life. Darwin alludes here to Paley's seminal deistic definition of God as watchmaker. By doing so, Darwin could preserve God within a perspective which rules out any sort of *a posteriori* intervention (as Descartes' God of *The World*). Yet, as Spinoza amply showed: such a God is nothing but a necessary principle. And this is not the God of religion, a God capable of Providence. In order to be so, God must have moral attributes: either God is a providential principle, or *he* does not exist. Darwin was aware of this. As he writes to Hooker on February the 8th 1867, Providence means «either simply God or hourly, providential care.»[156] Nevertheless, the attribution of moral features to God seemed to be utterly prevented by the blatant «misery in the world», that is by the massive amount of suffering and violence that natural selection mechanically produces. This contradiction is what eventually leads Darwin to radicalize his hesitant «agnosticism»[157] towards atheism.[158]

Fundamentally, Darwin recovers modern atheistic adage, according to which the very presence of suffering in this world is sufficient to nullify any attempt of theodicy. As Darwin

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[154]Charles Darwin to Dalton Hooker, July the 13th 1856. Text available at <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/?docId=letters/DCP-LETT-1924.xml;query=;brand=default>.

[155]Charles Darwin to Asa Gray, May the 22nd 1860. Text available at <httreductiops://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/?docId=letters/DCP-LETT-2814.xml;query=;brand=default>.

[156]Charles Darwin to Joseph Dalton Hooker, February the 8th 1867. Text available at <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/?docId=letters/DCP-LETT-5395.xml;query=providence;brand=default>.

[157]Charles Darwin to John Fordyce, May the 7th 1879. Text available at <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/?docId=letters/DCP-LETT-12041.xml;query=agnosticism;brand=default>: «In my most extreme fluctuations I have never been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of a God. - I think that generally (and more and more so as I grow older) but not always, that an agnostic would be the most correct description of my state of mind.»

[158] Charles Darwin to Mary Everest Boole, December the 14th 1866. Text available at <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/?docId=letters/DCP-LETT-5307.xml;query=;brand=default>: «I may however remark that it has always appeared to me more satisfactory to look at the immense amount of pain and suffering in this world, as the inevitable result of the natural sequence of events, i.e. general laws, rather than from the direct intervention of God.»

writes in his *Autobiography* (posthumously published in 1887 with several omitted passages regarding Darwin's religious opinion, which will be restored at a later time in Nora Barlow's 1958 edition):

> That there is much suffering in the world no one disputes. Some have attempted to explain this in reference to man by imagining that it serves for his moral improvement. But the number of men in the world is as nothing compared with that of all other sentient beings, and these often suffer greatly without any moral improvement. A being so powerful and so full of knowledge as a God who could create the universe, is to our finite minds omnipotent and omniscient, and it revolts our understanding to suppose that his benevolence is not unbounded, for what advantage can there be in the sufferings of millions of the lower animals throughout almost endless time? This very old argument from the existence of suffering against the existence of an intelligent first cause seems to me a strong one; whereas, as just remarked, the presence of much suffering agrees well with the view that all organic beings have been developed through variation and natural selection.[159]

This passage of Darwin's autobiography testifies his deep theological knowledge. After all, Darwin took the first academical steps in the theistic environment of Cambridge.[160] Indeed, as the beginning of the quotation shows, Darwin knew very well the justifying strategies adopted by theists: suffering in the world serves for human being's moral improvement. In my opinion, in order to understand Darwin's idiosyncrasy towards theodicy, it might be useful a comparison with Thomas Malthus.[161] As is known, Malthus provided the principles of population wherefrom Darwin inferred the biological theory of natural selection. Besides, Malthus also provided a very influential argument in favor of theodicy. As Sergio Cremaschi pointed out:

> Theodicy was a central item also for Anglican natural theology, and the Cumberland-Gay-Brown-Paley tradition it had become strictly intertwined with the foundations of ethics. Evil was strategically reduced to partial evil, connected by a cause-effect relationship with general good, and moral laws in turn were justified by their means end relationship to general good. Malthus's further step – in a sense a necessary one after the possibility of ascribing the origins of social evil to some original depravity of man had been ruled out – was establishing a link not just between theodicy and ethics, but also between theodicy and politics […]. Malthus's "solution" to the problem of evil argues that physical evil is necessary in order to stimulate activity, and that such stimulation amounts to gradually electing mind from matter or, in other words, that the creation of mind is a process taking place in time and the original sin consists of the sluggishness of matter. This solution goes with the idea that eternal life is the final point to which the best products of such process – namely, fully intellectually and morally developed human minds - are destined.[162]

The core of Malthus' theory of population is the imbalance between natural resources and the growth of population within a certain environment. This is due to the geometrical

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[159] Nora Barlow (ed.), *The autobiography of Charles Darwin*, p. 90.

[160] Desmond and Moore, *Darwin*, pp. 74ff.

[161] A trace of such a idiosyncrasy can be found in the well-known conclusion of the third chapter of *The Origin of Species*, where, as we noticed before, Darwin detachedly states that the only «consolation» we might glimpse within the struggle for existence is the ultimate survival of «the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy». Nevertheless, few lines before, there is a clear reference to Malthus's theory on population: «All that we can do, is to keep steadily in mind that each organic being is striving to increase in a geometrical ratio; that each at some period of its life, during some season of the year, during each generation or at intervals, has to struggle for life and to suffer great destruction.» Cf., Darwin, *Origin of Species*, p. 61. In Malthus, the laws determining the growth of population provide the premises of his theodicy, whilst in Darwin they represents the undeniable large amount of suffering life needs to endure in order to survive. Therefore, the «consolation» Darwin proposes is merely "ontological"; a consolation "from the point of view of the Whole" which however does not justify the sindividual experience of natural evil. Although very subtlety, this passage show Darwin's moral opposition to Malthus's perspective.

[162] Sergio Cremaschi, *Utilitarianism and Malthus's Virtue Ethics. Respectable, virtuous and happy*, New York, Routledge, 2014, pp. 79-80.

character of the growth of population which cause hunger, misery, and therefore, struggle for life. According to Malthus, evil rises from these «inevitable laws of nature, and not from any original depravity.»[163] Thus, rather than a metaphysical substance or an ontological deprivation, evil is a structural condition of creation. According to Malthus, such a structural evil is what permits to conceive the chance for theodicy. Indeed, as he writes in the well-known *An Essay on the Principle of Population*:

> With the crude and puerile conceptions which we sometimes form of this attribute of the Deity, we might imagine that God could call into being myriads and myriads of existences; all free from pain and imperfection; all eminent in goodness and wisdom, all capable of the highest enjoyments; and unnumbered as the points throughout infinite space. But when from these vain and extravagant dreams of fancy, we turn our eyes to the book of nature, where alone we can read God as he is, we see a constant succession of sentient beings, rising apparently from so many specks of matter, going through a long and sometimes painful process in this world, but many of them attaining, ere the termination of it, such high qualities and powers as seem to indicate their fitness for some superior state. Ought we not then to correct our crude and puerile ideas of infinite Power from the contemplation of what we actually see existing? Can we judge of the Creator but from his creation? And, unless we wish to exalt the power of God at the expense of his goodness, ought we not to conclude that even to the great Creator, almighty as he is, a certain process may be necessary, a certain time (or at least what appears to us as time) may be requisite, in order to form beings with those exalted qualities of mind which will fit them for his high purposes?[164]

According to Malthus, only a «crude and puerile» conception of God can keep together the attributes of omnipotence and goodness. By doing so – as Pierre Bayle did -, one would necessarily detect an unsustainable contradiction which leads straight to atheism. On the contrary, Malthus disjoints these two terms: on the one hand, there stands the omnipotence of the Creator; on the other hand, there stands the goodness of Providence. Furthermore, as Malthus maintains, the latter can coherently follow a different path. As if the goodness of God were confirmed in opposition to his omnipotence. Indeed, according to Malthus, «to avoid evil, and to pursue good, seem to be the great duty and business of man.»[165] In other words, «evil exists in the world, not to create despair, but activity.»[166] Without imperfection, there would be «torpor.»

> The Supreme Being would appear to us in a very different view, if we were to consider him as pursuing the creatures that had offended him with eternal hate and torture, instead of merely condemning to their original insensibility those beings, that, by the operation of general laws, had not been formed with qualities suited to a purer state of happiness. Life is, generally speaking, a blessing independent of a future state. It is a gift which the vicious would not always be ready to throw away, even if they had no fear of death. The partial pain, therefore, that is inflicted by the Supreme Creator, while he is forming numberless beings to a capacity of the highest enjoyments, is but as the dust of the balance in comparison of the happiness that is communicated; and we have every reason to think, that there is no more evil in the world, than what is absolutely necessary as one of the ingredients in the mighty process.[167]

Hence, the presence of evil in the creation engenders a process of moral growth which peak is the human mind, that is where the plan of creation becomes visible and where, therefore, is brought into existence. In order to establish theodicy, Malthus thinks the physical evil – what Bayle considered as the atheistic principle par excellence – in opposition to the moral good. Virtue is the tool whereby human being – the only creature endowed with

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[163] Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, and It Affects the Future Improvement of Society* (1798), New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 1996, p. 207.
[164] Ibidem, pp. 351-352.
[165] Ibidem, p. 359.
[166] Ibidem, p. 395.
[167] Ibidem, pp. 390-391.

mind - can lessen evil and pursuit happiness. And human society is the place where virtue, namely theodicy as such, can operate in.

> The principle, according to which population increases, prevents the vices of mankind, or the accidents of nature, the partial evils arising from general laws, from obstructing the high purpose of the creation. It keeps the inhabitants of the earth always fully up to the level of the means of subsistence; and is constantly acting upon man as a powerful stimulus, urging him to the further cultivation of the earth, and to enable it, consequently, to support a more extended population. But it is impossible that this law can operate, and produce the effects apparently intended by the Supreme Being, without occasioning partial evil.[168]

Finally, Malthus outlines a social theodicy which, by leveraging on the opposition between natural evil and social virtue, not only attempts to save the very idea of Providence, but also the metaphysical character of human mind. After all, as we noticed in the previous chapter, to save the existence of a benevolent God is the same as to safeguard the metaphysic of the human mind from materialism. From this point of view, Alfred Russel Wallace is an emblematic case. As is known, Darwin hastened to publish *The Origin of Species* on hearing of Wallace accomplishing the same results on natural selection. Among the two biologists, there was always agreement, not to say equivalence. Nevertheless, the question on the human mind marked a fundamental disagreement out among them. In 1870 *The Limits of Natural Selection as applied to Man*, Wallace contests the all-encompassing power of the natural selection.[169] Indeed, according to him, the latter runs into its limits exactly when it attempts to explain the origin and the development of the human mind.

> So, those faculties which enable us to transcend time and space, and to realize the wonderful conceptions of mathematics and philosophy, or which give us an intense yearning for abstract truth (all of which were occasionally manifested at such an early period of human history as to be far in advance of any of the few practical applications which have since grown out of them), evidently essential to the perfect development of man as a spiritual being, but are utterly inconceivable as having been produced through the action of a law which looks only, and can look only, to the immediate material welfare of the individual or the race.[170]

Unlike Darwin, according to Wallace, «The utilitarian hypothesis (which is the theory of natural selection applied to the mind) seems inadequate to account for the development of the moral sense.»[171] Fundamentally, this is due to the non-utilitarian character of the highest mental abilities that the human being can perform. This is blatant in the case of savages: as Wallace maintains, «The higher feelings of pure morality and refined emotion, and the power of abstract reasoning and ideal conception, are useless to them, are rarely if ever manifested, and have no important relations to their habits, wants, desires, or well-being. They possess a mental organ beyond their needs.»[172] In other words, Wallace simply resorts to the Cartesian argument[173] (but, since the constant reference to the mind of savage, one might also glimpse Locke) on the immateriality of mind, adapting it though to an evolutionary perspective. Therefore, according to these premises, the existence of useless abilities which are not related to the logic of natural selection requires «the intervention of some distinct individual intelligence, to aid in the production of what we can hardly avoid considering as

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[168] Ibidem, p. 365.
[169] Darwin refers to Wallace's critiques, rejecting them, in *Descent of Man*, pp. 137-138.
[170] Alfred Russel Wallace, *Contribution to the Theory of Natural Selection. A Series of Essay*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 358-359.
[171] Ibidem, p. 352.
[172] Ibidem, p. 356.
[173] Ibidem, p. 357: «The power of conceiving eternity and infinity, and all those purely abstract notions of form, number, and harmony, which play so large a part in the life of civilised races, are entirely outside of the world of thought of the savage, and have no influence on his individual existence or on that of his tribe.»

the ultimate aim and outcome of all organized existence - intellectual, ever-advancing, spiritual man.»[174]

In my opinion, Malthus and Wallace highlight the complementarity of theodicy and humanism. To safeguard divine goodness and to safeguard human exceptionality are fundamentally the same strategy. Theodicy and humanism entail one another. Such a bond between Providence and human mind - after all, the God of theism is an anthropomorphism of human mind – constitutes the core of the traditional critique addressed to materialism as Darwin's: to be a stubborn, not say ideological, form of reductionism. Nowadays, Neo-Darwinism is the field where atheism and materialist reductionism are more highly expressed and endorsed. Yet, despite the intense development of evolutionary sciences, the theoretical debate seems to be still the same as that of Descartes' age.[175] In 2012 *Mind and Cosmos*, Thomas Nagel states that:

> Organisms such as ourselves do not just happen to be conscious; therefore no explanation even of the physical character of those organisms can be adequate which is not also an explanation of their mental character. In other words, materialism is incomplete even as a theory of the physical world, since the physical world includes conscious organisms among its most striking occupants.[176]

According to Nagel, «to explain not merely the possibility but the actuality of rational beings, the world must have properties that make their appearance not a complete accident: in some way the likelihood must have been latent in the nature of things.»[177] Nagel opposes to materialist reductionism the monistic perspective of «panpsychism.»[178] Despite the very content of such a perspective, like Wallace, Nagel acknowledges «consciousness, intentionality, meaning, purpose, thought, and value» as the critical points for natural selection. Although thinkers like Nagel do not certainly evoke metaphysic or transcendence to explain the origin and the nature of mind, I do believe that these forms anti-reductionism lie upon a century-old bias: that "value" is something qualitative higher that "hunger"; that mind, namely consciousness, entails a deviation in relation to matter. My question is: why can mind be not an instinct? And, above all, why should such a perspective be reductive? My suspect is that the charge of reductionism, as far as epistemologically licit, is vitiated by moral judgments, that is by the idea that a material explanation would entail a devaluation. As Dennett pointed out: «From the outset, there have been those who thought they saw Darwin letting the worst possible cat out of the bag: nihilism. They thought that if Darwin was right, the implication would be that nothing could be sacred.»[179] In other words, as Dennett carries on, «Something *is* sacred to these thinkers, but they do not call it God; they call it, perhaps, Life, or Love, or Goodness, or Intelligence, or Beauty, or Humanity. What both groups share, in spite of the differences in their deepest creeds, is a conviction that life does have meaning, that goodness matters.»[180] I think this is the reason why Darwinism has

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[174] Ibidem, p. 360. Wallace' perspective does not necessarily entail a theistic outcome. As he points out, «But even if my particular view should not be the true one, the difficulties I have put forward remain, and I think prove, that some more general and more fundamental law underlies that of "natural selection".» In other words, Wallace contests Darwin's materialist reductionism, instead invoking a more complex perspective wherein there stand a plurality of laws.

[175] Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, p. 13 « If you read trendy intellectual magazines, you may have noticed that "reductionism" is one of those things, like sin, that is only mentioned by people who are against it. To call oneself a reductionist will sound, in some circles, a bit like admitting to eating babies.»

[176] Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos. Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 39.

[177] Ibidem, p. 64.

[178] Ibidem, pp. 46ff. See also Id., *Panpsychism*, in *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 181-195.

[179] Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, p. 18.

[180] Ibidem.

always received oppositions and reserves when applied to the field of humanities. It is the "fear" that life is nothing more than what it actually is, that is a blind and fragile algorithmic process. The fear that life, our life, is meaningless.

In this regard, contemporary theodicies conceal the same stubborn attachment to the categories of sacred and sense. Works such as Murray's *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*[181], Dougherty's *The Problem of Animal Pain*[182] or Southgate's *Theology in a Suffering World*[183] - to quote the most influential nowadays -, attempted to provide a theological justification for the problem of evil as the latter has been redefined by the theory of evolution by natural selection.[184] As Brian Scarlet pointed out, «after Darwin, perceptions of the problem changed […]. Even if there were a God, natural selection seemed to sideline divine providence. The processes of the animal world, blind and uncaring, as Darwin was widely thought to have shown them to be, made hope vanish and left only horror where it did not meet indifference.»[185] Indeed, Darwin showed how nature is established upon laws which working principle is the production of large-scale pain. Animal pain has become the trickiest issue inasmuch Darwin seems having radicalize further Bayle's admonishment, according to which the suffering of animals provided an even more evident proof of the non-existence of God. In a formula: *there is animal pain, therefore God surely Cannot exist*. I cannot deepen here each proposal, but I think it is possible to conceive those contemporary justifications as recoveries of Malthusian «soul-building theodicy.» As Derk Pereboom pointed out, «The main problem for this sort of theodicy is that evils often do not give rise to the specified goods, and in fact sometimes destroy a person rather than contributing to his salutary development.»[186] If so, animal pain would be even more useless, since one might wonder what moral growth would mean for other living beings. Moreover, it would been even worse if animal pain were the price to pay for human moral growth. It would be an insane anthropocentric fury. As Peter Harrison claimed «If theodicists feel that the pains of animals must be explained at all costs, they might do better with Descartes than with Plantinga.»[187]

As the passage of Darwin's autobiography shows, the English biologist was aware of Bayle's lesson.[188] As Darwin writes: «But the number of men in the world is as nothing

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[181] Michael J. Murray, *Nature Read in Tooth and Claw. Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.

[182] Trent Dougherty, *The Problem of Animal Pain. A Theodicy for All Creatures Great and Small*, new York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

[183] Christopher Southgate, *Theology in a Suffering World. Glory and Longing*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018.

[184] For an effective overview see Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution. The History of an Idea*, Berkley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2003, pp. 375ff.

[185] Brian Scarlet, *God and Animal Pain*, in «Sophia», 1/2003, p. 61. See also James P. Sterba, *Solving Darwin's Problem of Natural Evil*, in «Sophia», 2019, p. 502: «Before Darwin, some natural philosophers and theologians had entertained the idea that the life on earth might have had a long history, and even that it had evolved. Darwin, with his hypothesis of natural selection, went further, claiming that conflict and suffering were the very instrument of that evolution. So, Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection seemed to make it even more difficult to reconcile God and natural evil.»

[186] Derk Pereboom, *The Problem of Evil*, in *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William E. Mann, Oxford, Blackwell, 2005, p. 157.

[187] Harrison, *Theodicy and Animal Pain*, p. 81.

[188] Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* is also the main polemic front of Paley in *Natural Theology*,

one of the most appreciated books by Darwin. See Darwin's reading notebook at <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/people/about-darwin/what-darwin-read/darwin-s-reading-notebooks>. Another very Baylean statement within Darwin's autobiography is: «I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my Father, Brother and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine.» Cf. Barlow, *The autobiography of Charles Darwin*, p. 87.

compared with that of all other sentient beings, and these often suffer greatly without any moral improvement [...]. For what advantage can there be in the sufferings of millions of the lower animals throughout almost endless time?» Darwin knew that animal pain is what hinders theodicy the most. Animal suffering has clearly no purpose and sense. Animal suffering is the emblem of the meaninglessness of pain.

> An innocent and good man stands under tree and is killed by flash of lightning. Do you believe (and I really should like to hear) that God *designedly* killed this man? Many or most persons do believe this; I can't and don't. - If you believe so, do you believe that when a swallow snaps up a gnat that God designed that that particular swallow should snap up that particular gnat at that particular instant? I believe that the man and the gnat are in same predicament. - If the death of neither man or gnat are designed, I see no good reason to believe that their *first* birth or production should.[189]

Why should death be evil, whereas life should be good? And also, why should death be not imputable to God, whereas life should be His benevolent gift? As Thomas Huxley states in 1888 *The Struggle for Existence in Human Society*:

> No doubt it is quite true that sentient nature affords hosts of examples of subtle contrivances directed towards the production of pleasure of the avoidance of pain; and it may the proper to say that these are evidences of benevolence. But if so, why is it not equally proper to say of the equally numerous arrangements, the no less necessary result of which is the production of pain, that they are evidences of malevolence?[190]

In the *Notebook B*, Darwin wonders: «Why is life short?»[191]. A very biological question which straightforwardly blames God. In the seminal 1944 *What is Life*?, Erwin Schrödinger provided a physical definition of life as resistance to entropy:

> It is by avoiding the rapid decay into the inert state of "equilibrium" that an organism appears so enigmatic; so much so, that from the earliest times of human thought some special non-physical or supernatural force (vis viva, entelechy) was claimed to be operative in the organism, and in some quarter is still claimed. How does the living organism avoid decay? The obvious answer is: By eating, drinking, breathing and (in the case of plants) assimilating.[192]

Therefore, life is «the marvellous faculty of a living organism, by which it delays the decay into thermodynamical equilibrium (death).»[193] According to interpreters such as Dennett and Dawkins, this physical definition of life allows to understand the deepest philosophical meaning of Darwin's biology.[194] As working principle, natural selection highlights how life is nothing but the attempt to survive. Life is a movement of resistance which puts friction to the dissolution which surrounds it. But it dreadfully manages to do so, since life remains alive by means of countless suffering. This because *life is weak*. If it were powerful, even only a little, we would surely witness something less painful.

In 2009 *The Greatest Show on Heart*, Richard Dawkins talks of «evolutionary theodicy» as the attempt to answer the question on pain from the point of view of evolution by natural selection. As Dawkins claims:

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[189] Charles Darwin to Asa Gray, July the 3rd 1860. Text available at <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/?docId=letters/DCP-LETT-2855.xml;query=;brand=default>.
[190] Huxley, *The Struggle for Existence in Human Society*, p. 245.
[191] Barrett, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks*, B2, p. 171.
[192] Erwin Schrödinger, *What is life?*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 70.
[193] Ibidem, p. 73.
[194] Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, p. 68-73. See also Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, p. 12: « Darwin's "survival of the fittest" is really a special case of a more general law *of survival of the stable.* The universe is populated by stable things.»

> Theologians worry about the problems of suffering and evil, to the extent that they have even invented a name, "theodicy" (literally, "justice of God"), for the enterprise of trying to reconcile it with the presumed beneficence of God. Evolutionary biologists see no problem, because evil and suffering don't count for anything, one way or the other, in the calculus of gene survival. Nevertheless, we do need to consider the problem of pain. Where, on the evolutionary view, does it come from? Pain, like everything else about life, we presume, is a Darwinian device, which functions to improve the sufferer's survival. Brains are built with a rule of thumb such as, "If you experience the sensation of pain, stop whatever you are doing and don't do it again". It remains a matter for interesting discussion why it has to be so damned painful.[195]

From an evolutionary point of view, the question on pain is: Why so painful? What's wrong with a painless solution as a little red flag raising in the brain? This is a question that evolution might be able to answer one day. Surely, this is a question that God will be never able to answer. I believe this is Darwin's radical atheism: *there is life, therefore God cannot exist.*

The Suffering Animal Versus the Powerful Animal

As I have attempted to show, Darwin's contribution to the century-old debate on the relationship between humanity and animality basically consists in its dissolution. In the field of philosophy, the main repercussion of the theory of evolution by natural selection is the serial confutation of all those theoretical principles which has posed such a question so far. In few words, Darwin simply claimed that the relationship between the human being and the animal is not an actual issue. It becomes so when a certain ontological perspective is applied to the living matter. Nevertheless, Darwin turned to the category of humanity as an ethological marker in relation to the question on the moral sense «from the side of natural history.» Here, humanity, an actual synonymous of civilisation, becomes the idealization – Richard Dawkins would name it «meme»[196] - of the instinct of sympathy which, due to its abstract character, can potentially expand even beyond the border of species. Moreover, humanity establishes a sort of alternative evolutionary path – we might name it "civil selection" - wherein the eliminative criterions of natural selection are replaced with behaviors and habits that foster solidarity, aid, and empathy. Such a reverse effect of evolution led Darwin to conceive the relationship between morality and naturality in antagonistic terms, even though on the basis of an ontological continuity. As I have attempted to show, this is neither a humanist remnant nor an ideological justification for the supremacy of western civilisation. Darwin's antagonism between civilisation and natural selection presumes a value judgment on natural selection as "evil" since producer of useless pain. Finally, this is the theoretical background of Darwin's atheism which, beyond the theological question, express the ultimate meaning of Darwin's materialism: life is weak. This is the new sense the paradigm of the *suffering animal* obtains after being processed by Darwinism: *a weak life which fights against pain*.

In the overture of 1887 *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Friedrich Nietzsche writes:

> These English psychologists, who have to be thanked for having made the only attempts so far to write a history of the emergence of morality, – provide us with a small riddle in the form of themselves […]. These English psychologists – just what do they want? You always find them at the same task, whether they want to or not, pushing the *partie honteuse* of our inner world to the foreground, and looking for what is really effective, guiding and decisive for our development […]. The idiocy of their moral genealogy is revealed at the outset when it is a question of conveying the descent of the concept and

[195] Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Heart*, p. 392-393.
[196] Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, pp. 189ff.

> judgment of "good". «Originally» – they decree – «unegoistic acts were praised and called good by their recipients, in other words, by the people to whom they were *useful*; later, everyone *forgot* the origin of the praise and because such acts had always been *habitually* praised as good, people also began to experience them as good – as if they were something good *as such*». We can see at once: this first deduction contains all the typical traits of idiosyncratic English psychologists, – we have "usefulness", "forgetting", "habit" and finally "error", all as the basis of a respect for values of which the higher man has hitherto been proud, as though it were a sort of general privilege of mankind. This pride must be humbled, this valuation devalued: has that been achieved?[197]

According to Nietzsche, all these English psychologists, behind whom there stand Mill, Spencer and Darwin, «think in a way that is *essentially* unhistorical.» Nietzsche's counterargument is well-know:

> Now for me, it is obvious that the real breeding-ground for the concept "good" has been sought and located in the wrong place by this theory: the judgment "good" does *not* emanate from those to whom goodness is shown! Instead it has been "good" themselves, meaning the noble, the mighty, the high-placed and the high-minded, who saw and judged themselves and their actions as good, I mean first-rate, in contrast to everything lowly, low-minded, common and plebeian. It was from this *pathos of distance* that they first claimed the right to create values and give these values names: usefulness was none of their concern! The standpoint of usefulness is as alien and inappropriate as it can be to such a heated eruption of the highest rank-ordering and rank-defining value judgments: this is the point where feeling reaches the opposite of the low temperatures needed for any calculation of prudence reckoning of usefulness, – and not just for once, for one exceptional moment, but permanently. The pathos of nobility and distance, as I said, the continuing and predominant feeling of complete and fundamental superiority of a higher ruling kind in relation to a lower kind, to those "below" – *that* is the origin of the antithesis "good" and "bad".[198]

In this last paragraph, I do not aim to deepen Nietzsche's «hypotheses on descent.»[199] I will rather focus on Nietzsche's critique of Darwin's philosophy. In my opinion, the indirect debate between these two authors has defined the main discursive registers which contemporary materialisms will build upon.

Nietzsche's relationship with Darwin is engaging. As Dirk R. Johnson pointed out, at first, Nietzsche fascinatingly acknowledges Darwin as the peak on modern anti-metaphysical thought.[200] Afterward, Darwin will become the target of biting critiques.[201] From hero to villain. Before proceeding further, it is worth accounting four fundamental aspects[202]: Nietzsche did not directly know Darwin's works, but it largely turned to secondary literature (especially German); Nietzsche's critiques focus on the philosophical content of Darwin's theory and do not intend, unlike they easily seem to do, to contest its scientificity; when referring to Darwin, Nietzsche quite always address Darwinists such as Spencer or, more generally, the Anglo-utilitarian philosophy[203]; Nietzsche did not develop a fully-fledged critique of Darwinism, but it is rather fragmented and usually emerges in relation to the

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[197] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, I/1, pp. 10-11.
[198] Ibidem, pp. I/2, 11-12.
[199] Ibidem, p. 6.
[200] Id., *Daybreak. Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* (1881), ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, 49, p. 32: «Formerly one sought the feeling of grandeur of man by pointing to his divine origin: this has now become a forbidden way, for at its portal stands the ape, together with other gruesome beasts, grinning knowingly as if to say: no further in this direction.»
[201] Dirk R. Johnson, *Nietzsche's Anti-Darwinism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 17ff.
[202] On Nietzsche's reflection on Darwin see Johnson, *Nietzsche's Anti-Darwinism*, and John Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004; Christian J. Emden, *Nietzsche's Naturalism. Philosophy and the Life Sciences in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 34-48 and pp. 147-166.
[203] Cf. Maria Cristina Fornari, *La morale evolutiva del gregge. Nietzsche legge Spencer e Mill*, Pisa, ETS, 2006.

theme of the «will to power.» In my opinion, we should consider the dispute between Nietzsche and Darwin as a theoretical struggle utterly internal to materialism; a struggle for a view of life which has done with metaphysics and which aims to grasp the ultimate moral implications of the death of God.

In Nietzsche's eyes, Darwin stands for the peak of a very modern way of thinking the nexus between life and morality.[204] As Nietzsche states in a fragment from autumn 1885-1886:

> Never has an epistemological skepticism or dogma arisen without ulterior motives - that it has a second rank value as soon as one considers what at bottom forced one to this position: even the very will to certainty, when it is not the will "I only want to live" - Basic insight: Kant as well as Hegel as well as Schopenhauer - the skeptical-epochal position as well as the historical and the pessimistic are of moral origin. I saw no one who would have dared a critique of moral value feelings: and I soon turned my back on the meager attempts to arrive at a history of the emergence of these feelings (as among the English and German Darwinists). - How does one explain Spinoza's position, his renunciation and rejection of moral value judgments? (Was it one consequence of a theodicy?)[205]

According to Nietzsche, Darwinism is affected by modern pathology of *conatus*, that is the misleading axiological primacy bestowed on the will to self-preservation.[206] This is the historical data, the utilitarian *episteme* that the English psychologists do not see and, therefore, assume as in compliance with nature.[207] As Nietzsche claims in 1886 *Beyond Good and Evil*:

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[204] As is known, Nietzsche encountered Darwin's genealogical thesis on morality primarily through his friends Paul Rée 1877 *The Origin of the Moral Sensation*. On Nietzsche and Paul Rée see Dirk R. Johnson, *Il sodalizio di Nietzsche con Paul Rèe*, in «Rivista di filosofia», 2/2005, pp. 233-261. Like Darwin, in this essay [quoted by Nietzsche at the very beginning of *On the Genealogy of Morality* as the emblem of the English «perverse kind of genealogical hypotheses» (*Genealogy of Morality*, p. XVI)], Rèe attempted to provide a naturalistic explanation of «moral phenomena», especially regarding the «origin» of human moral evaluation of Good as non-egoism and Evil as egoism. Cf. Paul Rée, *On the Origin of the Moral Sensation*, in Id. *Basic Writings*, ed. Robin Small, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2003. In my opinion, what characterizes Rèe's reading of Darwin's moral thesis is a very Kantian background which seeks a pure authenticity of altruism as original moral impulse. Like Kant, Rée is interested in showing the complete distinction within the human mind between altruism, as disinterested act towards others' good, and egoism, as self-interested act ultimately related to individual self-preservation. Rée eventually end up considering «non-egoistic drive» as the condition of possibility of moral evaluation. On this see Fornari, *La morale evolutiva del gregge*, pp. 18-19. As I have attempted to show in the third paragraph of the following chapter, such a division does not really concern Darwin's enquiry on moral sense. By following Hume's and Smith's theories on sympathy, Darwin is surely more consequentialist and, explicitly against Kant, he tends to contest any sort of deontology. Therefore, I think that this Kantian account of Rèe's moral Darwinism is what eventually led Nietzsche to see Darwin as a naïve apologist of altruism and, above all, as an ultimate advocate of Christian axiology.

[205] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unpublished Fragments (Spring 1885 – Spring 1886*), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2020, 2[161], p. 380.

[206] Id., *The Will to Power* (1901), ed. R. Kevin Hill, New York, Penguin, 2017, 688, p. 392; *Nachgelassene Fragmente Frühjahr 1888*, 14 [121]: «Spinoza's proposition concerning self-preservation25 should actually put an end to change. But the proposition is false; the contrary is true. It is precisely a living organism in which it is most clearly shown that it does what it does not to preserve itself, but to become something more.» From here on, for the quotations from the posthumous *The Will to Power*, I will also indicate the indexing of the *Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke und Briefe* in order to provide a more correct historical framework of Nietzsche's quotation. Texts available at <http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB>.

[207] Id., *Nachgelassene Fragmente Frühjahr–Herbst 1881*, 11[106]: «„Nützlich-schädlich"! „Utilitarisch"! Diesem Gerede liegt das Vorurtheil zu Grunde als ob es ausgemacht sei, wohin sich das menschliche Wesen (oder auch Thier Pflanze) entwickeln solle. Als ob nicht abertausend Entwicklungen von jedem Punkte aus möglich wären! Als ob die Entscheidung, welche die beste höchste sei, nicht eine reine Sache des Geschmacks sei! (Ein Messen nach einem Ideale, welches nicht das einer anderen Zeit, eines anderen Menschen sein muß!)» [«"Beneficial-detrimental"! "Utilitarian"! At the base of these groundless words there is the prejudice that decided upon which direction the human being (or the animal, the plant) should develop

> With humans as with every other type of animal, there is a surplus of failures and degenerates, of the diseased and infirm, of those who necessarily suffer. Even with humans, successful cases are always the exception and, since humans are *the still undetermined animals*, the infrequent exception […]. So how is this *surplus* of failures treated by the two greatest religions, those mentioned above? They try to preserve, to keep everything living that can be kept in any way alive. In fact, they take sides with the failures as a matter of principle, as religions *of the suffering*. They give rights to all those who suffer life like a disease, and they want to make every other feeling for life seem wrong and become impossible […]. And yet, after they gave comfort to the suffering, courage to the oppressed and despairing […]: what else did they have to do, to work in good conscience and conviction for the preservation of all the sick and suffering, which really means working in word and in deed for the *deterioration of the European race*? Stand all valuations *on their head – that* is what they had to do! And crush the strong, strike down the great hopes, throw suspicion on the delight in beauty, skew everything self-satisfied, manly, conquering, domineering, every instinct that belongs to the highest and best-turned-out type of "human", twist them into uncertainty, crisis of conscience, self-destruction.[208]

Nietzsche's judgment on religion as the moral system which has transvaluated the master morality into a slave morality reflects that on English psychologists.

> Utilitarianism (socialism, democratism) criticizes the descent of moral valuations, but it believes in them, just like the Christian. (Naivete, as if morality would remain if the sanctioning God were missing. The "beyond" absolutely essential if the belief in morality is to be maintained.) Basic problem: where does this omnipotence of faith come from? Of faith in morality? (which also betrays itself in the fact that even the basic conditions of life are falsely interpreted in favor of morality: despite knowledge of the animal world and the plant world. "self-preservation", Darwinistic perspective on reconciliation of altruistic and egoistic principles […]).[209]

Therefore, according to Nietzsche, Darwinian genealogy of morality is affected by an ideological circularity: while defining the material origin of moral values, it ends up providing a naturalistic justification of values that, not by chance, are the same as Christian-western axiology.[210] As Maria Cristina Fornari pointed out, for Nietzsche, English

towards. As if thousands of developments were not possible from any point! As if the decision upon which is the best, the higher, were but a mere matter of taste!» Translation mine].

[208] Id., *Beyond Good and Evil. Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, 62, p. 56.

[209] Id., *Unpublished Fragments*, 2[165], p. 384. As Nietzsche state in a fragments from winter 1883-1884: «Being most equitable and mild indicates weakness (the New Testament and the early Church), which manifests itself as utter *bêtise* in the Englishmen Darwin and Wallace.» Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 130, p. 85; *Nachgelassene Fragmente Winter 1883–1884*, 24[25].

[210] We find a first formulation in 1873 *David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer*: «With a certain crude contentment he covers himself with the shaggy cloak of our ape-genealogists and praises Darwin as one of humankind's greatest benefactors -but we realize with consternation that his ethics is constructed independently of the question […]. Strauss has not even learned that a concept alone can never make human beings better and more moral, and that it is just as easy to preach morality as it is difficult to establish it; instead, it should be his task earnestly to explain and derive, on the basis of his Darwinistic premises, the phenomena of human kindness, compassion, love, and self-denial, whose existence one simply cannot deny: in fact, however, Strauss chose instead to flee from the task of explanation by making the leap into imperative diction. With this leap he even happens frivolously to jump over Darwin's most basic principle. "Never forget even for a moment" Strauss says, "that you are a human being and no mere creature of nature, never forget that all others are likewise human beings, that is, for all their individual differences they are the same as you and have the same needs and demands as you- this is the essence of all morality". But where does this resounding imperative come from? How can this be innate to human beings when, according to Darwin, the human being is wholly a creature of nature and has evolved to the heights of humanity by adhering to a completely different set of laws; namely, by no other means than by constantly forgetting that other similar creatures possess the same rights, by feeling himself to be the stronger and gradually bringing about the demise of other specimens displaying a weaker constitution.» Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observation*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995, pp. 39-40

genealogists «can only provide a history of what "actually exists" rather than accounting for what "actually existed".»[211] As Nietzsche states in a fragments from autumn 1887:

> The fatal belief in divine providence is easily the most debilitating belief there ever was, both practically an intellectually. But to what extent does it still persist under other guises? To what extent does Christianity as a tacit assumption and interpretation live on under the guise of such formulas as "nature", "progress", "perfectibility" and "Darwinism", or the superstition that there is a certain relationship between happiness and virtue, between unhappiness and guilt? That absurd confidence in the course of things, in "life" and in the "instinct of life"; that petty-bourgeois resignation which believes that if everybody did his duty all would go well - this sort of thing only makes sense on the assumption that things are directed sub *specie boni.*[212]

In other words, Darwinian genealogy of morality is nothing but a justification of altruism, that is the leading principle of that slave morality which has blamed selfishness as "evil". Hence, by identifying moral sense with altruism, Darwin finds in the beginning what is already contained in the end («they confuse what comes first with what comes last»[213]). Surely, Nietzsche highlights a circularity which is undoubtedly suspicious: why should selfishness be necessarily evil? Above all, why should altruism be necessarily good? According to Nietzsche, if we reconstruct the genealogy of moral values historically rather than through the vicious lens of utilitarianism, we will realize that, at the beginning, selfishness was "good". This is not because selfishness is morally better *per se* - «usefulness was none of their concern» -, but because it expresses what human beings are before morality (the Christian morality) intervenes to «poison», to then «soothe», their «interiority».[214] As Nietzsche claims in 1878 *Human, All Too Human*: «*Egoism is not evil*, because the idea of one's "neighbor" - the expression is of Christian origin and does not correspond with truth - is very weak in us; and we feel almost as free of responsibility for him as we do for plants and stones. That the other suffers has to be *learned*; and it can never be learned fully.»[215] On the contrary, altruism humiliates and represses the power of life: «the Darwinian beast and the ultra-modern, humble moral weakling who 'no longer bites' politely shake hands in a way that is at least entertaining.»[216] Slave morality is established on the «*ressentiment*» - the «most dangerous of blasting and explosive material»[217] - of those individuals who, since incapable of expressing the power of their lives, establish an axiological order which attempts to banish the energy of the more powerful ones.

> In a person who was made and determined for command, self-denial and modest retreat would not be a virtue but the waste of a virtue: that is how it seems to me. Every unegoistic morality that considers itself unconditional and is directed toward everyone does not just sin against taste: it is a provocation to sins of omission, and one *more* temptation under a mask of benevolence – a temptation and injury to precisely the higher, the rarer, the privileged. Morals must be compelled from the very start to bow before *rank order*, their presumptuousness must be forced onto their conscience, – until they are finally in agreement with each other that it is *immoral* to say: "What's right for the one is fair for the other ".[218]

Nietzsche's analysis is sharp: Darwinism presented itself as the ultimate demolisher of metaphysic, but it finally ended up providing the latter the insidious alibi of naturality. In

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[211] Fornari, *Morale evolutiva del gregge*, p. 83.
[212] Id., *The Will to Power*, 243, p. 151; *Nachgelassene Fragmente Herbst 1887*, 10[7].
[213] Id., *Twilights of the Idols* (1889), ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, IV/4, p. 168.
[214] Id., *On the Genealogy of Morality*, III-15, pp. 92-94
[215] Id, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for free Spirits* (1878), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, I/101, pp. 54-55.
[216] Id., *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Pref-VIII, p. 8.
[217] Ibidem, III-15, p. 93.
[218] Id., *Beyond Good and Evil*, 221, pp. 112-113.

few words: thanks to Darwin, God is still alive. This allows to reinforce an axiological order which, according to Nietzsche's perspective, continues to foster the "low" values of solidarity, altruism and equality. Therefore, for Nietzsche, Darwin's materialism represents a missed opportunity in the history of morality: as if Darwin backed down before the destructive effects of his evolutionary theory for morality and, hence, battened down the hatches by providing a naturalistic explanation and justification of the existing moral state of things. At least, as Nietzsche might say, Descartes honestly claimed the necessity of a provisional code of morals since afraid to demolish excessively. In summary, in Nietzsche's view, Darwin turned to the genealogy of morality to avoid the abys of «the transvaluation of values» and, in this sense, Darwinism is a clumsy materialism which compromises itself with metaphysic for the good of the many.

Nevertheless, in my opinion, the disagreement between Nietzsche and Darwin is due to a more fundamental reason: their opposite understanding of life. As we noticed in the previous chapter, in Darwin, atheism is what lies at the base of his understanding of the relationship between nature and morality. Nature is not evil in itself; it is so from the point of view of sentient beings, whose consciousness of pain introduces within the course of evolution an antagonistic force. This is not a mere will to life. The will to avoid suffering is not the same as survive. For Darwin, the bond between sentience and sociability is what naturally lead to the golden rule and to the recognition of suffering as common destiny to contrast. We should never underestimate the selfish nature of sympathy. For Darwin, morality and natural selection tend to stand one another because the first, since sentient, poses a question that the second, since blind and chance, cannot see. Yet, for Nietzsche, such a perspective, however comprehensible, is vitiated by a deep misunderstanding about what nature is. Nietzsche is totally convinced of it: behind such an obsession for suffering, there stand a judgment on nature which applies on it a whole series of concerns socially and culturally, not to say even biographically, characterized. As Nietzsche claims in 1882 *The Gay Science*:

> To wish to preserve oneself is a sign of distress, of a limitation of the truly basic life-instinct, which aims at the expansion of power and in so doing often enough risks and sacrifices self-preservation. It is symptomatic that certain philosophers, such as the consumptive Spinoza, took and indeed had to take just the so-called self-preservation instinct to be decisive: - they were simply people in distress. That today's natural sciences have become so entangled with the Spinozistic dogma (most recently and crudely in Darwinism with its incredibly one-sided doctrine of "the struggle for existence" -) is probably due to the descent of most natural scientists: in this regard they belong to "the people", their ancestors were poor and lowly folks who knew all too intimately the difficulty of scraping by. English Darwinism exudes something like the stuffy air of English overpopulation, like the small people's smell of indigence and overcrowding. As a natural scientist, however, one should get out of one's human corner; and in nature, it is not distress which rules, but rather abundance, squandering - even to the point of absurdity. The struggle for survival is only an exception, a temporary restriction of the will to life; the great and small struggle revolves everywhere around preponderance, around growth and expansion, around power and in accordance with the will to power, which is simply the will to life.[219]

Thus, according to Nietzsche, Darwin talks of natural selection because he turns to a Malthusian understanding of nature, where nature is limited and insufficient for the full-scale nourishment of life. This is the core of the well-known Nietzsche's *Anti-Darwin*, a series of aphorisms (dated back to 1887-1888 two-year period, that is when Nietzsche

[219] Id., *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, 349, pp. 207-208. See also Id., *Beyond Good and Evil*, 13, p. 15: «Physiologists should think twice before positioning the drive for self-preservation as the cardinal drive of an organic being. Above all, a living thing wants to *discharge* its strength – life itself is will to power –: self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *consequences* of this. – In short, here as elsewhere, watch out for *superfluous* teleological principles! – such as the drive for preservation (which we owe to Spinoza's inconsistency –).»

planned the unfinished project of *The Will to Power, an Attempt at a Re-valuation of All Values*), wherein his confrontation with Darwin is not only explicit but even more heated.

> *Anti-Darwin*. – As far as the famous "struggle for existence" is concerned, this seems to me to be more of an opinion than a proven fact at the moment. It takes place, but as an exception; the overall condition of life is *not* a state of need, a state of hunger, but rather abundance, opulence, even absurd squandering. Where there is a struggle, it is a struggle for power … You should not confuse Malthus with nature. – But assuming this struggle exist (and it does in fact happen), it is unfortunately the opposite of what Darwin's school would want, and perhaps what we might want too: namely to the disadvantage of the strong, the privileged, the fortunate exceptions. Species do *not* grow in perfection: the weak keep gaining dominance over the strong, - there are more of them, and besides, they are *cleverer* … Darwin forgot about spirit (- that is English!), *the weak have more spirit* […]. Anyone with strength can do without spirit (- "let it go" people in Germany think these days […]). You see that by spirit I mean caution, patience, cunning, disguise, great self-control, and everything involved in mimicry (which includes much of what is called virtue).[220]

«You should not confuse Malthus with nature»: for Nietzsche nature is rather abundance, opulence, even absurd squandering. In other words, life is not as weak and precarious as Darwin maintains, but powerful. Life is not stablished on a structural insufficiency. Life is rather will to power: a boundless source of potentialities which demand to be expressed and not humiliated. Nietzsche grasps such an understanding of life from the condition western morality is, according to him, going through. Since the weak ones are in power, and since their morality is established on the *resentment* caused by their powerlessness, they impose to the powerful ones the suppression of their will to power. Life is weak if judged from a resentful point of view.

> *Against Darwinism*. The utility of an organ does not explain its origin, on the contrary! […] The individual organism itself is the struggle of parts (for nutrition, space, etc.); its development involves the prevalence, the predominance of individual parts, and the atrophy, the "becoming an organ", of others. The extent of the influence of "external circumstances" is ridiculously overrated by Darwin; essential to the life process is precisely this tremendous formative power to create from within, which merely uses and exploits "external circumstances"…The fact is that the new forms generated from within are not formed for any purpose, but that in the struggle between the parts, it will not be long before a new form bears a relationship to a partial utility, and then adapts itself ever more perfectly to that use.[221]

Nietzsche's theory of will to power aims to provide an alternative biological paradigm to that of Darwin's natural selection.[222] According to Nietzsche, Darwin overrates the influence of environmental circumstances, thereby leaving out the inner powerfulness of individuals. Indeed, the way individuals manage with their inner power is what eventually determines among them the superior ones and the mediocre ones. Nietzsche seems to resort to a sort of "non-finalistic Lamarckism": a form of vitalism where the development of individuals depends on their inner will which, the more it is purposeless, the more it will develop toward the best.

> *Against Darwin* […]. The Darwinists rely upon the struggle for existence, the death of the weaker creatures and the survival of the most robust and most gifted; consequently they imagine a continuous increase in the perfection of all creatures. We, on the contrary, are quite assured that in the struggle for

[220] Id., *Twilights of the Idols* (1889), X/14, p. 199.
[221] Id., *Will to Power*, 647, p. 367; *Nachgelassene Fragmente Ende 1886-Frühjahr 1887*, 7[25].
[222] As Cristian Fuschetto pointed out, Nietzsche's «biology of power» is largely inspired by the German reception of Darwinism, especially by Wilhem Roux's theory of «inner struggle» and William Rolph's «principle of insatiability.» Cf. Cristian Fuschetto, *Breve storia di un appassionante equivoco. Nietzsche, Darwin e la scoperta della vita*, in *Underscores. Darwin, Nietzsche, von Uexküll, Heidegger, Portmann, Arendt*, ed. Paolo Amodio, Cristian Fuschetto, Fabiana Gambardella, Napoli, Giannini, 2012, pp. 11-46.

existence, chance serves the weak as well as the strong; that cunning often advantageously substitutes itself for strength; that the fruitfulness of a species bears a remarkable relation to the likelihood of its destruction…[223]

What does the progress of evolution maintained by Darwinists consist of? According to Nietzsche, if we look at the present western social-democratic societies, we witness no progression towards better forms of live, but rather the success of mediocrity. The slave morality prevents the evolution of humanity toward its excellence, instead promoting a human type which will bring about the «destruction» of the species.

Against Darwin. What surprises me most on making a general survey of the grand destinies of man, is that I invariably see the opposite of what today Darwin and his school sees or wishes to see: the progress of the species, and selection in favour of the stronger and fitter. Precisely the opposite of this is palpable: the elimination of the strokes of good fortune, the inutility of the more highly developed types, the inevitable preponderance of the average, and even of the be/ow- average types. Unless we are shown some reason why man is an exception among creatures, I tend to assume that Darwin's school is entirely mistaken. That will to power in which I recognize the ultimate ground and character of all change provides us with the means to assess why selection is never in favour of the exceptions and of the strokes of good fortune; the strongest and most serendipitous individuals are at a disadvantage when they are opposed by the organized gregarious instincts and timidity of the weak, of the majority. My general view of the world of values shows that the select types, the strokes of good fortune, do not have the upper hand when it comes to the supreme values which are now imposed upon mankind, but rather the types of decadence - perhaps there is nothing more interesting in the world than this unwelcome spectacle…[224]

For Darwin, the development of humanity is related to the extension of sympathy. The more a society safeguards the weak and helpless ones, the more human-civil it is. An evolutionary path which, it is worth repeating it, tends to reverse that of natural selection. Nietzsche refuses such an understanding of the naturality-morality relationship: for him, Darwin's perspective is only to the detriment of the will to power, it hinders evolution by natural selection as such.

Strange as it may sound, one always has to arm the strong against the weak, the serendipitous against the hapless, the wholesome against the corrupt and congenitally afflicted. If we drew our morality from reality, then it would read thus: the ordinary are more valuable than the extraordinary, and the forms of decadence more valuable than the ordinary; the desire for nothingness has the upper hand over the desire for life – and the general aim now is (to express it in Christian, Buddhistic, Schopenhauerian terms): better not to be than to be […]. I find the much remarked "cruelty of nature" elsewhere, for she is cruel to her fortunate children; she shelters and protects and loves *les humbles*.[225]

Hence, one the one hand, there stand a *weak life*. On the other hand, there stand a *powerful life*. From Nietzsche's point of view, this is the difference between a judged life and an unjudged one. Nietzsche's harsh words - «one always has to arm the strong against the weak» - highlight a political question which deserves to be more deepened. I do not intend here to deal with Nietzsche's political thought. I will come back on this point at length in the fourth chapter. Nevertheless, Nietzsche's opposition to the axiology of civilization is established upon an undeniable political aristocratism[226] which, as is known, has represented a very puzzling theme for twentieth-century interpreters, especially those who attempted to make Nietzsche a philosopher of liberation who brought to light the «duplicities and maskings» of

[223] Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 684, p. 386; *Nachgelassene Fragmente Frühjahr 1888*, 14[133].
[224] Ibidem, 685, p. 389; *Nachgelassene Fragmente Frühjahr 1888*, 14[123].
[225] Ibidem, pp. 389-390.
[226] Cf. Domenico Losurdo, *Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel. Intellectual Biography and Critical Balance-Sheet*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, pp. 607ff.

western universalism.[227] In my opinion, like Darwin, Nietzsche does not need to be saved from himself.[228] His aristocratism was neither metaphorical nor simply moral, and his own words clearly shows us what his ultimate worldview was. For the moment, let's put aside the question of whether we might accept Nietzsche's proposal or not, and let's account Nietzsche's critique of Darwinism only for his ethical and ontological content. Did Nietzsche want to warn us about the risks we might run if we establish our morality and our society on weakness rather than power? Which risks? That the weak ones might have a chance? That a society lets the research of power go to make space for everyone, even those who would be "naturally" destined to dissolution? Well, if so, Nietzsche is asking us to choose between equality and inequality, between the civilization as we know it and a not so clear future beyond good and evil. It is not a matter of choosing between Darwin's civilization and Nietzsche's aristocratism. More simply, we have been lucky enough that the evolution of our moral sense has allowed us to no longer need both Darwin and Nietzsche.

[227] Gianni Vattimo, *Il soggetto e la maschera. Nietzsche e il problema della liberazione*, Milano, Bompiani, 1994, p. 72. Translation mine.
[228] Losurdo, *Nietzsche*, p. 609: «to be able to appreciate Nietzsche as a great philosopher, one must first defend him against his apologists.»

Chapter III

Humanity As a Matter of Civilisation. The Primo Levi Case[1]

> I am, somehow, less interested in the weight and convolutions of Einstein's brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweatshops.
>
> Stephen Jay Gould[2]

Thinking Dehumanization By Experience

> *JANUARY 26.* We were lying in a world of dead men and phantoms. The last trace of civilization had vanished around and inside us. The work of bestial degradation, begun by the Germans in triumph, had been brought to its conclusion by the Germans in defeat. It is man who kills, man who creates or suffers injustice; he who shares his bed with a corpse, having lost all restraint, is not a man. He who has waited for his neighbor to die in order to take his piece of bread is, albeit blameless, farther from the model of thinking man than the most primitive pygmy or the most vicious sadist. Part of our existence lies in the feelings of those near us. This is why the experience of someone who has lived for days during which man was merely a thing in the eyes of man is non-human.[3]

In twentieth century literature, few titles could be as effective as that of Primo Levi's 1947 first book. *If this a man* has become the most appropriate periphrasis to subsume the trauma that the *Shoah* has represented for contemporary philosophy. As Hannah Arendt stated in *The Origin of Totalitarianism*:

> What totalitarian ideologies therefore aim at is not the transformation of the outside world or the revolutionizing transmutation of society, but the transformation of human nature itself. The concentration camps are the laboratories where changes in human nature are tested, and their shamefulness therefore is not just the business of their inmates and those who run them according to strictly "scientific" standards; it is the concern of all men. Suffering, of which there has been always too much on earth, is not the issue, nor is the number of victims. Human nature as such is at stake […]. Until now the totalitarian belief that everything is possible seems to have proved only that everything can be destroyed. Yet, in their effort to prove that everything is possible, totalitarian regimes have discovered without knowing it that there are crimes which men can neither punish nor forgive. Just as the victims in the death factories or the holes of oblivion are no longer "human" in the eyes of their executioners, so this newest species of criminals is beyond the pale even of solidarity in human sinfulness.[4]

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[1] This chapter collects and reworks a series of studies on Primo Levi I carried out in the following publications: Simone Ghelli, *Il peso insostenibile della fortuna. L'ateismo di Primo Levi*, in «Iride. Filosofia e Discussione Pubblica», 2/2018, pp. 245-259; Simone Ghelli, *"Soffro dunque sono": Primo Levi lettore dei moderni*, in *Innesti: Primo Levi e i libri altrui*, ed. Gianluca Cinelli e Robert S. C. Gordon, Oxford, Peter Lang, 2020, pp. 161-177; Simone Ghelli, *Umano e non-umano in Primo Levi. Una lettura darwiniana*, *Letteratura e scienza. Atti del XXIII congresso dell'ADI – Associazione degli italianisti (Pisa 12-14 settembre 2019)*, Roma, Adi editore, 2021 [forthcoming]; Simone Ghelli, *«Basta! Lei ne sa più di me. "Dello scrivere oscuro" e la questione della disuguaglianza*, in *Narrare la tragedia*, Firenze, Cesati Editore, 2021, pp. 45-56; Simone Ghelli, *Sulla ricezione di Primo Levi nel mondo cattolico*, in *Primo Levi al plurale*, ed. Fabio Levi, Torino, Zamorani, 2021 [forthcoming].

[2] Gould, *The Panda's Thumb*, p. 151.

[3] Primo Levi, *The Complete Works*, I, ed. Ann Goldstein, New York, Liveright, 2015, p. 164.

[4] Hannah Arendt, *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, New York, Harvest Book, 1973, pp. 458-459.

The historical phenomenon of the Holocaust has meaningfully reintroduced the question on the human-animal relationship into contemporary philosophy, bestowing an original ethical-political account on it. As if the tragic events of the first half of the Twentieth Century had manifestly showed how politically devastating the discrimination between human and inhuman can become once inflected within certain ideological registers (racism, antisemitism, fascism, imperialism, and so on). This confirms a doubt risen in conclusion of the first chapter: that the definition of the proper of human, which counterweight is a precise definition of what is not human, i.e., animal, first of all established a moral discrimination within humanity itself. An «anthropological machine»[5], as Giorgio Agamben would name it, which, from time to time, decides upon either the inclusion or the exclusion of individuals, human individual, from the definition of the human.

According to Simona Forti, starting from the mid-1900s, biopolitics is the «hermeneutical horizon» which «has definitively shifted attention away from the omnipotent will of the actors to the suffering of those who bore the brunt of those actions.»[6] A shift which takes into account all those members of humanity who, all of a sudden, are ruthlessly considered to be no longer human. Indeed, from Arendt, to Foucault, and even Agamben, the main subject of biopolitical reflection is the figure of the «absolute victim»[7]: a human subject utterly destitute of his humanity and reduced to «to the lowest possible common denominator, namely to a bundle of biological, "identical reactions".»[8] The concentration camp is the exemplary situation where such an «absolute victim» is produced. S/he stands for the final stage of the anthropological experiment of Totalitarianism which, by attempting to build a new kind of humanity, it rather ended up destroying it. And that's where the animal question comes in.

Contemporary debate on dehumanization is wide and the definitions of the human-animal relationship hitherto provided are as many as the different meanings assigned to these two terms. Indeed, there are authors, such as Hannah Arendt, who resorted to a humanist lexicon (even though with an anti-metaphysical tone), as there are others, such as Jacques Derrida, who, on the contrary, used the animal and the human to deconstruct the hierarchical opposition between these two terms. I will refer to these different approaches in due course. However, after Auschwitz, the human and the animal reaffirmed their capability as philosophical categories to determine the borders of human condition. In other words, when we talk of animality and humanity, especially within a political-historical frame, we usually refer two different conditions wherein individuals happened to live. As Forti points out, western «political imagination» has always employed «an assorted bestiary to represent anyone who lies outside the law of the polis or is antagonistic.»[9] There is an acceptation of animality as bestiality (lions, bears, leviathans, etc.) that tends to «shift the human image into a region "beyond the human".»[10] These are images which convey power and excess and which «almost always portrayed those who stood at the top of the political relationship, at the active pole of those who hold power: sovereigns, tyrants, and commanders.» At the same time, there is also an animality conceived as mere biological necessity which, on the contrary, tends to shift the human beings "below" the human. These are images which convey baseness, weakness, primitiveness (bacteria, ticks, rats, etc.), thereby evoking a

[5] Agamben, *The Open*, pp. 33ff.
[6] Simona Forti, *The New Demons. Rethinking Power and Evil Today*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2015, p. 126. See also Matthew Calarco, *Thinking Through Animals. Identity, Difference, Indistinction*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2015, pp. 53-55; Cary Wolfe, *Before the Law. Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012.
[7] Forti, *The New Demons*, p. 127.
[8] Ibidem, p. 135.
[9] Ibidem, p. 144.
[10] Ibidem.

parasitic sense of danger and repugnance. This second bias of the animal as a lowly being is exactly the understanding of animality which twentieth-century totalitarian "thanatopolitics" are grounded upon. Indeed, if we look at the side of the perpetrators, Nazi racial rhetoric, wherein medical discourse and political language overlap, amply resorted to an incessant and paranoid exhortation to «immunization»[11], according to which certain individuals are considered parasitic lives that, with their mere presence, endanger the health of the social body. Lives which deserve to be isolated and exterminated and upon whom looms a «hypermoral» judgment that want them to be «lives that are not worthy of being lived».[12] As if inhumanity were a condition not only biologically degraded, but also, and perhaps especially, saturated with moral meanings. In other words, these are individual lives excluded from what is acknowledged as «human», and which, due to such a bio-moralization of the victim's body, end up being considered even more unnecessary and expendable than that of animals.

This is exactly what victims of the holocaust experienced and testified. According to Elisabeth De Fontenay, Holocaust literature ushered in «a new current of writers: those undramatically move from the animal to the human.»[13] This continual coming and going has been a very effective instrument to, on the one hand, depict the level of dehumanization reached within the concentration camp, on the other hand, to emphasize the deconstructive character of this extreme experience of suffering and vulnerability. That is to say, as De Fontenay maintains, that by experiencing a complete dismissal of their humanity, human beings could somehow take part in «the fate that many animals know so well.»[14] Among these witnesses, Primo Levi is probably who provided the most powerful and philosophically weighty testimony. In my opinion, Levi not only masterfully achieved to condense both the core and the spirit which has animated the philosophical debate on Auschwitz during last century. Thanks to the hybridism of science and literature which characterized his writings, Levi was also able to observe the question on dehumanization from a very different and unique angle, thereby providing one of the most concrete and powerful philosophical answer. An answer which, I do think, has not been sufficiently reconstructed so far, and that still today, more than thirty years from Levi's last work, owns a theoretical strength which deserves to be brought to the attention of current philosophical debate.

First of all, it is worth understanding how interpreters have situated Primo Levi's thought within the contemporary debate on dehumanization. In *Animals and Animality in Primo Levi's Works*, Damiano Benvegnù provided a very effective overview.[15] According to him, two main approaches can be traced down. The first, more traditional and long-term, is a

[11] Cf. Roberto Esposito, *Bíos. Biopolitics and Philosophy*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008, pp. 45ff.

[12] Forti, *The New Demons*, p. 176. Forti questioned the tendency by biopolitical reflection to reduce Nazi racial ideology to a form of pure biologism. According to her, «What led to mass murder was not the neutrality of value relativism typical of the scientistic worldview; rather, it was a hypermoral vision of the world, strongly characterized, like all hypermoralities, by the fundamental distinction between good and evil.» (p. 150). In other words, Nazi racial discourse is strongly connected not only to the new life sciences, but also and more deeply with the metaphysics of soul born with Plato. See also. Ead., *The Biopolitics of Souls: Racism, Nazism, and Plato*, in «Political Theory», 1/2006, pp. 9-32.

[13] Fontenay, *Le Silence des Bêtes*, p. 742. Translation mine

[14] Ibidem, p. 747. Translation mine. This is what Enrico Donaggio named «obscene analogy»: an influential interpretative current which, from John M. Coetzee's 1999 *The lives of Animals* to Charles Patterson's 2001 *Eternal Treblinka*, has stressed the analogy between Nazi concentration camps and slaughterhouses. Cf. Enrico Donaggio, *L'analogia oscena. La Shoah e lo sterminio degli animali in John M. Coetzee*, in «La società degli individui», 3/2008, pp. 53-67.

[15] Damiano Benvegnù, *Animals and Animality In Primo Levi's Work*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 1-14.

humanist interpretation.[16] As Joseph Farrell inquires: «The question, "What does it mean to be human" is posed by the very title of his most celebrated work, as are also the opposite questions: What forces can undo a man? Or, alternatively, What conduct is incompatible with humanity»[17]? Like many other interpreters, Farrell finds the answers to all these questions into the seminal chapter *The Canto of Ulysses* of *If This is a Man*. As is known, here, Levi explicitly turns to a humanist grammar, claiming human exceptionality - conveyed by Dante's verses «*you were not made to live your lives as brutes,/but to be followers of worth and knowledge*»[18] - that even the extreme life condition of the camp can suppress. As Levi witnesses, by playing the verses of the *Divine Comedy* to his fellow inmates Pikolo, «I forget who I am and where I am», and «dare to talk about these things with the soup poles on our shoulders.»[19] Therefore, Levi's perspective seems to endorse the humanist belief, according to which the humanity of the human being corresponds with the "higher" faculties of reason and languages, and, on the contrary, an inhuman life is akin to the brutes', that is of silent animals led by mere instincts and biological needs. For all these reasons, as Nicholas Patruno claimed, *The Canto of Ulysses* «provides a reply to Steinlauf», the protagonist of the chapter *Initiation*: human dignity cannot be measured by «the standard of personal hygiene», but rather «by more profound and extraordinary standards, more akin to those that a noble language and culture such as Dante's can instill in the individual.»[20]

The second approach is a post-humanist reading. Interpreters such as Jonathan Druker[21], Charlotte Ross[22] and, above all, Giorgio Agamben[23] have situated Levi's thought in line with the contemporary anti-humanist thought. According to these interpretations, Levi's anthropology rather conflicts with any dualism between the mind the body or between humanity and animality. Starting from *If This is a Man*, and through the so-called «biological fiction» stories and essays[24], Levi has harshly brought human exceptionality into question, making of Auschwitz not a place of "humanist revival", but rather a resonant denial of any metaphysics of the human. As Levi states in *If This is a Man* «our human condition is hostile to everything infinite.»[25] As Benvegnù points out, this second approach is more careful inasmuch it takes into account Levi's works as a whole. On the contrary, humanist interpretations focus largely on the works on *Shoah*, where the anthropological question is more humanitarian, that is aimed to report Nazi crimes against humanity, than philosophical. As Stefano Bellin highlighted, «the more we move away from the Holocaust, the more Levi seems to advance positions that are fundamentally anti-Cartesian and postanthropocentric»[26]. Therefore, should Primo Levi be considered a "humanist witness" and a "post-humanist intellectual" simultaneously? By following Benvegnù's reconstruction, this tension between humanism and post-humanism in Primo Levi becomes

[16] Joseph Farrell (ed.), *Primo Levi. The Austere Humanist*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2004.
[17] Id., *The Humanity and Humanism of Levi*, in *Answering Auschwitz. Primo Levi's Science and humanism After the Fall*, ed. by Stanislao G. Pugliese, New York, Fordham University Press, 2011, p. 88.
[18] Levi, *Complete Works*, I, p. 108.
[19] Ibidem.
[20] Nicholas Patruno, *Primo Levi, Dante, and the "Canto of Ulysses"*, in *The Legacy of Primo Levi*, ed. by Stanislao G. Pugliese, New York, Palgrave, 2005, p. 40.
[21] Jonathan Druker, *Primo Levi and Humanism after Auschwitz. Posthumanist Reflections*, New York, Palgrave, 2009.
[22] Charlotte Ross, *Primo Levi's Narratives of Embodiments. Containing the Human*, New York, Routledge, 2011.
[23] Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive*, New York, Zone Books, 1999.
[24] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, p. 2837. The term «biological fiction» («*fantabiologia*») was coined by Italo Calvino regarding the collection of short stories *Natura Histories* in a letter to Primo Levi dated November, the 22nd 1961.
[25] Ibidem, I, p. 13.
[26] Stefano Bellin, *Embracing Uncertainty: Primo Levi's Politics of the Human*, in «Paragraph», 1/2019, p. 68.

even more manifest if we stress the «animal question». In this regard, the lecture on *Racial Intolerance* held by Levi in Turin in November 1979 is emblematic.

> I believe that racial prejudice is something that is barely human; I believe that it's pre-human, that it precedes man, that it belongs to the animal world rather than the human world. I believe it is a feral prejudice, typical of wild animals, and this for two reasons: first, because we find it among social animals, which I'll talk about later, and, second, because there is no remedy for it. […] *By this I don't mean to say, indeed I would never say, that racism is an incurable evil; if we are humans it's because we have learned to protect ourselves, to deny, to thwart certain instincts that are our animal inheritance.*[27]

According to Farrell, «this dialectical opposition between the animal and the human is a recurrent and deeply significant theme in Levi, while the underlying fundamental, even fundamentalist, reassertion of a basic humanistic credo in the values of being human contained in those words represent his enduring and authentic voice as writer and intellectual.»[28] Farrell goes even to define this conflict between humanity and «animal inheritance» as a «philosophical dogma» to which Levi «tenaciously held all his life, even in the face of the atrocities he himself had endured and had seen perpetrated by human beings.»[29] As Benvegnù underlines, Farrell's interpretation is misleading, inasmuch it lacks a precise contextualization. It does not mention, for instance, the important references to the Austrian ethologist Konrad Lorenz which attest not only Levi's zoological interest towards animals – characters of several stories and essays that Farrell does not consider at all - but also his ethological understanding of the «human animal»[30] as «an animal with complex instincts.»[31]

Therefore, what do "human" and "animal" mean for Primo Levi? Above all, what kind of existence did the concentration camp inmates embody? Were they reduced to an inhuman, or animal, condition as the humanist interpreters maintain? Otherwise, since the humanist reading is only partial, should we agree with Agamben, according to whom «if one establishes a limit beyond which one ceases to be human, and all or most of humankind passes beyond it, this proves not the inhumanity of human beings but, instead, the insufficiency and abstraction of the limit»?[32] Hence, what is at stake here is to understand which of these two main theoretical alternatives suits more Levi's perspective, that is whether the Italian writer made the human-animal relationship an opposition or a mutual dissolution. Notwithstanding, I think that even the post-humanist readings, which is undoubtedly more consistent, fails in explaining Levi's position. If, on the one hand, it is true that, by accounting for a wider perspective, Levi's understanding on the human-animal distinction is surely anti-dualistic; on the other hand, if we consider only the works on the *Shoah*, where the humanitarian question is more urgent, Levi largely tends to oppose these two terms. Therefore, there seems to be two theoretical levels within Levi's anthropological thought: the ethological inquiry, where the human being is processed as an animal among other animals, and the moral-political reflection, where humanity represents a "higher" condition that protects individuals from their inner animality. Thus, the humanist and the post-humanist interpretations could be equally correct, depending on what kind of Levi's work we might take into account. If so, Primo Levi's thought would end up appearing inconsistent and imprecise right exactly in relation to what is probably its fundamental

[27] Levi, *The Complete Works*, II, p. 1310-1312.
[28] Farrell, *The Humanity and Humanism of Levi*, p. 87.
[29] Ibidem, p. 88.
[30] Levi, *The Complete Works*, I, p. 82.
[31] Ibidem, p. 259.
[32] Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 63.

theme.[33] In my opinion the contradiction rather stands on the side of "labels" such as humanism or post-humanism. In my opinion, these interpretations are vitiated by the tendency to trace Levi's thought back to their conceptual registers, thereby ending up compelling Levi to be consistent with traditions that he either felt distant or was not connected with.

Within twentieth-century philosophical debate on Auschwitz, Levi is not simply an outsider, but a real foreign. Levi was not a professional philosopher and he never aimed to be so. As He used to repeat, philosophy «was not for him».[34] However, Primo Levi's works overflow with philosophy, fluctuating between rather unusual sources and very traditional ones. As we noticed before, Levi's anthropology encompasses a wide spectrum of references: from Dante to Konrad Lorenz, from tradition humanism to ethology. Such an inclination for thinking out of the box, without compelling to any preconceived pattern, is what impedes to classify Levi within a precise philosophical tradition. For these reasons, I do think that, before deciding upon whether Levi was a humanist or a post-humanist, we should deepen his works from the inside, tracing back the sources he turned to in order to understand and explain what he experienced during the imprisonment in Auschwitz. Because, for Levi, being a witness did not mean only fulfilling a duty, but also bolstering his reflection with a unique empirical material. A sort of "thinking by experience" which makes Levi's works a precious resource for contemporary debate on the human-animal relationship.

The Inegalitarian God and the Meaningless Suffering

> *What moves you?* – I am hardened, and I am rarely moved. I am moved by…well, I would say by what moves everyone: suffering children, the suffering elderly, the vulnerable people, but, perhaps because of my experience, I am quite hardened, I am not easily moved.[35]

Before deepening Primo Levi's understanding of the human-animal relationship, I would like to highlight the philosophical account of his reflection. Primo Levi is often seen as a "layman" writer, an intellectual who, for all his life, never ceded to the consolatory allure of ideologies, of theodicies or of metanarratives. Indeed, if there is something which both the readers and the interpreters can agree upon is the absence in his works of any sort of justification of the world. Primo Levi was a thinker capable of making the most of the aporetic character of reality, and, at the same time, since unaccustomed to any *petition principii*, of following to the core the implications which derive from a fully-fledged lay viewpoint on the world. Because, for the author of *If This is a Man*, laicism did not simply represent a disenchanted perspective or an alternative meaning. For Levi, laicism was not a refuge. It could not and must not be so. By defining himself as a layman, he rather confessed his radical idiosyncrasy to the very category of meaning. After all, as we will see, to find a "meaning" within the events of this world, especially the most tragic ones, means always to

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[33] Cf. Christopher Hamilton, *Humanity, Animality, and Philosophy in Primo Levi*, in *Interpreting Primo Levi. Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Minna Vuohelainen and Arthur Chapman, New York, Palgrave, 2016, p. 73.

[34] Roberto Di Caro, *The Essential and the Superfluous (1987)*, in Primo Levi, *The Voice of Memory. Interviews, 1961-1987*, ed. Marco Belpoliti and Robert Gordon, New York, The New Press, 2001, p. 175: «Listen, I've always made paints, I'm used to a concrete life, in which you either solve a problem or throw it away. Philosophical problems, by contrast, haven't changed since the Pre-Socratics, they keep going around and around them, working them over and over… And also, all philosophers share the vice of wanting to invent their own private language which you need to struggle your way through before you can understand what they mean. No, it's not for me...»

[35] Dina Luce, *Il suono e la mente* (1982), in Primo Levi, *Opere complete*, III, ed. Marco Belpoliti, Torino, Einaudi, 2018, p. 318. All English translations from Levi's *Opere complete* are mine.

"save" something or someone. And is known how Levi look suspiciously at the category of «salvation.»[36]

«For me, suffering is meaningless: it must be avoided; in my opinion, the only duty of a *layman* is to avoid his suffering and that of others.»[37] I do think that Primo Levi's laicism mainly expresses in relation the question of suffering which allowed him to move from the very concrete level of history to the speculative horizon of ontology. Starting from *If This is a Man*, the question of political evil always intertwines with the wider theme of natural evil. Let's consider, for instance, the well-know «Auschwitz experiment»[38] that Levi carries out in the chapter *The Drowned and the Saved* of his 1947 testimony. As is known, the most important anthropological data which comes to light from the «biological and social experiment» of the Lager is «the existence of two particularly differentiated categories among men – the saved and the drowned.»[39] Besides its ethical-political content - which I will discuss later -, these categories represent a more fundamental division between lucky and fitting individuals and the unlucky and unfitting ones. As Levi maintains, even though «less evident in ordinary life», this basic iniquity among the human beings follows a cosmic injustice that the concentration camp indulges and systematizes: «In history and in life», as Levi writes, «one sometimes seems to glimpse a fierce law that states: "To he who has, it will be given; from he who has not, it will be taken away".»[40] An underlying continuity that Levi will never cease examining. Such a continuity is due to the idea that, as Levi writes in the 1971 *Heading West*, «Life does *not* have a purpose; pain always prevails over joy; we are all condemned to death, and the day of execution is not revealed.»[41] Indeed, according to Levi, «if not universe, at least this planet is governed by a force that is not invincible but perverse, that prefers disorder to order.»[42] In other words, the phenomenon of life is nothing but the attempt, always exposed to failure, to self-preserve one's own life «against the brute power of degradation and death.» Therefore, the «tremendous volume of this "substance" that poison every life»[43] confirms Levi is his laicism: the presence of pain in this world is not only an incontrovertible and structural fact, but it is also morally unjustifiable.

As Levi states in 1977 *Against Pain*, «The layman has few certainties, but the first is this: it is acceptable to suffer (o to cause suffering) only if doing so prevents greater suffering.»[44] Over the last two decades, interpreters has largely stressed the theoretical centrality of the theme of suffering within Levi's moral philosophy. Speaking of which, Robert Gordon efficaciously framed Levi's ethics within traditional «utilitarianism», that is a consequentialist perspective which, rather than resorting to systems and rigid certainty, judges any situation depending on whether they produce pleasure or pain.[45] Moreover, Damiano Benvegnù highlighted the anti-anthropocentric character of Levi's utilitarianism, where the vulnerability of the living matter becomes the lowest common denominator of an

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[36] Carlo Conti, *Il lavoro aiuta a sopravvivere* (1979), in ibdem, p. 152: «I have learnt one thing from the Lager: to feel that someone is killing you is as awful as to fell to be saved by someone else. It is better to save ourselves, and to save others, personally.»

[37] Daniela Amsallem, *Il mio incontro con Primo Levi* (1980), in ibidem, p. 862.

[38] Cf. Massimo Bucciantini, *Auschwitz Experiment*, Torino, Einaudi, 2011.

[39] Levi, *Complete Works*, I, pp. 82-83.

[40] Ibidem, p. 84. As Alberto Cavaglion underlined, here Levi radicalizes the evangelical quotation from Matthew 25:29, depriving it of its soteriological optimism. Cf. Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo*, annotated edition by Albert Cavaglion, Torino, Einaudi, 2012, pp. 205-206.

[41] Levi, *Complete Works*, I, p. 589.

[42] Ibidem, III, p. 2630.

[43] Ibidem, II, 2060.

[44] Ibidem, p. 2059.

[45] Robert S. C. Gordon, *Primo Levi's Ordinary Virtues. From Testimony to Ethics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 89-96.

ethics encompassing all the sentient being within the same circuit.[46] Thus, as Marco Belpoliti pointed out, in Levi «ethics implies a materialist philosophy»[47]: a very traditional materialism wherein Auschwitz –contemporary metonymy of evil – stands for the anti-metaphysical historical phenomenon par excellence. In my opinion, such a very innovative materialistic use of Auschwitz is what permits to understand the deep philosophical meaning of Levi's most controversial and radical statements: «There is Auschwitz, and so there cannot be God.»[48]

> I ended up wondering about the reason for our fate, for being here today. I wondered, not answered. Not only, I have not found the answer, but I am not also satisfied with the answers given to me. They should explain the reason for the evil in the world, how the evil of the world is consistent with all-powerful Father God Father. No answer has been given to this.[49]

According to Ferdinando Camon, by means of the enthymeme «There is Auschwitz, and so there cannot be God», Primo Levi attempted to «provide a philosophical proof of the non-existence of God.»[50] However, an historical-philosophical reconstruction of Levi's atheism risk ending up being a mere suggestion lacking in philological basis. This is due to the occasioning character wherewith atheism is discussed within Levi's works. Indeed, besides some brief passages in *If This is a Man* and in *The Drowned and the Saved*, for the most part, the question of the existence of God is discussed throughout interviews and conversations. This led to process Levi's atheism as a biographical matter which eventually concerns Levi's personal bond with Judaism o, more generally, the question of faith after Auschwitz.[51] As if Levi's negation were simply the desperate acknowledgment of a survivor who, by using Elie Wiesel's words, «had seen too much suffering not to rebel against any religion that sought to impose a meaning upon it.»[52] Actually, from an historical point of view, Levi's position conveys a deep philosophical awareness, a not accidental concatenation of concepts and arguments which closely resembles modern materialism.

> That is how things stand for me: either God is all-powerful or he is not God. But if he exists, and is thus omnipotent, why does he allow evil? Evil exists. Suffering is evil. Thus if God, at his bidding, can change good into evil or simply allow evil to spread on Earth, then God is bad. And the hypothesis of a bad God repels me. So I hold on to the simpler hypothesis: I deny him.[53]

At the moment, there are no philological basis upon which establish an analogy between Primo Levi and the moderns. Unfortunately we still do not know what Levi could actually read. Therefore, it would be misleading to conclude, on the basis of his words hitherto quoted, that Levi was a real reader of the Bayle's *Dictionary* or of d'Holbach's *Good Sense*. However, despite any concrete philological lead, we should not forget that great innovative ideas pass down beyond the texts they are confined to. They have a sort of «atmospheric diffusion»; they are "in the air".[54] As we noticed in the previous chapters, Bayle's post-Cartesian thesis on suffering and atheism represented a point of no return which influenced the philosophical debate of the following two centuries, from French Enlightenment to Darwin's biology. They spread through several authors and very different traditions (Empiricism, Utilitarianism, and so on), thereby losing any connection with their original

[46] Benvegnù, *Animals and Animality In Primo Levi's Work*, pp. 51sgg.
[47] Marco Belpoliti, *Primo Levi. Di fronte e di profilo*, Milano, Guanda, 2015, p. 327. Translation mine.
[48] Ferdinando Camon, *Conversation with Primo Levi*, Marlboro, The Marlboro Press, 1989, p. 68.
[49] Paola Lucarini, *Intervista a Primo Levi* (1983), in *Opere Complete*, III, p. 375.
[50] Ferdinando Camon, *Prefazione 2014 a «Conversazione con Primo Levi»*, in ibidem, p. 1164
[51] Myriam Anissimov, *Primo Levi: Tragedy of an Optimist*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 2000, pp. 383ff.
[52] Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea. Memoirs*, New York, Schocken Book, 1995, p. 89 (digital edition).
[53] Giuseppe Grieco, *God and* I (1983), in *The Voice of Memory*, p. 276.
[54] Mario Andrea Rigoni, *Leopardi e il metodo Bayle*, «Rivista di Storia della Filosofia», 1/1999, p. 43.

sources, and becoming a needful conceptual set for any anti-metaphysical thought. In Richard Dawkins' words, we could even talk of a "materialist meme" which ideally connects different authors from different ages within the same philosophical plot. Primo Levi definitely "breathed" this air. According to Daniela Amsallem, «French culture, especially the period from Renascence to Enlightenment, played a key role in Levi's education.»[55] He perfectly knew French and for him, like all the people from Piedmont at the time, France represented a philosophical polestar. Moreover, Levi came into contact these ideas also thanks to his father's "Enlightenment library", wherein «there was everything, from Voltaire to Camille Flammarion.»[56]

The insistence on physical pain and its employment as an argument against theodicy suggests a noteworthy resemblance between Primo Levi and modern debate on atheism. As we noticed in the first chapter, modern atheists contested not so much the idea of a first cause, as rather the attribution to the latter of a moral account. In other words, their target was that mixture of goodness and omnipotence whereon the very idea of Providence is grounded, and which turns out to be utterly inconsistent before the real presence of pain in the world. Moreover, Pierre Bayle's main contribution – what makes Bayle's atheism a momentous innovation - was the shift of attention from the traditionally more crucial question on moral pain to the concrete experience of suffering. As Bayle writes in the article *Manichean* of the *Dictionnaire*:

> If man is the work of a single supremely good, supremely holy, supremely powerful principle, is it possible that he can be exposed to illnesses, to cold, to heat, to hunger, to thirst, to pain, to vexation? Is it possible he should have so many bad inclinations and commit so crimes? Is it possible that the supreme holiness would produce so criminal a creature? Is it possible that the supreme goodness would produce so unhappy a creature? Would not the supreme power joined to an infinite goodness pour down blessings upon its work and defend it from everything that might annoy or trouble it?[57]

If it is true that, by sinning, the human being «became wicked, and he deserved that the supremely just and supremely good God made him feel the-effects of His wrath»[58], then, as Bayle argues, «it is not God who is the cause of moral evil; but he is the cause of physical evil.» A punishment which is «far from being incompatible with the supremely good principle.»[59]

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[55] Daniela Amsallem, *Illuminista*, in *Primo Levi*, a cura di Mario Barenghi, Marco Belpoliti e Anna Stefi, Milano, Marcos y Marcos, 2017, p. 290.

[56] Primo Levi and Tullio Regge, *Conversation*, London, Penguin, 1990, p.13. In my opinion, one of Levi's main sources concerning the questions of theodicy and of anti-theodicy is Voltaire, especially 1759 *Candide.* Although at the moment it seems impossible to verify Levi's possession and direct knowledge of this work, however we might presume the highly probable presence of Voltaire's *Candide* within the father's "Enlightenment library". We know for sure that Levi read (in French) Voltaire's 1730 *La pucelle d'Orléans* («The Maid of Orleans») thanks to a quotation in *Carbon* from 1975 *The Periodic Table* (Complete Works, II, p. 939). On this see, Alberto Cavaglion and Paola Valabrega, *«Feeble and a Bit Profane.» The Voice of the Sacred in Primo Levi*, Torino, Einaudi, 2018, pp. 13-16 (digital edition). Moreover – but this is a hypothesis - , we might glimpse a concrete clue in the 1946 poem *February 11, 1946*, where Levi writes: «*I contemplated the mad blasphemy/That the world was one of God's mistakes,/And I was one the world's*» (Complete Works, III, p. 1896. Emphasis mine). We might presume that Levi here is applying to Leibniz's theodicy of "the best of all possible worlds" (the polemic subject of Voltaire's *Candide*) a sort of parodic inversion akin to the one he carried out towards Matthew 25:29 in *If This is a Man*. However, Voltaire's *Candide* can be considered one of the main carrier of modern reflection on theodicy within Primo Levi's thought. This would also explain Levi's polemic, rather than technical, attitude towards such a subject.

[57] Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, p. 148

[58] Ibidem, p. 149.

[59] Ibidem.

> If God did not foresee the fall of man, he must at least have judged that it was possible; therefore, since he saw he would be obliged to abandon his paternal goodness if the fall ever did occur, only to make his children miserable by exercising upon them the role of a severe judge, he would have determined man to moral good as he has determined him to physical good […]. This is where we are led by the clear and distinct ideas of order when we follow, step by step, what an infinitely good principle ought to do.[60]

Therefore, in Bayle's view, theodicy is nothing but a groundless attempt to reconcile Providence with the catastrophes of this world, believing that «This has happened, therefore this is not contrary to the holiness and goodness of God.»[61] By doing so, theology does not realize that it is justifying a preventable and useless fury. As if God were «a father who allows his children to break their legs so that he can show everyone his great skill in mending their broken bones.»[62]

A «bad God» who wants evil, even though he could prevent it, is exactly what Primo Levi contests and denies.[63] However, Levi bestows a social political account upon his anti-theodicy which makes his atheism a very unique answer to the question on "God after Auschwitz". As we noticed before, Primo Levi summarised his atheist argument by the enthymeme «There is Auschwitz, and so there cannot be God.» The biographical misrepresentation has been largely fed by the revision that he added at the later time on the typescript of Camon's interview: «I don't find a solution to this dilemma. I keep looking, but I don't find.»[64] Such an addition has appeared as mitigation more in compliance with Levi's detached style. As Alberto Cavaglion pointed out, «when Levi talks of Providence and of God, he is never dogmatic […]. His negations are never unconditional since they belong to a writing project which goes beyond any Manichean simplification.»[65] Nevertheless, it is quite surprising that interpreters have largely overlooked what Primo Levi claims few lines before while telling of an «argument» he had with a friend of his after the release[66]:

> He's a believer but not a Catholic; he came to see me after my release to tell me I was clearly one of the elect, since I'd be chosen to survive in order for me to write *Survival in Auschwitz* [i.e., *If This is a Man*]. And this, I must confess, seemed to me a blasphemy, that *God should grant privileges, saving one person and condemning someone else*. I must say that for me the experience of Auschwitz has been such as to sweep away any remnant of religious education I may have had.[67]

In *October 1944* - the chapter of *If This is a Man* where the procedures of selection for the gas chamber are described -, Levi already expressed his idiosyncrasy towards the idea of providential salvation. It is the well-known anecdote of Kuhn's prayer:

> Kuhn is out of his mind. Does he not see, in the bunk next to him, Beppo the Greek, who is twenty years old is going to the gas chamber the day after tomorrow, and knows it, and lies there staring at the light without saying anything and without even thinking anymore? Does Kuhn not understand that what happened today is an abomination, which no propitiatory prayer, no pardon, no expiation by the guilty

[60] Ibidem, pp. 149-150.
[61] Ibidem, p. 175.
[62] Ibidem, p. 176.
[63] Grieco, *God and I*, p. 275: «in the absence of God, you might say that I put myself in the position of Giacomo Leopardi, the poet who charged nature with deceiving her children with false promises of happiness which she knows she cannot keep.»
[64] Camon, *Conversation with Primo Levi*, p. 68.
[65] Levi, *Se questo è un uomo*, p. 222. Translation mine.
[66] The friend Levi is talking about is Nicolò Dallaporta, the «Assistant» mentioned in *Potassium* from 1975 *The Periodic Table* (*Complete Works*, II, pp. 794-803).
[67] Camon, *Conversation with Primo Levi*, p. 68. Emphasis mine.

> – nothing at all in the power of man to do – can ever heal? If I were God, I would spit Kuhn's prayer out upon the ground.[68]

Hence, we could sum up Levi's atheist argument as follows: *if god is inegalitarian, that he cannot exist.* It is a sort of social anti-theodicy which plays political evil against God. A political evil that, for Levi, bear the name of *inequality*. I will come back on this point in due course. As I pointed out before, for Levi, the *drowned-saved* division is the political expression of the cosmic injustice which, blindly and indifferently, divides the humankind into the lucky and the unlucky. «It was my good fortune to be deported to Auschwitz only in 1944»: in Levi, «luck» is the amoral replacement of Providence.[69] If the latter were applied to Auschwitz, then we should contemplate the idea of an inegalitarian God who decides to save some chosen and to exclude others from such a privileged circle of salvation. And this would be «the act of a *mafioso*.»[70] Once again, theodicy end up being riskier for theology than for atheology. Luck is the name Levi assigned to «chance»: a relativist frame which determines individuals' lives, and which, since random and indifferent, does not require to be ultimately justified.[71] Unlike the neutrality of the term "chance", "luck" owns a moral load whereby Levi stresses the unbalanced allocation of «good fortune» among humankind: *some have, whereas some do not.* In Levi's eyes, this is nothing but an unjust disequilibrium, an unbearable fundamental inequality whereon life is grounded.

However, Levi's understanding of Providence is not the same as the Cartesian theologists' who Bayle disputed with. Levi polemicizes against the Providence of Alessandro Manzoni's *The Betrothed*[72]: a transcendent and inscrutable principle which superintends the history of humankind and which, therefore, reveals itself in any political or social situations, no matter how individual or collective. As Levi questions in 1980 *Renzo's Fist*, «Why does Providence stop when confronted with the wickedness of human beings and the pain of the world»?[73] The answer he found in *The Betrothed*, one of his main sources, is «that troubles often come to those who bring them on themselves […]; and that when they come – whether by our own fault or not - confidence in God can lighten them and turn them to our won improvement.»[74] Indeed, according to Manzoni, to seek «true culprit» before the evil of history is «unreasonable.» We would end up finding ourselves «hesitating between two alternatives, equally blasphemous and insane: a denial, or an indictment, of Providence.»[75] Levi refuses such a social theodicy inasmuch he considers it as established upon inegalitarian criterions of salvation. Not by chance, here is where he mainly distances himself from Manzoni, whose social theodicy - as further proof of the atmospheric thought which permeates Levi's reflection - was inspired by Antonio Rosmini who, in turn, aimed to rebut Bayle's assault to Christian theology.[76]

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[68] Levi, *Complete Works*, I, pp. 123-124.
[69] Cf. Robert S. C. Gordon, *«Sfacciata fortuna». Luck and the Holocaust*, Torino, Einaudi, 2010.
[70] Grieco, *God and I*, p. 275.
[71] Ibidem: «In Auschwitz I had only one moment of religious temptation. It happened during the great selection of October 1944, when the group that picked out prisoners to send to the gas chambers was already at work. In short, I tried to commend myself to God, and I recall, with shame, having said to myself: "No, you can't do this, you don't have the right. First, because you don't believe in God; secondly, because asking for favours, without having a special case, is the act of a *mafioso*." The moral of the story: *I gave up the doubtful comfort of prayer and I left it to chance, or whoever else it might be, to decide my fate*.» Emphasis mine.
[72] Cf. Andrea Rondini, *Manzoni e Primo Levi*, in «Testo», 60/2010, pp. 50-52.
[73] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, p. 2086.
[74] Alessandro Manzoni, *The Betrothed and History of the Column of Infamy*, ed. David Forgacs and Matthew Reynolds, London, Dent, 1997, p. 550.
[75] Ibidem, p. 556.
[76] Pier Paolo Ottonello, *Rosmini «inattuale»*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2011, pp. 113-126.

Yet, there is a second aspects which highlights Levi's affinity with moderns. As we noticed in the previous chapter, starting from Bayle, modern atheism stands out for its innovative focus on the consciousness of suffering. I talked of *sensitive cogito*, that is the idea that, in light of new Cartesian epistemology, the undeniable reality of pain is experienced within the mind of the subject. As Bayle writes in the article *Paulicians* of the *Dictionnaire*.

> The author of our being, if he is infinitely beneficent, ought to take continual pleasure in making us happy and in preventing everything that might trouble or diminish our pleasure. That is an essential characteristic contained in the idea of supreme goodness. The fibers of our brains cannot be the cause of God's diminishing our pleasures; for according to you he is the sole author of matter, he is all powerful, and nothing prevents him from acting in accord with the full extent of his infinite goodness. He need only will that our pleasures not depend on the fibers of our brains.[77]

«The fibers of our brains»: evil is the pain, both physical and psychological, that a sentient being subjectively feel. To put is simply, "*Evil is real because I feel it and nobody can dissuade me from thinking so*." In my opinion, such an anti-Cartesian idea of a *sensitive cogito* represents the second, and probably main, affinity between Levi and the tradition of the *suffering animal*. Indeed, Levi is a materialist who consider pain as «a producer of knowledge.»[78] Speaking of which, the section *Concerning Pain* of 1977 *A Will* is emblematic:

> Experience will also teach you that pain, though perhaps not the only information of the senses that can be doubted, is certainly the least dubious. It's likely that the French sage whose name escapes me and who declared that he was certain he existed inasmuch as he was sure he was thinking didn't suffer much in his life, because otherwise he would have constructed his edifice of certainties on a different foundation. In fact, often those who think aren't sure they're thinking, their thought wavers between awareness and dream […] But those who suffer, yes, those who suffer have no doubts, those who suffer, alas, always certain, certain they are suffering and *ergo* exist […]. The pain of your flesh will provide you with the brutal certainty of being alive – you'll have no need to draw on the spring of philosophy.[79]

Levi's materialism clearly manifests in relation to the negation of Cartesian mind-body dualism. In the conclusion of the well-known story *Carbon*, Levi conveys the activity of «brain» in computational terms as a «labyrinthine tangle of yeses and nos», without hinting thus at any immaterial *quid*.[80] As Levi pointed out during a conference from 1986:

> I think that whoever had toothache cannot deny that mind and matter are strictly connected. We are deeply constrained to our flash […]. For my part, I do not think that mind depends on the causality of matter. I think that our mind arises from purely chemical reaction of matter, even thought so complex that, at the moment, they elude us. Probably, they will elude us for a long time, perhaps forever […]. The conclusion of *Carbon* is a good hook. Nevertheless, I believe this: that such a ballet, which will never be described, of the atoms in our brain influences our way of being and our way of thinking.[81]

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[77] Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, p. 172.

[78] See also Marco Belpoliti and Robert S. C. Gordon, *Primo Levi's Holocaust vocabularies*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi*, ed. Robert S. C. Gordon, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 62: «Pain in Levi's moral universe is a physiological reality, the product of a materialist world-view imposed by the sheer physical suffering of the camps; but it is nonetheless ethically weighted for that and nonetheless a producer of knowledge (just as it is for one of Levi's 'hidden' influences, the Italian Romantic poet Leopardi). Several of the founding moments of ethical reflection in *If This is a Man* are rooted in the new discovery of physical pain and violence, with various motivations and limitations.»

[79] Levi, *Complete Works*, II, p. 1488.

[80] Ibidem, p. 946. For an anti-materialist interpretation of Levi's *Carbon* see Cavaglion and Valabrega, *«Feeble and a Bit Profane»*, pp. 121ff.

[81] Luciana Costantini and Orietta Togni, *Il gusto dei contemporanei* (1986), in *Opere complete*, III, p. 766.

Charlotte Ross efficaciously subsumed Levi's anthropological thought through the category of «embodiment», an «ontological condition» at the core of which there stands the body experience and wherein the mind-matter distinction fails.[82] If the safety of our «heated houses»[83] can foster the illusion of a psychical life independent from the body, on the contrary, the moments of vulnerability and suffering roughly attest that «our life is organic chemistry.»[84] By alluding to none justification, according to Levi, pain is not only the «guardian of life»[85], but also that experience, both ethical and gnoseological, which allows «to understand ourselves and to understand the others around us.»[86]

For Levi, among these "others", there stand also the animals. In *Against Pain*, a brief essay devoted to the question of animal experimentation[87], Levi provides a very modern perspective on animal suffering:

> Animals must be respected […] not because they are "good" or useful to us (not all of them are) but because a rule engraved within us, and acknowledged by all religions and code of law, requires that we avoid creating pain, either in humans or in any other creature capable of feeling it. "All is mystery except our pain". This is a simple rule, but its ramifications are complex, and everyone knows that. How can we measure the suffering of others against our own? Still, solipsism is a puerile fantasy: "other people" exist, and among their number we should count our travelling companions, the animals.[88]

This confirms an anti-Cartesian vocation that connects Levi to a long-lasting philosophical tradition which finds in him a very unique and innovative – perhaps even unintentional - interpreter. Indeed, the concurrence of testimony and speculation within Levi's works makes the *suffering animal* a living paradigm, a very concrete conceptual dispositif which transforms a cross-section of an individual experience into a full-fledged analysis of the human condition.

In my opinion, one of the most evident signs of Levi's modernity is his understanding of the role played by science in human struggle against pain. As is known, literature and science are the two faces of Levi's «centauric»[89] account as intellectual: two dimensions or, better, two professions («*mestieri*»), which counterweight one another, thereby avoiding, one the one hand, the hyperuranic leaks of the first, on the other hand, the cold-heartedness of the second. A centauric account which defines the strict bond between reason and science that characterizes Levi's reflection as a whole. Starting from Descartes, such a bond has been the core of western civilisation:

> I am sure there is no one, not even among those who make a profession of it, who would not admit that everything known in medicine is practically nothing in comparison with what remains to be known, and that one could rid oneself of an infinity of maladies, as much of the body as of the mind, and even perhaps also the frailty of old age, if one had a sufficient knowledge of their causes and of all the remedies that nature has provided us.[90]

With these words, Descartes concluded the *Discourse on the Method*. They are symptomatic of the change of pace undertaken by modern philosophy: philosophy should be of service to get a better life and not to develop fruitless speculations. As Descartes points out, this practical purpose of knowledge «is desirable not only for the invention of an infinity

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[82] Charlotte Ross, *Primo Levi's Narratives of Embodiments*, pp. 1-2.
[83] Levi, *Complete Works*, I, p. 7.
[84] Lorenzo Mondo, *Il sistema periodico* (1975), in *Opere complete*, III, p. 84.
[85] Levi, *Complete Works*, I, p. 481.
[86] Amsallem, *Il mio incontro con Primo Levi*, p. 862.
[87] Benvegnù, *Animals and Animality In Primo Levi's Work*, pp. 64ff.
[88] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, pp. 2059-2060.
[89] Edoardo Fadini, *Science Fiction I (1966-1971)*, in *The Voice of Memory*, p. 85.
[90] Descartes, *Philosophical Essay*, p. 75.

of devices that would enable one to enjoy trouble-free the fruits of the earth and all the goods found there, but also principally for the maintenance of health, which unquestionably is the first good and the foundation of all the other goods of this life.»[91]As Daniela Amsallem pointed out, such a conviction inspires several pages of Levi's works. [92] Let's consider, for instance, *We are alone*, the concluding essay of *The Search for Roots*:

> The misery of man has another face, one imprinted with nobility; maybe we exist by chance, perhaps we are the sole instance of intelligence in the universe, certainly, we are immeasurably small, weak and alone, but if the human mind has conceived Black Holes, and dares to speculate on what happened in the first moments of creation, why should it not know how to conquer fear, poverty and grief?[93]

As is known, Levi devised his personal anthology by organizing the texts within a «diagram»[94] at which extremities there stand, on the one hand, the biblical Job, who was «victim of a cruel wager between Satan and God»[95], on the other hand, black holes, which remind us that «the universe is not made for human beings; it is hostile, violent, alien.»[96] These two figures describe the trajectory of Levi's atheism: «man suffer unjustly»[97], therefore «in the sky there are no Elysian Fields, only matter and light, distorted, compressed, dilatated, and rarefied to a degree that eludes our senses and our language.»[98] Before the image of such an inhospitable cosmos, the lack of a «a driver who controls its movements, maybe even built the machine itself»[99], could lead to discouragement, to a cosmic pessimism. As we noticed before, Levi denies any moral and epistemological value to the category of meaning. But he was not pessimist.[100] Among the anthological «routes» Levi proposes in *The Search for Roots*, there is «salvation through knowledge» wherein we find authors such as Lucretius, Bragg, Clarke and Darwin.[101] Levi was convinced of this: the salvation of the humankind can come only from science and reason, the places «where pain is soothed and life is rendered more tolerable, more secure, and longer.»[102] The layman Primo Levi believes in scientific progress. As he states in a 1979 interview: «I am instinctively optimist. I believe in life, in its realisation through mutations, evolutions. I believe in the human being as the cornerstone of life. I have faith in them.»[103] Nevertheless, as he will clarify later on, «if optimism mean having faith in the world getting better, in the future being better than the present; well, I am not optimist. Yet, the future has not been written yet: it will good, better, worse, awful, depending on what we will all do.»[104] Hence, science and reason, «positive abilities of the human being»[105], are the only tools capable of

[91] Ibidem, p. 74.
[92] Amsallem, *Illuminista*, p. 293.
[93] Primo Levi, *The Search for Root. A Personal Anthology*, London, Allen Lane, 2001, pp. 214-215.
[94] Ibidem, p. 9.
[95] Ibidem, p. 11.
[96] Ibidem, p. 214.
[97] Ibidem, p. 9.
[98] Ibidem, p. 214.
[99] Grieco, *God and I*, p. 276.
[100] See the last paragraph of this chapter. This mark also the distance with Giacomo Leopardi who was certainly an important source of Levi's works. As Levi states during a 1981 interview: «Leopardi has never been a favourite author of mine, because of the profound difference between us: he sees the world with such despair, whereas I am immersed in the world…». Cf. Aurelio Andreoli, *The Search for Roots* (1981), in *The Voice of Memory*, p. 100.
[101] Cf. Peter Forbes, *Introduction*, in Levi, *The Search for Roots*, pp. IX-XI.
[102] Levi, *Complete Works*, I, p. 631.
[103] Lucia di Ricco, *Un uomo chiamato Faussone* (1979), in *Opere complete*, III, p. 166.
[104] Giovanni Tesio, *Credo che il mio destino profondo sia la spaccatura* (1982), in ibidem, p.241.
[105] Mladen Machiedo, *La parola sopravviverà* (1969), in ibidem, p. 34.

contain the «brute power» which rules the matter whereof, willingly or not, we are made.[106] Of course, the human being has also «negative abilities.»[107] Such a utopia of science contemplates dystopian implications which Levi austerely – sometimes also ironically - warned us against in several stories an essays.[108] After all, at the moment, apart from science, nothing else seems capable of saving us from pain.

> Those who deny the benefits of machines are in bad faith. Perhaps they do not own a fridge, or they have never used the phone? Obviously, an insane technology, or subjugated by a class, can lead the world to a catastrophe or to a slow gangrene, while a science, as child of reason, can set humanity free from a large amount of its sufferings. Within certain bounds, it has already proved it.[109]

Ethologist-Levi Encounters Moralist-Darwin

In the previous paragraphs, I attempted to frame Levi's thought within the theoretical frame of philosophical modernity. In my opinion, better than "humanist" or "posthumanist", the label of "modern thinker" succeeds in conveying Levi's very atypical philosophical stance. I am aware that the genealogy I am proposing might seems on the edge between philological reliability and unfounded conjecture. However, I am absolutely convinced that the lack of concrete philological evidence can be successfully bypassed thanks to several conceptual signs which constantly recurs. Now, it is time to go back to the main question of the following chapter: what do humanity and inhumanity mean for Primo Levi?

«I read Darwin, who really impressed me.»[110] As Levi admitted during a 1985 interview, *The Origin of Species* was the early readings – he was fifteen-sixteen years old[111] - which made him an «observer of the world.»[112] As is known, Levi confessed his admiration for Darwin in *Why are Animals Beautiful* from 1981 *The Search for Roots*, where he anthologises *Utilitarian Doctrine, how far true: Beauty, how acquired*, the last paragraphs of the sixth chapter of *The Origin of Species*. Here, Darwin deals with the «utilitarian doctrine» which, as Darwin himself claims, if true, «would be absolutely fatal» to his theory.[113] According to such a doctrine, «many structures have been created for the sake of beauty, to delight man or the Creator (but this latter point is beyond the scope of scientific discussion), or for the sake of mere variety, a view already discussed.»[114] It is a perspective that collides with the two fundamental assumptions of Darwin's theory of natural selection: anti-finalism and ontological individualism. Indeed, the utilitarian doctrine not only presumes that modifications happen toward a certain end, but also that such modifications are produced «exclusively for the good of another species.»[115] As we noticed in the previous chapter, anti-finalism and ontological individualism allowed Darwin to ground natural selection on pure chance. That was his dangerous idea: the categorical negation of meaning, i.e., preconceived directions, within the evolution of life in this world.

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[106] In his post-humanist reading, Druker sees in Levi's «faith in the power of reason and science» a «kind of theodicy in which humanity's rational faculty is vindicated despite its potential to oppress people.» Cf. Druker, *Primo Levi and Humanism after Auschwitz*, p. 34.
[107] Ibidem.
[108] Charlotte Ross, *Primo Levi's science-fiction*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi*, ed. Robert S. C. Gordon, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 107-109.
[109] Toscani, *Incontro con Primo Levi* (1972), *Opere complete*, p. 45.
[110] Alberto Gozzi, *Lo specchio del cielo* (1985), in ibidem, p. 522.
[111] Primo Levi, *The Las Interview. Conversation with Giovanni Tesio*, Cambridge, Polity Press, p. 41.
[112] Gozzi, *Lo specchio del cielo*, p. 522.
[113] Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 160.
[114] Ibidem, pp. 159-160.
[115] Ibidem, p. 162.

By choosing this paragraph of *The Origin of Species*, Levi proves to be a profound connoisseur and a sharp interpreter of Darwin's theory.[116] Yet, when commenting these pages, he carries out a conceptual shift which, in my opinion, is symptomatic of his use of Darwin's works.

> In these pages, in sharp and almost amusing polemic, directed against the absurd thesis that animals and plants are created beautiful to be admired by human being, Darwin attains the harmonious beauty of strenuous and rigorous reasoning. Denying man a privileged position place in creation, he reaffirms with his own intellectual courage the dignity of man.[117]

Here, Levi emphasises the anthropological question, thereby stressing the concurrence between anti-finalism and anti-anthropocentrism within Darwin's discourse. As is known, according to Freud, Darwin has inflicted, along with Copernicus and «the present-day psychological research», a «great outrage» against human being's «naive self-love.» As Freud claims in *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, Darwin «robbed man of his apparent superiority under special creation, and rebuked him with his descent from the animal kingdom, and his ineradicable animal nature.»[118] The image of Darwin as "wrecker of anthropocentrism" is well-known. Yet, Levi's comment is intriguing because the question of "human being's place in nature" is not processed in this section of *The Origin of Species*. In *Utilitarian Doctrine*, anti-anthropocentrism is surely a particular case of the wider critique to teleology. Notwithstanding, Darwin does not specifically «reaffirms» the «dignity of man.» As we noticed in the previous chapter, in *The Origin of Species*, Darwin intentionally avoided debating the moral-anthropological implication of his biological thesis. Therefore, through his comment, Levi stresses a question which is actually distinctive of another important book by Darwin: *The Descent of Man*.

On closer inspection, Levi's move should not surprise. In fact, starting from the mid-1900s, the reception of Darwin's works in Italy took place within a scientific-philosophical environment obsessed with the anthropological implication of evolutionism. I cannot reconstruct here such a complex theme.[119] Very briefly, even before 1864 first Italian translation of *The Origin of the Species* by Giovanni Canestrini[120] (who was Darwin's correspondent and whose research on «rudimentary characters» were quoted in *The Descent of Man*[121]), the Italian debate on Darwinism was prevailed by the theme of «scimmietà» ("simianity"), i.e., the tricky question human beings' descent from other primates. As is known, Darwin did not discuss this topic until 1871. Also in England the debate on evolutionism caused by the publication of *The Origin of Species* immediately took an anthropological turn. Let's consider, for instance, the 1860 Oxford debate or the publication in 1863 of Thomas Huxley's *Man's Place in Nature*. In Italy, Darwin's theory was received in a very troubled cultural period, where philosophical questions (such as the contrast

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[116] On Darwinian anti-finalism in Primo Levi see Telmo Pievani, *Darwin e gli ibridi: l'evoluzione in Primo Levi*, in *Primo Levi*, pp. 539-545. Moreover, on Levi's Darwinian understanding of chance see Gordon, *«Sfacciata fortuna»*, pp. 32-33.

[117] Levi, *The Search for Root*, p. 25.

[118] Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, New York, Liverlight, 1920, p. 247. In a 1985 interview with Gabriel Motola, Levi declares having read Freud's *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* when he was 12. Cf. Gabriel Motola, *Primo Levi. L'arte del romanzo*, in Levi, *Opere complete*, III, p. 803.

[119] For a very effective reconstruction see Giuliano Pancaldi, *Darwin in Italy: Science across Cultural Frontiers*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1992.

[120] Charles Darwin, *Sull'origine delle specie per elezione natura ovvero conservazione delle razze perfezionate nella lotta per l'esistenza*, ed. Giovanni Canestrini and Leonardo Salimbeni, Modena, Zanichelli, 1864. This translation, based on the 1861 third edition of *The Origin of Species*, will be revised in 1875 in the light of the sixth and final 1872 edition. The copy of *The Origin of Species* owned by Levi and quoted in *The Search for Roots* (Milan, Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1920), is still based on Canestrini's translation.

[121] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 17.

between positivism and idealism) and political issues (such as the unification process and the resulting diplomatic clash with Catholic Church) tended to overlap. The apeman theory was the perfect catalyst of these tensions. Whereas the Nineteenth century was characterised by a vivid debate, which did not prevent though a flourishing development of anthropological studies in Italy, the following century will be utterly different. Indeed, the influence of neoidealism, the latter become the "official" philosophy in Italian schools[122], caused a harsh devaluation of natural sciences. The debate on evolutionism was kept alive by some political and cultural pockets of resistance which acknowledged author like Darwin as the wrecker of fascist dogmatics. This is the context wherein Levi encounters, assimilates and interprets Darwin's works.[123]

Therefore, Levi reads *The Origin of Species* through an anthropological lens. Despite some Lamarckian[124] and Lorenzian[125] oscillations which blur, respectively, the radical anti-finalism and the strong individualism of Darwin's theory, Levi's anthropological thought fully draws from Darwin's works. As Marco Belpoliti pointed out:

> Levi conceives the human being as an animal (the human animal); his view is ethological […]. Levi has a Darwinian understanding of the human being, which rules the classic, but also Christian, idea of the relationship between personhood and human nature. For him, the latter is not a *quid* to research, but it is ethologically the outcome of behavioural strategies starting from biological basis. Ethics belongs to the *ethos* that civilization produces historically.[126]

Hence, what does this sort of "recovered dignity" in light of evolution consist of? In order to answer this question, it might be useful to come back to 1979 lecture on racial intolerance:

> I was saying that in my opinion—I propose this solution to the problem—racial prejudice originates in the animal world; and in effect we find it among most social, gregarious animals, those animals that, like man, can't survive alone and must live in groups. Among these animals we can observe many phenomena that are typically human. […] We recognize the need for a hierarchy. This is a strange and poorly explained phenomenon, but it is well-known and occurs even among domestic animals. […] In chicken coops there is a pecking order among the hens; after a certain number of preliminary pecks, a precise order is established according to which there is a hen that pecks all the others, a second hen that pecks all except one, and so on down to the last hen in the coop, which is pecked by all and pecks no other.[127]

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[122] Giuseppe Montalenti, *Il darwinismo in Italia*, in «Belfagor», 1/1983, p. 66.

[123] Ian Thomson, *Primo Levi. A life*, New York, Metropolitan Books, 2014 (digital edition), p. 100: «That Charles Darwin had been discredited by Fascist ideologues as a "materialist" made reading him faintly subversive. The deeper Levi read into *The Origin of Species*, however, the more he was awed by the work's dark grandeur. It was a secular Genesis that linked the animal kingdom from man-o'-war jelly fish to man. What Levi caught from Darwin was a "grand design" for the universe and a sober delight in extracting order from chaos.»

[124] Belpoliti, *Primo Levi. Di fronte e di profilo*, p. 241: «Curiously, in some stories Levi's seems to turn more to Lamarck's theories than Darwin's: perhaps, the theory of hereditariness of characters due to environment provides better narratives effects (comical, for instance) that a strict orthodox Darwinism». Translation mine.

[125] As Primo Levi states in 1979 *Novels Dictate by Crickets*: «the science of ethology has come into being and rapidly attained maturity, showing us […] that every animal species follows laws of its own, and that these laws, to the extent that we are able to understand them, are in close accord with evolutionary theories—which is to say, they favor the preservation of the species, though not always that of the individual» (*Complete Works*, III, p. 2075). The idea that the preservation of the species is not only primary, but also (sometimes) antithetical to that of individual, is clearly derived from Konrad Lorenz's ethology. An idea that Levi could easily find in *On Aggression*, the work quoted in *Racial Intolerance*. As Richard Dawkins pointed out: «Konrad Lorenz, in *On Aggression*, speaks of the "species preserving" functions of aggressive behavior […]. The group selection idea is so deeply ingrained that Lorenz […] evidently did not realize that his statements contravened orthodox Darwinian theory». Cf. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, p. 8.

[126] Belpoliti, *Primo Levi. Di fronte e di profilo*, p. 123. Translation mine.

[127] Levi, *Complete Works*, II, p. 1311.

Beside the reference to the question of racism, Levi's «solution» is as simple as it is puzzling: political evil «originates in the animal world», namely derives from our nature as social animals. Levi's argumentative strategies is the following: social animals tend to establish hierarchical cohabitational models which, therefore, are intrinsically oppressive and violent. Thus, the forms of political evil that, since the dawn of time, distress human society – racism, inequality, intolerance, and so on – are produced whenever our inner animality is free to express. It is a syllogism which lies at the base of Levi's reflection on Auschwitz and that, not by chance, we already find in the preface of *This is a man*:

> Many people – many nation – can find themselves believing, more or less consciously, that "every stranger is an enemy". For the most part, this conviction lies buries in the mind like some latent infection; it betrays itself only in random, disconnected acts, and is not the basis of a system of thought. But when this happens, when the unspoken dogma becomes the major premise in a syllogism, then, at the end of the chain, stands the Lager. It is the product of a conception of the world carried to its logical consequences with rigorous consistency; as long as the conception exists, the consequences remain to threaten us.[128]

In *If This is a Man* and in the following works devoted to Auschwitz, Levi's ethological «study of the human mind»[129] mostly remain veiled or, in any case, much less manifest compared to the biological fiction works.[130] Surely, it is correct talking of Levi as an «ethologist and anthropologist of the Lager.»[131] However, in the matter of the works on Auschwitz, I do consider to be more appropriate Giovanni Tesio's definition of Levi as a «classic moralist»[132], he who inspects the inner struggle within the human being between instinct and reason, between selfishness of self-preservation and moral sense. In my opinion, in *If This is a Man* or in *The Drowned and the Saved*, the ethological understanding of the human-animal relationship can be considered as a sort of transcendental of Levi's anthropological thought – as we noticed before, Levi encounters natural science well before Auschwitz -, but not their pillar theme. In the works on Auschwitz, such a relationship is modulated in light of a more ethical and political question: the process of dehumanisation. In line with contemporary scholarship on dehumanization, rather than attempting to answer the question "What the human being is?" (as Arendt pointed out, Auschwitz proves the unsustainability and the dangerousness of any discourse on the "human nature"), Levi seeks to understand how it was possible to devise, politically and juridically, the absolute victim.

At this point, if we add the Darwinian factor, the rift between the Humanist-Levi and the Posthumanist-Levi appears to be even more puzzling. Indeed, within *If This is a Man*, Levi often depict the situation of the Lager as a «pitiless process on natural selection»[133] or a

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[128] Ibidem, I, p. 5. See also, Robert S. C. Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture, 1944-2010*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2012, p. 95.
[129] Levi, *Complete Works*, I, p. 5.
[130] According to Alberto Cavaglion, in *If This is a Man*, «the subordination of science to literature is a surprising and unexpected fact for those who know Levi through his following works (*Flaw of Form*, *The Periodic Table*, *Natural Histories*, *The Wrench*, *Other People's Trade*, *If Not Now, When?*) […]. The revenge of chemistry over literature and philosophy starts in 1963, after the publication of *The Truce*, and strengthens with the account of the chemist-writer, the Centaur).» Alberto Cavaglio, *Primo Levi: guida a Se questo è un uomo*, Roma, Carocci, 2020, p. 11. Translation mine. Nevertheless, if my interpretative hypothesis is correct, I would not talk of "subordination", but rather of "implicit assumption". In *If This is a Man*, science does not surely provide a stylistic register (what about the chapter *The Drowned and the Saved*?); however, there is no doubt that sciences such as ethology and evolutionism are the "reading filter" of Levi's concentrationary experience.
[131] Cf. the section *Primo Levi antropologo ed etologo* in *Primo Levi*, pp. 400sgg
[132] Giovanni Tesio, *Primo Levi: ancora qualcosa da dire. Conversazioni e letture tra biografia e invenzione*, Novara, Interlinea, 2018, p. 63.
[133] Levi, *Complete Works*, I, p. 84.

«struggle for life.»[134] Hence, in Auschwitz, life is reduced to its basic mechanism, to an Hobbesian «ongoing war of all against all.»[135] Even morality itself, what Kantianly prevents the human being to look like «a thing» in the eyes of the others, goes to correspond to the categorical imperative of survival: «Eat your own bread, and, if you can, that of your neighbor.» As Levi states in the conclusion of the chapter *This Side of Good and Evil*:

> We now invite the reader to contemplate the possible meaning in the Lager of the words "good" and "evil", "just" and "unjust"; let each judge, in the basis of the picture outlined and the examples given above, how much of our ordinary moral world could survive on this side of the barbed wire.[136]

Therefore, Levi seems to suppose a strict dualism between naturality-animality and morality-humanity. As if the Darwinian source did not succeed in deconstructing such opposition, but rather in sharpening it further. Actually, Darwinism is exactly the perspective that permitted Levi to conceive the natural data in continuity with the anthropological one. This is possible if we account the "Moralist-Darwin" of *The Descent of Man* instead of the "Biologist-Darwin" of *The Origin of Species*. Thus, was Levi a reader of *The Descent of Man*? To date, it has not been possible to attest whether Levi possessed or studies this work. However, we know for sure that Levi encounter *The Origin of Species* when he was fifteen-sixteen years old, that is between 1934 and 1935.[137] It is a very important period for his education, marked out by bulimic readings, among which the scientific-naturalistic ones stand out.[138] Thus, we might suppose that Levi read and studied *The Descent of Man* in this period – we also know for sure that he read *The Voyage of the Beagle*.[139] After all, as we noticed before, in Italy, Darwinism is the equivalent of "discourse on Man", a discourse that Levi would have never known if he had read only *The Origin of Species*. As further proof, we should consider, in the light of what I underlined in the previous chapter, that Darwin discussed themes such as animal mind, social instincts and the material origin of morality – themes dear to Levi - *only* in the second and third chapters of the first part of *The Descent of Man*. Moreover, as Paola Valabrega pointed out, a fundamental question in Levi's works is the Darwinian understanding of the «hand-mind» relationship. [140] As is known, this is a question that Darwin debates in the fourth chapter of the first part of *The Descent of Man.*[141]

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[134] Ibidem, pp. 68, 82, 83.
[135] Ibidem, III, pp. 2508-2509.
[136] Ibidem, I, p. 81.
[137] Cf. Thomson, *Primo Levi. A life*, pp. 67-68: «In Darwin's *The Origin of Species* Levi found an alternative theology that recognised no God. And as Levi moved a step closer to his eventual atheism, so he told his classmate Mario Piacenza that evolution theory was the "most portentous natural truth that science had discovered".»
[138] When he was sixteen, Levi read William Bragg's 1925 *Concerning the Nature of Things*, the work which acquainted him with chemistry. Cf. Levi, *The Search for Roots*, p. 31.
[139] Levi, *Opere complete*, III, p. 619.
[140] Paola Valabrega, *Mano/cervello*, in *Primo Levi*, 320-329. As Levi writes in 1978 *The Wrench*: «Faussone's hands […] brought to mind long-ago readings of Darwin, of the craftsman's hand that, making tools and bending matter, rescues the human brain from indolence» (*Complete Works*, II, pp. 1096-1097).
[141] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, p. 141: «Man could not have attained his present dominant position in the world without the use of his hands which are so admirably adapted to act in obedience to his will […] But the hands and arms could hardly have become perfect enough to have manufactured weapons, or to have hurled stones and spears with a true aim, as long as they were habitually used for locomotion and for supporting the whole weight of the body, or as long as they were especially well adapted, as previously remarked, for climbing trees. Such rough treatment would also have blunted the sense of touch, on which their delicate use largely depends. From these causes alone it would have been an advantage to man to have become a biped; but for many actions it is almost necessary that both arms and the whole upper part of the body should be free; and he must for this end stand firmly on his feet.» The conclusion of Levi's 1971 *His own Maker* follows almost to the letter these passages of *The Descent of Man*. As Levi writes: «For some time now, my wife and I have understood that walking is the answer, but that walking on four legs is only half an answer […]. But there's more: my hands

In my opinion, the most blatant sign of Levi as a reader of *The Descent of Man*, that is a connoisseur of themes which today are typical of evolutionary debate on morality (but that for Darwin was simply moral philosophy), is his use of the term-concept of «civilisation». The latter appears for the very first time during the «Auschwitz experiment» that Levi carried out in the chapter *The Drowned and the Saved* of *If This is a Man*:

> Let thousands of individuals, differing in age, condition, origin, language, culture, and customs, be enclosed within barbed wire, and there be subjected to regular, controlled life, which is identical for all and inadequate for all needs. No one could have set up a more rigorous experiment to determine what is inherent and what acquired in the behavior of the human animal faced with the struggle for life.[142]

Before revealing the results of such a «gigantic biological and social experiment», i.e., the *drowned-saved* division -, Levi offers two important clarifications. First, as Levi states:

> We do not believe in the most obvious and facile deduction: that man is fundamentally brutal, egoistic, and stupid in his conduct once every *civilized institution* is taken away, and that the "Häftling" is consequently nothing but a man without inhibitions. We believe, rather, that the only conclusion to be drawn is that, in the face of driving need and physical privation, many *habits* and *social instincts* are reduced to silence.[143]

Here, Levi rejects the «obvious» – and, for him, naïve - pessimistic anthropology *à la* Hobbes, instead adopting an ethological perspective – more congenial to him – which replaces the strict dualism between human nature and civilisation with a gradual understanding of sociability. This because, according to him, the concentration camp is not a state of nature, a pre-political condition which requires «civilized institutions» in order suppress human selfishness. For Levi, Auschwitz is a hyper-political situation which brings Totalitarianism to completion. As he will later maintain during a 1975 interview: «The Lager, Auschwitz, was the fulfilment of Fascism, it was an integrated fascism, completed.»[144] It is the same perspective adopted also by Hannah Arendt in *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, which conceives the extermination camp not as an accidental feature of Totalitarianism, but rather as its essential and distinctive instrument of domination.[145] And such hyperpolitical (or totalitarian) character of the Lager displays in the division between the *drowned* and the *saved.* As Levi points out:

> This division is much less evident in ordinary life, for there it rarely happens that a man loses himself. Normally a man is not alone and, I his rise or fall, is bound to the destiny of his neighbors, so that it is exceptional for anyone to acquire unlimited power, or to fall by a succession of defeats into utter ruin.

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would be free. They already are, but until now I hadn't considered using them for anything other than climbing trees […]. I also often noticed that in the process of making things you think of all sorts of other things to make. I often feel that I'm thinking more with my hands than with my brain» (*Complete Works*, I, pp. 717-718).

[142] Levi, *Complete works*, I, p. 82.

[143] Ibidem, pp. 82-83. Emphasis mine.

[144] Primo Levi, *Intervista del 25 gennaio 1975, in Rai Tg della sera*, in *Primo Levi. Il veleno di Auschwitz. Il volto e la voce: testimonianze in TV 1963-1986*, ed. Ferdinando Sessi and Stas' Gawronski, Venezia, Marsilio, 2016, Translation mine. Beside 1984 *Foreword to "People in Auschwitz" by Hermann Langbein* (*Complete Works*, III, pp. 2671-2674), within Levi's works we never find the term "Totalitarianism". He always talked of "fascism". This is due to Levi's commitment to anti-fascism which, starting from his experience as partisan, characterized the accentuated political account of his testimony. Moreover, as Italian intellectual, Levi was always concerned about the tendency by Italian institutional memory to separate Fascism from Nazism in order to relieve the national consciousness from crimes related to the Holocaust. Finally, in Italy, it prevented, and still prevents, a fully-fledged comprehension of Mussolini's dictatorship. On this see Anna Bravo, *Narratives for History*, Torino, Einaudi, 2014, pp. 6-26, and Robert S. C. Gordon, *Primo Levi and Holocaust Memory in Italy, 1958– 1963*, in *New Reflections on Primo Levi*. *Before and After Auschwitz*, ed. Risa Sodi and Marcus Millicent, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 45-59.

[145] Cf. Simona Forti *Il totalitarismo*, Roma-Bari, Laterza 2001.

> Moreover, everyone is usually in possession of such spiritual, physical, and even financial resources that the probability of a shipwreck, of total inadequacy in the face of life, is relatively small. And then one must add the definite cushioning effect exercised by the law, and by the *moral sense* that constitutes a self-imposed law; *for a country is considered the more civilized the more the wisdom and efficiency of its laws hinder a poor man from becoming too poor or a powerful one too powerful*.[146]

Within *If This is a Man*, «civilisation» stands not simply for the world outside the barbed wire. If anything, it is a parameter whereby Levi judges the level of inhumanity inside the concentration camp. Moreover, as these starting passages amply show, when Levi speaks of «civilisation», he turns to a vocabulary («habits», «social instincts», «moral sense») typical of the evolutionary studies on morality ushered in by Darwin's *The Descent of Man*.[147] This is a clear example of what Cesare Segre named «interdiscursivity»[148], which attests how, since the very beginning, Darwinism provided Levi with an "analytical filter" to depict his experience of imprisonment. The idea of a basic continuity between civilisation and uncivilization, portrayed by the *drowned-saved* division, shows how for Levi the difference between these two dimensions is a matter of «corrective actions.» As Levi states in a 1974 interview with Enzo Collotti:

> In the so-called civil life, there are sort of effective corrective actions. The more effective they are the more civilized society is. They are many: family, friends, the money one has in the bank, the material or moral or spiritual inheritance one had received. All things that help. In the ordinary life, one hardly drowns without receiving help, at least symbolically. Instead, that was the rule over there [the Lager]: who fell, really fell. They reached the bottom; nothing could stop them. And who went up did not find any corrective actions to their rise, as the law is or should be in the social life, which is why they obtain an unlimited power, or they should not. In a civil society this should not happen. Any march, whether upwards or downwards, are braked. Over there they were not braked. As a balloon that goes up and a lead block that goes down.[149]

In Levi's view, civilisation is an indicator of humanity, an egalitarian principle which tends to lessen the extremities.[150] Because, as I underlined before, in Levi's eyes, history and life spontaneously tend to inequality, to establish disparities which turn out to be utterly unfair to our consciousness as civilised social animals.

> What I attempted to theorise in the chapter titled *The Drowned and the Saved* is a certain bipartition of humanity, which is why it seems that human beings are divided, naturally, by birth, in two categories: those who go up and those who go down. It is an extremely repugnant fact. It contradicts everything we believe regarding morality or sociology or politics. But it really looked so at that time: that there were the upper and the lower, the drowned and the saved, those who win and those who lose. These are things that we have all had a glimpse of in ordinary life, but, as always happened, in a concentration camp

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[146] Levi, *Complete Works*, I, p. 83. Emphasis mine.

[147] Belpoliti and Gordon, *Primo Levi's Holocaust vocabularies*, p. 56: «much of Levi's understanding of the processes and experiences of the concentration camps is underpinned by an evolutionary or Darwinist vocabulary of adaptation. Levi's entire focus in *If This is a Man* could be described as centring on survival of the fittest, not in the sense of the most strong, but in the correct Darwinian sense of the most fit, the best adapted to the environment. The key chapter of the book, in this respect as in many others, is 'The Drowned and the Saved', which is taken up with a (partly ironic, partly pseudo-Darwinian) typology of adaptation – those who are likely to survive and those who are not in this very strange, inverted environment of Auschwitz.»

[148] Cesare Segre, *Intertestuale-interdiscorsivo. Appunti per una fenomenologia delle fonti*, in *La parola ritrovata. Fonti e analisi letteraria*, ed. Costanzo Di Girolamo and Ivano Paccagnella, Palermo, Sellerio, 1982, 23-24.

[149] Enzo Collotti, *Il mestiere di raccontare* (1974), in *Primo Levi*, p. 41. Translation mine.

[150] Conti, *Il lavoro aiuta a sopravvivere*, p. 152: «The Lager was nothing but a fragment, an extreme case of our ordinary reality, although through a deforming lens: as in a sort of social Darwinism, the «unfit» succumbs. The ways to overcome such a situation can be as many as the possible societies, different than ours. In fact, there are crueller societies where the unfits are killed, as there are others more selfless attempting to save them.»

> these things occurred with the lid off, in plain view, let's say, neither a microscope nor a meditation was needed to observe them. They leaped out. When the convoy, new people, arrived , the spontaneous selection occurred after few days. It was like a sieve: there were those who stay above and those who stay beneath. I have cynically named them the drowned and the saved, but it was surely not a salvation in a Christian sense […]. It was rather Darwinian. They were the suitable and the unsuitable.[151]

At this point of the conversation, Collotti rises a licit doubt: «Hence, such a renewed selection, reactivated in the concentration camp, is an example of what is actually the human selection which led civilisation to this point. It is an example in reverse.» Yet, as Levi promptly clarify:

> What you are talking about, and which Darwin talked about, is the natural selection. Here, it is unnatural […]. It occurred within an environment that was not natural, utterly unnatural. It was an unnatural selection, so to speak. It occurred in a violated environment, horribly violated from above, wherein everything was upside down; where one could obtain merit in the most horrendous ways; where theft was even rewarded; where violence itself was often rewarded, compensated. Thus, the assimilation of the selection we are talking about, the spontaneous one of the Lager, with natural selection should be partially accepted. It was so somehow, if we want to play with words. It was a natural selection, but in a showily unnatural environment.[152]

Therefore, Levi simply applies to the Darwinian law of natural selection a moral judgment: «In the Lager, where man is alone and where the struggle for life is reduced to its primordial mechanism, this *unjust law* is openly in force, and is recognized by all.»[153] Levi makes natural selection morally responsible for the inequality that it produces. The *drowned* and the *saved*, the fit and the unfit: the blind and mechanical laws of life do not contemplate intermediate figures.

As we noticed in the previous chapter, in *The Origin of Species*, Darwin looks at this natural injustice detachedly, not to say stoically: «When we reflect on this struggle, we may console ourselves with the full belief, that the war of nature is not incessant, that no fear is felt, that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply.»[154] This is the unperturbed view of the biologist who studies the operating

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[151] Collotti, *Il mestiere di raccontare*, pp. 40-41. Translation mine. The expression «with the lid off» will reappear in 1979 *Novels Dictated by Crickets*. It is a quotation from Aldous Huxley' 1931 *Sermon in Cats*. Cf. Aldous Huxley, *Music at Night And Other Essay*, London, Chatto&Windus, 1957, p. 260. Levi derives from the latter the idea that «animals, and especially mammals, and domestic animals in particular, are like us, but "with the lid off"» (*Complete Works*, III, p. 2075). This statement exemplifies the anthropological purpose of Levi's stories and essays on animals: «their behavior is similar to what ours would be if we were free of inhibition». We might glimpse here a subtle reference to the «Auschwitz experiment.» Nevertheless, as Levi promptly clarifies: «Perhaps matters are not quite so simple». Thanks to his Darwinian awareness, Levi never established a direct analogy between human beings and animals, thereby avoiding «the tendency to describe humans in zoological terms, to seek and find at all costs the animal inside the man.» Yet, as Damiano Benvegnù pointed out, if properly contextualized, Huxley's expression did not simply refers to animals, but rather to «Primitive people, like children and animals» who are «simply civilized people with the lid off, so to speak – the heavy elaborate lid of manners, conventions, traditions of thought and feeling beneath which each one of us passes his or her existence». Cf. Damiano Benvegnù, *Primo Levi e Konrad Lorenz. «Dei bellissimi libri di divulgazione»*, in *Innesti*, pp. 200-201. Moreover, the metaphor of the «sieve» to explain the harsh process of natural selection derives from Herbert Spencer's theory of survival of the fittest. Cf. Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (1862), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 430-431.

[152] Collotti, *Il mestiere di raccontare*, pp. 41-42. Translation mine.

[153] Levi, *Complete Works*, I, p. 84. Emphasis mine.

[154] As Domenico Scarpa underlined, in his translation of *The Origin of Species*, Giovanni Canestrini translated «happy» to «abili», the Italian for «able» (Carlo Darwin, *Sulla origine delle specie per elezione naturale*, trans. Giovanni Canestrini, Torino, UTET, 1875, p. 76). A blatant case of paronomasia. Cf. Carlo Emilio Gadda and Goffredo Parise, *«Se mi vede Cecchi, sono fritto.» Corrispondenza e Scritti 1962-1973*, ed. Domenico Scarpa, Milano, Adelphi, 2015, p. 289 (digital edition). Yet, despite the alteration of meaning, Levi would have found the term «abili» to be more congenial to his perspective. Indeed, for him, abilities, such as the knowledge of

principle of life and whose only consolation is the fact that, in spite of its structural weakness, life goes on anyway. Due to his past as victim, Levi – who always claimed the subjective character of his reflection – could not accept such a consolation. As he states in *Novels Dictated by Crickets*: «These are all ideas filled with a shadowy significance of their own, and they stir muffled echoes deep in our civilized conscience.»[155] However, Levi could find a more logical and moral perspective in Darwin's *The Descent of Man*: that «reverse effect of evolution», which counterposes natural selection and civil selection, although remaining within the evolutionary continuity of natural selection. Therefore, the moralist-Darwin provided Levi with a theoretical horizon more congenial to him, wherein naturalism and moralism coexists without contradicting one another. Once the Darwinian source is accounted, Levi's perspective does not appear to be as inconsistent as it did before, a sort of naïve and equivocal median position between classic humanism and contemporary post-humanism. Levi's understanding of the human-inhuman relationship is coherently and consciously Darwinian. In few words, what seems to be an actual fallacy from a humanist or posthuman point of view, for Levi is evolutionary «remission» [«*remissione*»].[156] In my opinion, such a Darwinian background is what makes Levi's testimony one of the most original and solid philosophical answer to the question of dehumanization, that is the tricky triangulation between humanity, political evil, and inhumanity.

In 1976, Levi writes an appendix for the school edition of *If This is a Man* «in order to answer the questions that were repeatedly addressed to [him] by student readers.»[157] It is an important text within Levi's reflection on Auschwitz where, on the ethical-political side, he starts sketching all those considerations which, in 1986 *The Drowned and the Saved*, will be subsumed under the well-known category of «gray zone»[158]. On the anthropological side, he deepens further his ethological understanding of Totalitarian political evil. Indeed, one of these questions ask: «How do you explain the Nazi's fanatical hatred of the Jews»? Levi's answer discloses the contents of 1979 conference on racial intolerance.

> Hatred of the Jews, improperly called anti-Semitism, is a specific case of a wider phenomenon, and that is aversion toward those who are different from us. Undoubtedly, it originates in a zoological phenomenon: animals belonging to different groups of a single species manifest signs of intolerance toward one another. This happens even among domestic animals: we know that a hen from one henhouse, introduced into another, is pecked for several days, as a sign of rejection. The same happens among rats and bees and, in general, all species of social animals. Now, *man is certainly a social animal*

German or a certain political shrewdness, were, along with luck, the decisive factors of survival. Furthermore, this is connected to Levi's "Marxist-socialist" characterization of Darwin's evolutionism, especially regarding the themes of work and of the hand-mind relationship. See Pierpaolo Antonello, *Primo Levi and "Man as Maker"*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi*, 89-103.

[155] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, p. 2078.

[156] Ibidem, I, p. 83: «But things are different in the Lager: here the struggle to survive is without respire, because everyone is desperately and ferociously alone». In his translation of *If this is a man*, Stuart Woolf translates the original «senza remissione» (*Opere complete*, I, p. 64) to «without respite» (elsewhere translated as «submission» or «mercilessly»), thereby altering the profane tone of the sentence. Indeed, as Alberto Cavaglion underlined, «remissione» is a key word in *If this is a man*, and it surely has a Manzonian origin. It is a term imbued with moral-religious meanings which Levi always tended to alter and overturn. Cf. Levi, *Se questo è un uomo*, 193 and 205. Notwithstanding, in the chapter *The Drowned and the Saved*, «senza remissione» seems to have a medical-scientific value (in compliance with the Latin etymology of *remittĕre*), that is the abatement of a certain process without overcoming it. Hence, in my opinion, when Levi claims that «qui la lotta per sopravvivere è senza remissione», he means that, unlike what usually happens in a civil country, in the Lager the struggle for life is not "softened", "braked", "corrected".

[157] Ibidem, I, p. 167.

[158] Belpoliti, *Primo Levi. Di fronte e di profilo*, Milano, Guanda, 2015, p. 491.

(Aristotle confirmed it), but we would be in trouble if all the zoological urges that survive in man were tolerated! Human laws are useful precisely for this: to restrain animal impulses.[159]

Thanks to Darwin, Levi "discovers" how to combine the human with the animal, civilization with nature, without supposing any ontological difference. On closer view, the Darwinian modulation of the human-animal relationship ties two terms which express contrary concepts, thereby confirming, as Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo highlighted, Levi's stylistic predilection towards the «oxymoron.»[160] As if Darwin taught Levi how to combine two terms which, probably due to his early idealist philosophical education («I am a "liceo" student with a humanistic education»)[161], he tended to understand dialectically. In Levi, "animal" is conceptually the same as "natural", "biological", "savage", "brute". On the contrary, "human" stands for "reason" and "freedom", that is the faculties that contradict natural necessity. In *The Descent of Man*, Levi could find the same discursive registers, although inflected within the conceptual horizon of evolution. For Levi, as for Darwin, the human is not a metaphysical *quid*, but an evolutionary possibility, a contingent condition that can always be revoked. Therefore, animality is something inherent of human condition which constantly grips it and drag it toward regression. This reversive (or remissive) dialectic is the weight-bearing structure of the dispositif of dehumanization. In few words, our humanity, what does not make us look like a «thing», is a matter of civilisation.

For Levi, Auschwitz did not represent the return to a phantom state of nature since among the products of the latter there are moral sense, social instincts and sympathy. Products that the concentration camp almost succeed to crush. Auschwitz did not restore the law of natural selection among human beings – supposing that it has never been like this -, but it rather perverted it, bestialized it.

> Fascism is unnatural. Even more so Nazism, because it is an underlined Fascism. Assaulting is unnatural , we learned this recently, animals do not assault one another but in moderation. They do not exterminate one another. Mutual extermination does not exist among animal species. It is no natural. The intra-species extermination, within the human race, was the theory of Nazism. Human race was artificially divided in two or four or twenty parts; one was good, the others were not good. They were destined for extermination or exterminating them was licit. This was unnatural, racism is unnatural. Now, what is the corrective action, the medicine for this?[162]

According to Levi, Fascism takes natural inequality – that between the fits and the unfits – to systematises it.[163] But natural inequality is chance, contingent. Depending on the environmental conditions, the fits can become unfits and vice versa. Let's think, for instance, of the «shameless luck»[164] of being ill with scarlet during the last days of Auschwitz, when being healthy paradoxically meant being destined for death. On the contrary, Fascism claims a fixed and predetermined inequality, a preconceived pattern established upon a racist and hierarchical understanding of humankind: «it was a New Order on an "aristocratic" basis […], where the security of the privileged few rested on the forced labor and forced silence of the many.»[165] Both Fascism and civilisation are related to natural selection: nothing

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[159] Levi, *Complete Works*, I, p. 184. Emphasis mine.
[160] Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, *Per Primo Levi*, Torino, Einaudi, 2019, pp. 101-108 (digital edition).
[161] Giuseppe Grassano, *A Conversation with Primo Levi* (1979), in *The Voice of Memory*, p. 131. On Levi's secondary-school (*liceale*) education as main literary and cultural background for the writing process of *If this is a man* see Cavaglion, *Primo Levi: guida a Se questo è un uomo*..
[162] Collotti, *Il mestiere di raccontare*, p. 42. Translation mine.
[163] Pievani, *Finitudine*, p. 80: «If taken literally, nature is right wing […]. Nature is tradition, is predetermined, is a preconceived order, is what has been always done in a certain way, is conservation and nostalgia. Taken literally, nature is fascist.» Translation mine.
[164] Levi, *Complete Works*, p. 35.
[165] Ibidem, II, pp. 1198-1199.

withdraws from it. Nevertheless, unlike civilisation, Fascism does not contrast with natural selection: it attempts to reproduce its working principle, but it overtly rejects the "variable" of sympathy, that is what made civilisation possible. Fascism sees sympathy, but it considered it to be "for the weak", a degeneration of the power of nature which the strongest are called to perform. Fascism is the political conviction that civilisation is overrated. In other terms, Auschwitz pulverizes the «corrective actions» protecting our civilisation not so much from the «brute power» of living matter, but from the spectre of Totalitarianism. Because, first of all, civilisation is the alternative to Totalitarianism.

«We Weren't a Pleasant Sight»: On Primo Levi's Phenomenology of the Human

In 1986 *The Drowned and the Saved*, forty years after the publication of *If This is a Man,* Primo Levi takes the stock of his reflection on Auschwitz. The essay *Useless Violence* attempts to track down the specificity of totalitarian political evil. In order to do so, Levi is willing to grant Totalitarian politic of extermination a large amount of rationality, even utility, being fully aware by experience that the specific trait of Totalitarianism consist of a form of excess.

> When we look back at those years with the wisdom of hindsight, at a time when Europe and ultimately Germany itself were devastated, we are torn between two judgments: Did we witness the rational unfolding of an inhuman plan, or a manifestation of collective madness (still unique in history, yet still poorly explained)? A malevolent logic or an absence of logic? As is often the case with human affairs, the two alternatives coexist […]. Neither Nietzsche nor Hitler nor Rosenberg was mad when he intoxicated himself and his followers by preaching the myth of the superman, to whom all is conceded in recognition of his dogmatic congenital superiority. But it is worth considering the fact that all of them, master and pupils, gradually took leave of reality at the same pace as their morals became detached from the morals common to every time and every civilization, morals that belong to our heritage as human beings and must ultimately be recognized. Rationality ended and the disciples surpassed (and betrayed) their master by a broad measure in the practice of useless cruelty. *Nietzsche's language repels me deeply; I struggle to find a statement that does not coincide with the opposite of my own preferred way of thinking. His oracular tone annoys me, but I do not think it ever expresses a desire for the suffering of others: indifference there is, on almost every page, but never Schadenfreude, joy in the hardships of his fellow man, or joy in deliberately causing pain.* The suffering of the common people, the *Ungestalten*, the unformed, the not nobly born, is the price to pay for the coming of the kingdom of the elect. It is a lesser evil but evil nonetheless; it is not desirable in itself. Hitler's language and practices were another matter entirely. Today, much of the Nazis' useless violence has been consigned to history [...]. But other minor, individual acts of violence—details of the larger picture - are still inscribed in indelible characters in the memory of each of us former deportees.[166]

As we noticed in the previous paragraphs, in Levi's view, Totalitarianism, especially Nazism, produced an unnatural, not to say hyperpolitical, violence. Totalitarian evil does not stand this side of good and evil. It was not a radical form of socio-biologism which reproduces natural evil into human *polis*. By following, although betrayingly, «Nietzsche's language» of *Übermensch*, totalitarian politics went properly beyond traditional «moral sense», thereby entering into a slippery terrain where any excess becomes possible. According to Levi, the most blatant trace of such an excess is the large-scale practice of «useless violence.» This is the extreme face of dehumanisation. Pursuant to its very biographical character, Levi's thought represents a fundamental theoretical resource: as former victim, he tells us what dehumanization is "from below", what being dehumanized concretely means. For Levi, this is the philosophical value of testimony: the point of view of the victim is the only meaningful access to understand the truth of totalitarian political

[166] Ibidem, pp. 2487-2488. Emphasis mine.

evil. As is known, Levi persisted so much on such an epistemological value of testimony that he even ended up claiming what Agamben efficaciously named the «paradox of testimony»[167]. As Levi writes in *Shame*:

> Let me repeat that we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses. This is a troublesome notion that I became aware of gradually by reading other people's memoirs and rereading my own years later. We survivors are an anomalous and negligible minority. We are the ones who, because of our transgressions, ability, or luck, did not touch bottom. The ones who did, who saw the Gorgon, did not come back to tell, or they came back mute. But it is they, the "*Muselmänner* ", the drowned, the witnesses to everything - they are the ones whose testimony would have had a comprehensive meaning. They are the rule, we are the exception […]. No one has told the story of the demolition brought to its end, the finished work, just as no one has ever come back to tell us about his death. Even if they had possessed pen and paper, the drowned could not have borne witness, because their death had already begun before the body perished. Weeks and months before dying, they had already lost the ability to observe, to remember, to measure, and to express themselves. We speak in their place, by proxy.[168]

Therefore, we cannot know the extreme side of the extreme: the bottom of dehumanization is precluded to our knowledge. What we know is a rather a tellable dehumanization which, as such, still experiences some thin glimmers of humanity.

Useless Violence abounds with records witnessing what Günther Ander effectively named «the transformation of the human being in raw material»[169]: from the practices of Nazi railway transports (emblem of a «deliberate creation of pain for the pure sake of it»[170]), to the constant affront to decency («Within a few weeks, however, the discomfort lessen […], a charitable way of saying that the transformation from human being to animal was well under way»[171]), to the sadly known medical experiments. According to Levi, the latter reveal the extreme perversion reached by Totalitarianism:

> Here the selected individuals, who were sometimes overfed beforehand to restore them to physiological normalcy, were subjected to long baths in freezing-cold water or placed inside decompression chambers that simulated the rarefaction of air at twenty thousand meters (a height that none of the airplanes in those years could reach!) to establish the altitude at which human blood starts to boil: a fact that can be obtained in any laboratory at minimum cost and without victims, or even deduced from ordinary charts. It is important to remember such abominations today, when legitimate questions are being raised about the limits on subjecting lab animals to painful scientific experiments.[172]

In Levi's view, the "moral" contained in these stories of useless violence is as simple as it is atrocious: within the Lager, human beings ended up treating other human beings worse than how they would treat animals.[173] A real ethological nonsense which circumscribes a specificity of human-animal's «destructiveness» compared to that of other animals.[174] Nevertheless, what is ethologically absurd, is rather politically logical: «before dying, the

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[167] Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 36.
[168] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, pp. 2468-2469.
[169] Günter Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen 2, Über die Zerstörung des Lebens im Zeitalter der dritten industriellen Revolution*, München, Verlag C.H. Beck, 1980, p. 22.
[170] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, p. 2489.
[171] Ibidem, p. 2491.
[172] Ibidem, p. 2501.
[173] Cf. Fontenay, *Le Silence des Bêtes*, p. 746.
[174] As Martina Mengoni pointed out, Levi's considerations on «useless violence» have been influenced also by Erich Fromm's 1973 *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, a work to which Levi relates critically, but which however tells us of his theoretical research upon questions he used to deepen starting from his personal experience. As Levi writes in a letter dated December the 20th 1979 to Hety Schmitt.Maass: «I do not think it is professional to write on violence, without knowing what intellectuals maintained about it» (translation mine). Cf. Martina Mengoni, *I sommersi e i salvati di Primo Levi. Storia di un libro (Francoforte 1959-Torino 1986)*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2021, pp. 248-256.

victim had to be degraded to alleviate the killer's sense of guilt. This explanation is not without logic, but it cries out to the heavens: it is the only use of useless violence.»[175] Once again, Levi stresses a very important point of his inquiry on Totalitarianism: dehumanization does not dismantle the human in order to obtain an animal life morally indifferent. As Giorgio Agamben pointed out, Auschwitz inmate is not simply a *bios* reduced to a *zoé*: «Nothing "natural" or "common", however, is left in him; nothing animal or instinctual remains in his life. All his instincts are canceled along with his reason».[176] The *drowned* is an artificial product which does not exist in nature. He is a *Homo Sacer*, a «bare life», namely a political subject toward which any violence or injustice can be inflicted without committing a crime. Indeed, unlike the *Homo Sacer*, an animal life (that of pets as well as of guinea pigs) can even be either more morally restrictive or so indifferent that it does not cause fierceness and torments in its regards. Totalitarianism rather seeks a form of life upon which it can perpetrate a useless violence. Therefore, dehumanization is more a process of distortion of the human than a bestial animalization: it produces something which causes a mixture of rancour, rage and repulsion in the eyes of others. Totalitarianism wants its victims to inspire in the others, especially the tormentors, a desire not only for violence, but for torment. In other words, I would summarize this as follows: the *drowned* represents the final step of a politics of denigration and marginalization which goes as far as to exclude a member of society even from the very minimal schemas of social recognition.[177] *The drowned is an un-recognized human-animal as suffering animal*; *dehumanization is the process which denies the suffering animality of the human being*.

> For everyone, but especially for them, evacuating in public was agonizing or impossible, a trauma for which our civilization leaves us unprepared, a deep wound inflicted on human dignity, an obscene and ominous attack, but also the sign of a deliberate, gratuitous malice […]. After traveling for two days we found a couple of nails stuck in the wooden walls, repositioned them in a corner, and with string and a blanket improvised a shelter that was largely symbolic: we are not yet beasts, not as long as we try to resist.[178]

In the previous paragraph, I attempted to highlight Levi's Darwinian understanding of civilisation which, on the one hand, is of help to define the relationship between nature and «ordinary life»; on the other hand, it establishes a sharp contrast between civilisation and Totalitarianism. Auschwitz is an uncivilized place since it succeeds in wiping out any sort of humanity, i.e., sympathetic relationship among member of the same species. Hence, like in Darwin, Levi conceives humanity as a *habitus* grounded on the mutual recognition of the vulnerability of the living matter which all sentients being is made of.[179] However, in Primo Levi, the equivalence of humanity and civilization has a deeper meaning. «*The experience of someone who has lived for days during which man was merely a thing in the eyes of man is non-human*»: in Levi's eyes, humanity is a matter of civilisation insofar as humanity is a phenomenological matter. Let's consider another section of *Racial Intolerance*:

> We had been imprisoned for several months, almost a year in my case (others had been in prison for two years) and we weren't a pleasant sight, we were unshaven, our clothes were ragged, our hair was shorn, we were dirty, many couldn't speak German. Next to this bombed factory there was a camp for Hitler youth; they were fourteen-year-olds, equivalent to the Italian Fascist youth of the time; they

[175] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, p. 2502.
[176] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign, Power and Bare Life*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 185.
[177] From this point of view, the primogeniture of such a socio-political understanding of dehumanization should surely be attributed to Hannah Arendt. Cf. Arendt, *Origin of Totalitarianism*, p. 302.
[178] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, pp. 2490-2491.
[179] Mario Porro, *Letteratura come filosofia della natura*, Milano, Medusa, 2009, pp. 155-156.

> belonged to different social classes and were at a sort of pre-military camp, sleeping in tents nearby. They were taken on a tour to watch us shoveling the rubble; and what the instructors were telling them, with no effort to be discreet, to speak in a low voice, was this: "You see, we keep them in concentration camps and make them work, because they aren't men, it's quite obvious; they are unshaven, they don't wash, they're dirty and don't even know how to talk, all they're good for is handling a pick and shovel. So it's clear that we are compelled to treat them this way, the way you treat a domestic animal.[180]

By stressing the aesthetical appearance of the prisoners («we weren't a pleasant sight»), Primo Levi proves once again to be always very attentive to the concrete aspects of imprisonment. Indeed, in order to be politically effective, the racial presuppositions of Nazi politics needed an empirical confirmation. This is what Arendt named the «objective enemy», the fuel of totalitarian ideological machine.[181] As Levi writes: «This substitution of cause for effect […] occurs in every corner of the world where there is racial prejudice. The "other" is persecuted and then it is said: "Of course we persecute him, don't you see what he is? He's a brute, he's worth less than we are, he doesn't have our culture; it's natural to make him do the heavy work, the most unpleasant task…"»[182]

This passage of *Racial Intolerance* recalls the well-known dialogue between Steinlauf and Primo Levi in *If This is a Man*. As Levi tells: «after only a week of prison, the instinct for cleanliness disappeared in me.»[183] During the «initiation» days in Auschwitz, Levi meets Steinlauf, an ex-Sergeant of the Austro-Hungary Army, stripped to the waist and intent on scrubbing his neck and shoulders with energy albeit lacking soap. Levi promptly claims his scepticism towards Steinlauf's conduct: «Why should I wash? Would I be better off than I am? Would I be more pleasing to someone? […] Doesn't Steinlauf know that after half an hour with the coal sacks every difference between him and me will have disappeared?»[184] Yet, for Steinlauf, «washing one's face» was not «a stupid chore», a «mechanical habit, or, worse, a grim repetition of an extinct rite». Indeed, as he claims:

> Lager was a great machine to reduce us to beasts, we must not become beasts; that even in this place one can survive, and therefore one must want to survive, to tell the story, to bear witness; and that to survive we must force ourselves *to save at least the skeleton, the scaffolding, the form of civilization*. We are slaves, deprived of every right, exposed to every insult, condemned to almost certain death, but we still possess one power, and we must defend it with all our strength, for it is the last—the power to refuse our consent. So we must certainly wash our faces without soap in dirty water and dry ourselves on our jackets. We must polish our shoes, not because the rules prescribe it but for dignity and propriety. We must walk erect, without dragging our feet, not in homage to Prussian discipline but to remain alive, to not begin to die.[185]

As we noticed before, according to Nicholas Patruno, Steinlauf's lesson, so material and connected to appearance, will be confuted by the chapter *The Canto of Ulysses*, where «the form of civilization» turns out to coincides with interiority, with what Descartes would call «mind». Nevertheless, Levi's phenomenological understanding of the human proves, once again, how interpreters generally tended to overestimate the role that *The Canto of Ulysses* performs within his anthropological thought. This chapter is not only, as Mario Barenghi showed, rather shaky about what it testifies,[186] but it is also scarcely representative of Levi's conception of the human as whole. The humanist character of this chapter is so isolated

[180] Ibidem, II, p. 1321.
[181] Arendt, *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, pp. 423ff.
[182] Levi, *Complete Works*, II, p. 1321.
[183] Ibidem, I, p. 36.
[184] Ibidem.
[185] Ibidem, p. 37. Levi will tell Steinlauf's death in the chapter *The Intellectual in Auschwitz* of 1986 *The Drowned and the Saved.* Cf. Ibidem, III, p. 2515-2516.
[186] Mario Barenghi, *Why do We Believe Primo Levi?*, Torino, Einaudi, 2013, pp. 94ff (digital edition).

within *If This is a Man*, that we can even consider it more as a sort of academic exercise than as «the hermeneutical key of the book as a whole.»[187] Indeed, in Levi's testimony, the extreme materiality of survival does not reveal the essence of the human by contrast, bur rather, beyond any dialectical scheme, it shows its fragile plasticity. A plasticity that power bends depending on its own interests. As a matter of fact, the political and anthropological importance of appearance will turn out to be awfully true several times in *If This is a Man*. In this regard, the chapter *Die drei Leute vom Labor* represents an explicative example. By this point of his imprisonment, Levi has become «a specialized worker», a «chosen to enter the paradise of the Laboratory».[188] The latter is undoubtedly a safer environment for a prisoner: as Levi writes, «In the camp, at night and in the morning, nothing distinguishes me from the flock, but during the day, at work, I am sheltered and warm, and nobody beats me.»[189] Nevertheless, within the Lager, a safer position increases also the odds to meet the «civilian workers», that is normal people somehow involved in the productive activities of the Lager. In the laboratory, Levi meets five German women, and, right before them, Steinlauf's words proved to be a fierce anthropological truth.

> Faced with the girls in the Laboratory, we three feel ourselves sink into the ground with shame and embarrassment. We know what we look like: we see one another and sometimes we happen to see our own reflection in a clean window. We are ridiculous and repulsive. Our heads are bald on Monday, and covered by a short light-brown mold by Saturday. We have swollen, yellow faces, permanently marked by the cuts of the hasty barber, and often by bruises and numb sores; our necks are long and knobbly, like plucked chickens. Our clothes are incredibly filthy, stained with mud, grease, and blood […]. We are full of fleas, and often scratch ourselves shamelessly; we have to ask to go to the latrine with humiliating frequency. Our wooden clogs are intolerably noisy and are encrusted with alternate layers of mud and regulation grease.[190]

In this encounter, one might observe the greater distance among human beings that Totalitarianism can produce. On the one hand, dirty and smelly slaves, on the other hand, individuals so clean and respectable that, by contrast, they even seem like «creatures from another world.»[191] In other words, the concentration camp realises the inegalitarian, not to say aristocratic, *Weltanshauung* of Totalitarianism: a world divided, without mediation, in absolute slaves and hyper-privileged masters. Here we have another and subtler meaning of «civilization» in Primo Levi, according to which the human tends to coincide with the phenomenological idea of "normality". In Levi's eyes, the *drowned* is undoubtedly still a human being in an ontological sense: as Robert Antelme claimed in *The Human Race*, «we're still man, and we shall not end otherwise than as man. The distance separating us from another species is still intact.»[192] For Levi, the victims are fundamentally "ab-normal" individuals deviant non only from the "racial normality" established by the totalitarian regime (the Aryans in the Third Reich, the "Latin blood" in Fascist Italy), but, first and foremost, from the very basic phenomenological feature of what, in a certain time and in a certain place, is commonly acknowledged as the "normal" human individual.[193] In concrete terms (but this is the concreteness of Levi's thought), when this kind of victims appear to

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[187] Massimo Giuliani, *Per un'etica della resistenza. Rileggere Primo Levi*, Macerata, Quodiblet, 2015, pp. 40-53. Translation mine.
[188] Levi, *Complete Works*, I, pp. 132-133.
[189] Ibidem, p. 135.
[190] Ibidem, p. 136. See also Gordon, *Primo Levi's Ordinary Virtues*, p. 52.
[191] Ibidem.
[192] Robert Antelme, *The Human Race*, Evanston-Illinois, Marlboro Press, Northwestern, 1992, p. 219.
[193] In this respect, the recent phenomenological debate on the nexus between animality and normality seems very promising. For a brief introduction see Cristian Ciocan, *Husserl's Phenomenology of Animality and the Paradoxes of Normality*, in «Human Studies», 40/2017, pp. 175-190, and Anthony J. Steinbock, *Phenomenological Concepts of Normality and Abnormality*, in «Man and World», 28/1995, pp. 241-260.

our eyes, they look so dissonant and inconsistent with what we intuitively consider as an average human being that we end up being «unable to bear [their] proximity», fleeing from them «as one flees from contact with an incurable invalid, or a man condemned to death.»[194]

> They have smooth, rosy skin, nice colorful clothes that are clean and warm, and long, well-brushed blond hair; they speak with grace and self-possession, and, instead of keeping the Laboratory neat and clean, as they ought to, they smoke in the corners, eat bread and jam tarts in front of us, file their nails, break a lot of glassware and then try to blame us; when they sweep, they sweep our feet. They don't speak to us, and they turn up their noses when they see us shuffling around the Laboratory, squalid and dirty, awkward and unsteady in our clogs. I once asked Fräulein Liczba for some information, and she did not reply but, with a look of annoyance on her face, turned to Stawinoga and spoke to him quickly. I didn't understand the sentence, but I clearly made out "*Stinkjude*", and my blood froze.[195]

Perhaps, as Levi states in *The Last One*, «To destroy a man is difficult, almost as difficult as to create one.»[196] Nevertheless, it seems to be sufficient for them to smell just enough so that their fellows would push them away, finding this, if promptly supported by the power, licit and deserved as they would never do to a member of another species. Our humanity, what our philosophical tradition have always considered to be majestic, is rather very fragile, hung by a gaze, a smell, even clothes. As Levi writes: «we have learned that our personality is fragile, that it is much more endangered than our life; and the wise men of ancient times, instead of warning us "Remember that you must die," would have done better to remind us of this greater danger that threatens us.»[197]

Primo Levi did not stress further this aspect of his testimony. This should not surprise actually. In Levi's works, we always find a sort of "speculative scruple" which constantly holds the temptation to speculate back, both because of a certain suspicion toward philosophy as discipline and to avoid, as he used to repeat, «running before you can walk.»[198] This is what makes any philosophical approach to Levi's works difficult and challenging at the same time: to weigh properly speculations and narration of facts, that is to not overdo Levi's vocation to universalize the biographical character of his reflection on Auschwitz. It is a «good measure» which Levi himself always complied with, and which, therefore, should be scrupulously accounted in order not to overstate his view. Otherwise, we would end up using Levi's works to prove our thesis, and, as we noticed in the case of humanist and posthuman readings, this would be absolutely inappropriate. Notwithstanding, these observations on the phenomenology of the human will be very useful in the following chapter. Levi seems to suggest that, in order to fulfil the process of dehumanisation, that is establishing a profound inequality among human beings, victims must be somatically destitute of their appearance as human, as "normal" (or recognized) members of a certain group. Better, victims must lose the basic semblance which instils «humanity» in other people's eyes. Here is when the nonrecognition of one's suffering animality becomes possible.

An Evolutionary Optimism

In the previous paragraphs I aimed to highlight the Darwinian background of Levi's reflection on Auschwitz. By doing so, I attempted to define Levi's philosophical position within contemporary debate on dehumanization in accordance with the actual sources of his

[194] Levi, *Complete Works*, I, p. 137.
[195] Ibidem, pp. 136-137.
[196] Ibidem, p. 143.
[197] Ibidem, p. 52.
[198] Di Caro, *The Essential and the Superfluous*, p. 174.

thought. The final outcome of this reconstruction is a very different image of Levi not only as witness, but also as thinker. Indeed, his Darwinian understanding of the human-animal relationship makes him a more traditional thinker than what posthumanist interpreters maintain. At the same time, Levi's Darwinism makes him more innovative, not to say harshly polemical, towards the humanist frame which his reflection has been usually placed in. In my opinion, Levi is an interpreter, more or less consciously involved, of a third way of contemporary philosophical thought. I would define it as a *modernity updated to Darwinism* which, due to the twentieth-century distrust towards the philosophical products of modern age, has had so much scares appeal within contemporary reflection that employing Darwinism to understand Auschwitz (as Levi, a victim, did) can even appear to be outrageous. Therefore, by employing his naturalist knowledge, Levi applies on Auschwitz a philosophical awareness utterly extraneous to the leading philosophical paradigms of his age. It is a very original position which has not be sufficiently stressed so far, and which represents a very different way of thinking of the historical experience of Auschwitz and its philosophical repercussions.

The Austrian ethologist Konrad Lorenz played a fundamental role in Levi's comprehension of Darwinism. In Levi's works, Darwin is a fundamental source, but, besides *Why are Animals Beautiful?*, there are no other significant textual reference. On the contrary, starting from the mid-1970s, the name of Konrad Lorenz recurs quite frequently, and always strategically. Levi's use of Lorenz's ethology is twofold: literary and ethical-political. In regard to the literary use, 1979 *Novels Dictated by Crickets* is a programmatic essay:

> It is an age-old observation, ancient even in the time of Aesop (who must have been quite familiar with these matters), that it is possible to find all extremes in animals. There are animals both enormous and minuscule, extremely powerful and extremely weak, audacious and elusive, fast and slow, clever and dull, magnificent and horrible. A writer need only choose, he can overlook the truths set forth by scientists - it is enough for him to draw liberally on this universe of metaphors. It is precisely by leaving the human island that he will find every human trait multiplied a hundredfold, a forest of prefabricated hyperboles. Of those, many are tired, worn out by use in all languages: the too well known qualities of the lion, the fox, and the bull can no longer be employed. But the discoveries of modern naturalists, so abundant and wonderful in recent years, have opened to writers a treasury of ideas whose exploitation is merely at its timid beginnings. In the archives of *Nature* and *Scientific American*, in books by Konrad Lorenz and his followers, lurk the seeds of a new style of writing, which is still to be discovered, and awaits its demiurge.[199]

Novels Dictated by Crickets clearly highlights Levi's hybridism as "chemist-writer" who makes science and literature converse one another in order to heal their respective flaws. A «new style of writing» which nowadays, thanks to the development of ethology, has become necessary regarding especially human depiction of the animal world. Indeed, as Levi states, the anthropocentric and anthropomorphic language of our literary tradition «can no longer be employed». Animals do not longer represent that biological otherness before which the human beings could extract, for better or for worse, their exceptionality. According to Levi, within Konrad Lorenz's «books»[200], we find the exemplary mixture of naturalistic inquiry

[199] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, pp. 2076-2077. On *Scientific American* as «source of inspiration» for Primo Levi's science fiction see Enrico Mattioda, *Levi*, Roma, Salerno Editrice, 2011, pp. 93ff (digital edition).

[200] Levi talks of «*books* by Konrad Lorenz». We know for sure that he read 1963 *On Aggression* and also, thanks to a subtle quotation in 1986 *Peroxide Blonde* («the reductive universe of those whom Julian Huxley has fittingly termed "nothing-else-but-ists."») 1978 *The Foundation of ethology* (*Complete Works*, III, p. 2389; *Opere Complete*, III, p. 1337). Regarding the latter, it is worthy of attention the fact that this quotation comes from the first chapter, where Lorenz debates important methodological questions such as the critique of biological reductionism and of teleology. Moreover, if we consider both that Levi knew and read German and Lorenz's books published in Italian between the 50s and the 80s, we might suppose that he also read well-

and literary vocation which confutes the traditional deception of the animal as mindless being. In 1983 *«The Most Joyous Creatures in the World»*[201], Levi rereads Giacomo Leopardi's *Praise of Birds* in the light of modern ethological knowledge, thereby stressing the limitations and the fallacies of traditional narrative uses of the animal.

> According to Leopardi, it is possible for them to be happy because they are free of any awareness of life's vanity. And so they are unacquainted with boredom, an affliction specific to conscious humans, and the more dolorous the further human beings have distanced themselves from nature […]. Yet even though they're independent, and free by definition, they're still sensitive to human presence, and their voices are loveliest where the customs of humanity are loveliest. This song of theirs, which Leopardi identifies as the distinctive feature of birds and a marker of their happiness, is gratuitous, a laughter-song, an «expression of gladness», capable of transmitting this gladness to those who hear it, «by bearing witness, delusive though it may be, to the gladness of the world.» Likewise, the agitation of birds, the fact that they are «seen never at rest», is a pure manifestation of joy; it occurs «for no apparent reason» while their flight is simply «a delight to them.» In conclusion, Leopardi […] would like (but «only for a time») «to be converted into a bird, to taste the gladness of their life.»[202]

Leopardi's view of animals is notoriously anti-Cartesian, and Levi strongly highlights this. *Praise of Birds* could be located in the wake of traditional theriophily, where animal life represents a more genuine and joyful existential condition as compared to that of humans. Yet, like the Cartesian tradition, Leopardi's theriophily presents hermeneutical flaws which, nowadays, have become as naïve as outdated scientific doctrines like heliocentrism or creationism. Levi's comment is masterful:

> These pages are firm and lucid, still valid, and their power comes from the constant, but unstated, comparison with the misery of the human condition, with our essential lack of freedom, symbolized by our earthbound nature. All the same, we may ask ourselves what Leopardi would have written if, instead of relying on Buffon, and limiting his focus to the birds whose song he listened to during the long evenings in his village, he had, for example, read the books of Konrad Lorenz and had extended his observations to include other types of birds. I think that, first of all, he would have given up trying to compare birds to human beings. To attribute such feelings as gaiety, boredom, and happiness to animals (with the possible exception of dogs and certain monkeys) is acceptable only in the context of poetry—otherwise it's arbitrary and greatly misleading. We might say the same of the interpretation of birdsong: animal behaviorists tell us that birdsong, especially when it is solitary and melodious (and therefore especially pleasing to us), has a very specific meaning, of defense of the bird's territory and a warning to potential rivals or intruders. It would be more appropriate, then, to compare it not to human laughter but to less friendly human artifacts, such as the fences and gates with which landowners surround their property, or the intolerable electric alarms designed to scare burglars away from apartments. As for the liveliness of birds (of some birds: others, such as wading birds, are relatively calm), this is a necessary solution to a problem of survival. It is observed chiefly in birds that feed on seeds or insects, and which are therefore obliged to be frantically active in their search for food, which is scattered over vast areas and often hard to find; at the same time, their high body temperature and the hard work of flying make it necessary for them to eat a great deal. Clearly, it's a vicious cycle: working hard to obtain food, eating a great deal to make up for the costs of that hard work—a continuous loop that is not unfamiliar to most of the human race.[203]

Starting from these considerations, Levi argues in favour of the idea that, by accepting «the explanations that scientists provide», our admiration for animals can be even reinforced. Ethology displays the animal world neither as phantasmagorical nor as brutal, bus as a world

known works such as 1949 *King Solomon's Ring*, 1973 *Behind the Mirror: A Search for a Natural History of Human Knowledge* and 1973 *Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins*.

[201] *«The Most Joyous Creatures in the World»* was originally published in the Turinese daily newspaper *La Stampa* on November the 27th 1983 as «*Nel nido del cuculo*» («In the cuckoo nest)». In 1985 it was finally included among the essays of *Other People's Trade*.

[202] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, p. 2200.

[203] Ibidem, pp. 2200-2201

ruled by the laws of natural selection. Laws which – and here is where Levi seems to adopt a Lamarckian perspective – leads animals to elaborate astonishing adaptive solutions.[204]

> Birds, in short, like other animals, may not know how to do all the things that we do, but they know how to do other things that we cannot do, or that we cannot do so well, or that we can do only with tools of some kind. If the experiment that Leopardi dreamed of could be carried out, we would return to our human semblances with many more arrows in our quiver.[205]

This is the new kind of narrative material Levi is talking of: the long-lasting endeavor of living beings to resist to the «fierce laws» of dissolution of life. A painful endeavor which results in a great show of abilities that can be judged only insofar as they are successful or not in the struggle for existence. Levi proves to have learnt Darwin's lesson of the «coral of life.» Besides the narrative questions, in my opinion, what is philosophically relevant in *«The Most Joyous Creatures in the World»* is the fact that Levi did not choose to confront a Cartesian author, against whom his argument would have been even stronger, but he rather takes into account a text which exalt the animal condition. As Darwinist, Levi contests both Descartes and Montaigne: animals are like humans, neither better nor worse. Like the human-animal, the animal is a compound of good and evil, joy and pain, intelligence and stupidity. They both are products of evolution by natural selection and, therefore, they are fundamentally structured by and in view of survival. As I stressed in the previous chapter, this is the deepest philosophical core of Darwinism: an understanding of life as a material phenomenon characterized by a structural weakness and fragility, from which there follows a suffering process of resistance to entropy. As Levi writes in *Carbon*:

> "That's life", although it's rarely described that way: an insertion, a descent to its own advantage, a parasite on the downward path of energy, from its noble solar form to the degraded state of low-temperature heat. On this downward path, which leads to equilibrium, that is, to death, life draws a curve and nests in it. [206]

This leads to Levi's ethical-political use of Lorenz's works. As we noticed before, Levi's employs Lorenz's ethological research on aggressivity in order to understand totalitarian political evil. In Levi, such a move is twofold: on the one hand, it stresses the animal heritage of the human being as social animal, on the other hand, it traces the constitutive elements of totalitarian political evil back to typical hierarchical tendencies of the «human mind». It is a perspective which establishes a circularity between society and individuals, between power system and subjects. Thanks to his naturalist background, which finds in Lorenz's both confirmation and inspiration, Levi could think of the question of evil in purely immanent (or materialist) terms. This is the core of Levi's "ethological moralism"[207]: evil is the product neither of a sinful nature nor of a mistaken disposition of soul. Evil is rather part of our being as social animal (as we know, from an evolutionary point of view, it does not make sense to make wider comparison). More deeply, evil is part of our condition of living beings: «the human animal, like other animals, is biologically adapted to a certain amount of struggle for life».[208] As we noticed before, these are the theoretical presuppositions starting from which Levi thinks the contraposition between animal inheritance and civilisation, assigning to the process of civilisation an undeniable positive value. Such a positivity is not ideological. Like Darwin, Levi's understanding of civilisation is ethological, not political. Civilisation is the process which fosters - since more advantageous - sympathetic, i.e., altruistic, behaviors.

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[204] Cf. Levi's «animal glossary» in Belpoliti, *Primo Levi. Di fronte e di profilo*, pp. 361-423.
[205] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, p. 2203.
[206] Ibidem, II, p. 944.
[207] Mario Porro talked of «naturalistic humanism». Cf. Porro, *Letteratura come filosofia della natura*, p. 149.
[208] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, p. 2342.

The institutional forms that such a process can assume are a secondary matter and they do not necessarily coincide with western society.[209] Speaking of which, Levi's relationship with Lorenz get trickier.

In *Animals and Animality in Primo Levi's Work*, Damiano Benvegnù pointed out how curiously Levi seemed to overlook Konrad Lorenz's Nazi past.[210] Far from being a mere biographical data, the latter represents an ideological background which is somehow still present in works as 1963 *On Aggression* and which comes to light exactly in relation to the nexus between domestication and civilisation. Indeed, as Benvegnù reconstructs, in his 1940s research, Lorenz turned to a sort of Nietzschean perspective, where civilisation corresponds with a process of deterioration, not to say "bourgeoisification", which distorts and depletes the natural data, the latter conceived as a dimension of power and strength.[211] Obviously, in Nazi's viewpoint, the Jew stands for the anthropological outcome of such a degeneration. Benvegnù certainly highlight a tricky point, although, as he promptly remarks, it neither «nullifies what he and other eminent ethologists have discovered in the field of comparative animal behavior», nor «disregards Levi's theory about racial prejudice».[212] Nevertheless, I do think that, from a strictly philosophical point of view, the question is surely more complex than this. Indeed, we should consider that, especially starting from the 1970s, Lorenz's harsh judgment towards western civilisation is largely affected by the general pessimism caused by the nuclear nightmare typical of the Cold War period. Here is where Levi finds in Lorenz a better and closer interlocutor than Darwin. As we noticed in the previous chapter, according to Darwin, «Looking to future generations, there is no cause to fear that the social instincts will grow weaker, and we may expect that virtuous habits will grow stronger, becoming perhaps fixed by inheritance. In this case», as he concluded, virtue

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[209] As Levi state in *If this is a man*: «for a country is considered the more civilized the more the wisdom and efficiency of its laws hinder a poor man from becoming too poor or a powerful one too powerful.» Levi will rephrase this principle in 1986 *The Gray Zone*: «It is the duty of the righteous man to wage war on every underserved privilege, but it is a war without end» (*Complete Works*, III, p. 2434). According to Cesare Cases, «The principles of liberalism have been rarely enunciated with such clarity» (Cesare Cases, *L'ordine delle cose e l'ordine delle parole*, in «L'indice dei Libri del Mese», 10/1987, p. 30. Translation mine). In my opinion, Levi's position should be better conceived in terms of "egalitarianism". An egalitarianism that Levi think within the political frame of "socialism". Indeed, as he stated during 1986 interview with Anthony Rudolf, «I am basically a socialist, though not a member of the PSI. I believe in mutuality, community and a slow progress towards the messianic age.» [A. Rudolf, *Primo Levi in London (1986)*, in *The Voice of Memory*, p. 33]. This highlights his not-Eurocentric understanding of the term-concept of civilisation. Speaking of which, it is interesting Levi's eulogy of Israeli collective community of *Kibbutzim* where, as he writes in a 1968 article, «the same meticulous care is taken to avoid the establishment of a dominant class, and the rotation of tasks is rigorously respected, even at the cost of lower productivity; the equality of rights does not permit exception […]. The atmosphere of the kibbutz is both severe and serene, one of both joy and commitment. It is the microcosm and the utopia, but it is a utopia, perhaps the only one, that has been realized, that for many decades now has been nourishing itself, has borne fruit, and has caused no casualties» (*Complete Works*, II, p. 1188).

[210] Benvegnù, *Animals and Animality in Primo Levi's Work*, 4-7.

[211] Alec Nisbett, *Konrad Lorenz*, New York, Harcourt, 1977, p. 78:«The general thesis is simple. It starts with the idea that the breeding of domestic animals changes not only their physical form but also their behaviour, since this is based on the same genetic system. Domestication - indeed any sort of breeding that is manage by man - has usually led to the emphasis of characteristics of form and behaviour which would make animals less viable in the wild; all of Lorenz's practical work with animals supports this statement. He then argued that the civilisation of man has involved processes that are comparable to the domestication of animals, and he calls the process «self-domestication.» As a species, we may therefore be undergoing genetic changes that affect our own behaviour and, as so often in the case of animals, this may be for the worse.»

[212] According to Mario Porro, Lorenz's understanding of domestication suits with Levi's perspective on civilisation. Indeed, as Porro argue, for Lorenz, the process of domestication leads the human-animal to docility, which politically results in obedience. Such a perspective provides a sort of ethological background for Levi's own interpretation of Arendt's banality of evil. Cfr. Porro, *Letteratura come filosofia naturale*, p. 152.

will be triumphant.» Darwin's optimism was licit for an 1800's man of science: it was the conviction – today we would consider it to be a "positivist delirium" - that, once the laws which rule life and history are known, the development of the latter becomes not only predictable but also controllable. Primo Levi, a direct witness of Twentieth-Century countless tragedies, could not certainly share Darwin's confidence in progress. Yet, he could find in Konrad Lorenz's work an evolutionary perspective more consistent with his troubling times. Indeed, in *On Aggression*, Lorenz claims that «Wherever man has achieved the power of voluntarily guiding a natural phenomenon in a certain direction, he has owed it to his understanding of the chain of causes which formed it.»[213] This direction coincides with the development of «man's sense of justice»[214]. As Lorenz states:

> Darwin's recognition of the fact that we have a common origin with animals […] inspires a new feeling of respect for the functions of reason and moral responsibility which first came into the world with man and which, provided he does not blindly and arrogantly deny the existence of his animal inheritance, give him the power to control it.[215]

However, as Lorenz point outs, «With humanity in its present cultural and technological situation, we have good reason to consider intra-specific aggression the greatest of all dangers.»[216] Written during the cold-war age, *On Aggression* is haunted by the specter of the atomic bomb: «If I thought of man as the final image of God, I should not know what to think of God.»[217] The likelihood of a nuclear war is not only the emblem of the absolute aimlessness of evolution, but it also questions Darwin's confidence in the future triumph of the «virtue of humanity», that is of civilisation. It rather seems that «the average civilized human being» cannot stay up to date with the development of their own civilization, thereby producing a dyscrasia between technological progress and cultural progress which does not bode well. Yet, the course of evolution is unknowable, and, therefore, the chance of optimism remains feasible. After all, evolution is a field of unpredictable possibilities. Optimism and pessimism are nothing but narrow and anthropocentric points of view. As Lorenz states in the conclusion of *On Aggression*: «I believe that reason can and will exert a selection pressure in the right direction.»[218] We find the same evolutionary optimism in 1978 *The Foundation of Ethology*:

> The ultimate significance of human research into causality is to be found in the fact that *this research gives us*, as the most important regulating factor, *the means to control natural processes.* Whether these processes are external and inorganic, such as lightning and storms, or internal and organic, such as diseases of the body or "purely psychic" symptoms of decline in the social patterns of human behavior is, moreover, of no consequence. Never is the pursuit of an actively predetermined goal possible without causal comprehension. On the other hand, causal analysis would have no function if questing humanity did not pursue goals. The endeavor «to search, as far as it is possible for us, among the world's causalities and to trace the chain they form as far as they are linked to one another» (Kant) is not «materialistic» in some moralistic sense, as some teleologists choose to describe it, but signifies a potential for the most intensive active service to the ultimate aims of all organic processes in that we, where success is achieved, are endowed with the power to intervene, helpfully regulating, where values are endangered,

[213] Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 27.
[214] Id,, *Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins*, New York, Harcourt, 1974, p. 46: «Whatever future research may tell us about the phylogenetic and historical sources of man's sense of justice, we may accept it as a scientific fact that the species Homo sapiens has a highly differentiated system of behavior patterns at his disposal, which, in a way analogous to that of system of antibody formation in the cell state, serves to eliminate socially dangerous elements.»
[215] Id., *On Aggression*, p. 218.
[216] Ibidem, p. 26.
[217] Ibidem, p. 222.
[218] Ibidem, p. 290.

while the purely teleological observers can only lay their hands in their laps, deedless, mourning the disintegration of the whole.[219]

Although the Nietzschean reference is surely important to comprehend Lorenz's understanding of civilisation and, thus, of his «very idea of humanity», his ethology was mainly and abundantly characterised by another philosophical source: Immanuel Kant. The latter amply influenced Lorenz's comprehension of evolution.[220] On the side of ethological theory, such a Kantian background lies at the foundation of Lorenz's well-known concept of «imprinting» (*Prägung*). Indeed, from a strictly philosophical point of view, the theory of imprinting represents the recuperation of Kant's doctrine of a priori as explicative model of the behavioural and learning structures of animals.[221] In other words, Lorenz plays Kant against Hume, thereby questioning that radical Humean empiricism upon which Darwin's theory is grounded.[222] Yet, Kant's gnoseology influenced also Lorenz's anthropology. In fact, unlike Darwin, Lorenz does not pinpoint in social passions such as sympathy the driving force of civilisation. He rather talks of «reason» (*Vernunft*), thereby alluding to an implicit anthropology of the «crooked timber» which sees in reason the only possible moral regulatory principle of human conduct. Such a Kantian background of Lorenz's ethology emphasises further the Darwinian contraposition between civilisation (or humanity) and natural selection (or animality). Therefore, pursuant to its Kantian character, Lorenz's perspective perfectly suited with Levi's moralist use of ethology.[223]

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[219] Konrad Lorenz, *The Foundation of Ethology*, New York, Springer, 1981, p. 35. This is the conclusion of the first chapter where we also find Huxley's quotation to which Levi alludes in 1986 *Peroxide Blonde*.

[220] Cf. Davide Bozzo, *Il problema dell'idealismo di Kant nel manoscritto russo di Konrad Lorenz*, in «Studi Kantiani», 17/2004, pp. 103-142.

[221] Konrad Lorenz, *Kant's Doctrine of the A Priori in the Light of Contemporary Biology*, in *Philosophy After Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Michael Ruse, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 231-246.

[222] Konrad Lorenz, *The Natural Science of the human Species. An Introduction to Comparative Behavioral Research. The "Russian Manuscript" (1944-1948)*, ed. Agnes von Cranach, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1996, pp. 14-15: «Kant, the great discoverer of our innate patterns of thought and intuition, did not quite see these as organic functions determined by structure. He saw something that was not seen by the English empiricists, the first philosophers to regain confidence in the evidence provided by the sense organs. Bacon, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume were all of the opinion that the fundamental structures of human perception of the external world […], all arose from the individual experience of every individual human being […]. Although they were opponents of idealism and although they quite rightly took account of the sense organs and their specific structures, they were still "idealists enough" to overlook completely the brain as an organ that can also possess structures and what structures! Although Kant was even less inclined to interpret the forms and structures of human reason as organic functions determined by structures, he was the first to see something that had not been seen previously. He saw that quite specific forms of human thought and intuition are possessed by human beings that are independent of any experience and that, conversely, experience is only permitted by the existence of these given "a priori"' forms of thought and intuition. He recognized with great clarity something that the "sensualistic" tenet of the empiricists completely omitted, namely, that the form in which the external world is depicted in our perception is determined not only by the structure and function of our eyes, ears, and other sense organs but, far more extensively, by internal laws inherent in human perception itself. Like no other before him, he thoroughly examined and dissected these laws […]. Kant non only discovered our "world-image apparatus" but also analyzed it far more than anyone after him. For this reason, it seems almost like a satire of human intellectual history that the idealist Kant largely did this in criticism of the empiricist Hume.»

[223] As Levi writes in 1983 *News from the Sky*: «Immanuel Kant recognized two wonders in creation: the starry sky above his head, and the moral law within him. Let's leave aside moral law: is it to be found within everyone? Is it true, can we admit that it's innate in us, that we are born with it, and in the course of an individual life it evolves and matures, or does it, rather, degenerate and die out?» (*Complete Works*, III, p. 2180). As Levi reported in a 1985 interview, is father's library contained Kant's works (in German). Cf. Alberto Gozzi, *Lo specchio del cielo*, in *Opere complete*, III, p. 523.

On the occasion of 1968 *Apollo 8* mission, Levi writes a brief piece for *La Stampa* titled *The Moon and Man*, wherein he confesses all his enthusiasm and astonishment for an enterprise that, one year later, will lead the humankind to the first lunar landing.

> Man, the naked ape, a terrestrial animal descended from a long line of terrestrial or marine creatures, every one of his organs shaped by the restricted environment that is Earth's lower atmosphere, can be removed from that atmosphere without dying. He can endure exposure to cosmic radiation, even without the domestic air shield. He can be removed from the familiar alternation of day and night. He can tolerate accelerations many times that of gravity. He can eat, sleep, work, and think even in conditions of zero gravity; this is perhaps the most astonishing revelation, about which there were, rightly, the most serious doubts before Gagarin's mission. *Human matter (or rather animal matter), besides being adaptable in an evolutionary sense—on a scale of millions of years and at the cost of the incalculable sacrifice of less fit variations*—is adaptable here and now, on a scale of days and hours: we all saw the astronauts on TV, floating in space like fish in water, learning new equilibriums and new reflexes, never realized, or realizable, on the ground. Therefore man is strong not only because he became so, from the time, a million years ago, when from among the many weapons nature offered animals he chose the brain: man is strong in and of himself, he is stronger than he thought possible, he is made of a substance that is fragile only in appearance, he was mysteriously designed with enormous, unsuspected margins of safety. We are unique, sturdy, versatile animals, motivated by atavistic impulses, and by reason, and, at the same time, by a «creative force» as a result of which if an undertaking, whether good or bad, can be achieved, it cannot be put aside but must be achieved. *This undertaking, the lunar flight, is a test. Others await us, works of daring and brilliance, demanding in a different way, in that they are essential to our very survival: endeavors to eliminate hunger, poverty, and suffering.* These, too, must be considered a challenge to our worth, and these, too, since they can be achieved, must be achieved.[224]

Levi's evolutionary optimism lies on the products of human reason, that is science and technology, whose ultimate aim is the eradication of suffering.[225] An aim which is essentially tied to human condition: everybody suffers and nobody (justly!) wants to suffer. Because, unlike Nietzsche and all his false pupils, Levi did not believe in power. He saw with his own eyes what happens when human life is ripped from civilisation: there is no power, but only absolute suffering. Above all, power is not universal; it is unequally distributed. Not everyone is powerful. Not everyone comes into the world powerful. There are the powerful and there are the weak; the luck and the unluck; the *saved* and the *drowned*. Therefore, the development and the defense of civilization eventually depends on which side one might stand for: whether to conceive equality from the point of view either of the powerful ones or of the weak ones. Levi chose the latter not because, as Nietzsche would think, he was bourgeois, resentful or unconsciously Christian. Levi, the atheist Levi, did so because, for him, equality means giving the chance to everyone to live a "human" life, that is protected from the weakness and the vulnerability by which all of us, as suffering animals, are gripped. The rest is only a matter of luck.

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[224] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, p. 2337 (emphasis mine). The quotation «creative force» («*forza allegra*») derives from Francesco De Sanctis' 1883 *Il darwinismo nell'arte* ("Darwinism in Arts"). Cf. Levi, *Opere complete*, III, p. 1334. One year after, On July 13th 1969, Levi will publish on *La Stampa* the piece «*Non è più il mondo della fantasia vana*» devoted to the first human landing on the moon. Successively, the latter will be included in 1985 *Other People's Trade* as *The Moon and Us* (*Complete Works*, III, pp. 2030-2033).

[225] According to di Frederic D. Homer, Levi's perspective is rather more «tragic» and «differs from the early modernists because he throws himself into the struggle, even though he is doubtful of the outcome. Levi's perspective on civilization resembles that of Freud, who once commented in a letter to Albert Einstein that it is surprising civilization has prevailed as well as it has, given man's tragic and tenuous makeup.» Cf. Frederic D. Homer, *Primo Levi and the Politics of Survival*, Columbia, University of Missouri 2001, p. 49.

Chapter IV

The Rise of the Powerful Animal. On Deleuze's Materialism of Power

> Now, when suffering is always the first of the arguments marshalled against life, as its most questionable feature, it is salutary to remember the times when people made the opposite assessment, because they could not do without making people suffer and saw first-rate magic in it, a veritable seductive lure to life. Perhaps pain – I say this to comfort the squeamish – did not hurt as much then as it does now.
>
> Fredrich Nietzsche[1]

The Eclipse of the Suffering Animal

In the previous chapter, we encountered Primo Levi's though, which, as I attempted to show, represents a fruitful contemporary implementation of the modern paradigm of the *suffering animal*. In the second chapter, we witnessed the latter's "evolution" within the conceptual frame of Darwinism. Such a revised variation of moderns' *suffering animal* provided a materialist thesis on the living matter wherein any form of vitalism, finalism and essentialism are finally firmly rejected. Thanks to Darwinism, modern materialism succeeded in its centuries-old endeavour: to have done with metaphysics, its dualisms, its hierarchies, and its unbearable deontology. As we have noticed so far, the battlefield of such a dispute is the question of suffering. From the beginning, since Descartes conceived the *animal-machine* paradigm, modern anti-Cartesian revolt pinpointed in suffering the element capable of demolishing the «citadel of metaphysic». The empirical fact of evil alone, in all its facets (from natural evil to psychological pain), allows to contest any theological justification, thereby fostering the possibility, once God died, of thinking an ontology free from the dualisms between mind and body, transcendence and immanence, humanity and animality, and so on. *Dualism is the form of God's exercise of power*. Indeed, behind God and his advocate theodicy, there stand an axiological order established on discriminatory principles – any dualism imposes a strict *aut aut* - which, as the animal question blatantly show, end up deciding a priori those who are entitled to be endowed with a moral account (the right to live and the right to not suffer uselessly) and those who are not. In my opinion, what is peculiar of the *suffering animal* paradigm is the fact that the death of God does not lead to establish a different ontology wherefrom gather more egalitarian principles. Without God, life appears for what it is: an amoral phenomenon, neither good nor evil, wherein the living beings rejoice and suffer. It is not pessimistic at all to acknowledge the prevalence of the second on the first: this is "simply" how life itself works. And, as nothing can ultimately prescribe the livings how to rejoice and seek pleasure, as nothing can provide a valid justification for their suffering. Sentient beings do not like suffering; they simply endure it. As such, pain demands to be interrupted: where there is sentience there is automatically (not to say mechanically) a repulsion to suffering. Since blaming a wicked God would be pointless, then we might as well acknowledge such an unjustified injustice and ensure that those who are able to feel pain either do not suffer at all or, at least, suffer less. Thus, the paradigm of the *suffering animal* claims the death of God, but it does not seek a new form or salvation in life as such. God is dead because life, since its very working entails a massive

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, II/7, pp. 43-44.

amount of pain, cannot be considered a reliable source of good. I think that Darwin's main contribution to the *suffering animal* paradigm has been the underlining of an immanent swerve between life and morality – the reverse effect of evolution -, according to which morality begins where the natural fact of suffering is rejected by those living beings who suffer. From this point of view, Darwin is very modern, that is in line with that "Hobbesian" tradition which sees in nature an issue to be solved. Obviously, Darwin does not maintain a dualistic understanding of the nature-morality relationship, but suffering is surely a problem that nature poses and that us, since sentient being, desperately attempt to find a remedy for. Once again, Darwin's own perspective proves to be far and antithetical as compared to his bio-political epigones which, on the contrary, refers politics and morality back to its natural domain.[2]

What of the *suffering animal* within contemporary philosophy? Levi's case is surely representative, but it tells us a few regarding the mid-1900 philosophical reflection on the triangulation between materialism, humanity and animality. Although Levi should not be reduced to a mere literary example, however, he directly interacted with philosophy very little, and, when he did, he scarcely engaged with philosophies and philosophers of his generation. In this chapter, I will attempt to understand how the philosophical narration reconstructed so far has been understood within contemporary philosophy. In the end of the second chapter, I maintained that Nietzsche, through his critique of Darwinism, outlined a different paradigm: that of the *powerful animal*. The latter shares the attempt to provide a fully-fledged materialist ontology, i.e., an anti/metaphysical understanding of life, but it rejects the basis of the genealogy of morality which the *suffering animal* is established upon. In other words, Nietzsche's *powerful animal* contests the arrangement of a materialist discourse at the core of which there stands the question of suffering. For the moderns, such a centralization on suffering was the key to overcome metaphysics: the empirical presence of suffering, that is the existence of a vulnerable and fragile matter, makes the hypothesis of God inconsistent and even immoral. Darwin radicalized further this perspective, developing a "law of life" which working principle – the natural selection – is nourished by the very precariousness that characterized the living matter. Life and its conditions of possibility hung by a threat. Nietzsche, a sharp interpreter, contests Darwinian ontology inasmuch, according to him, it is established upon the same "slave morality" of the metaphysical tradition it aims to overcome. The naturalism that Darwinism claims is ostensible: a moral judgment conceals behind its understanding of life and of the living. Thus, by means of his polemical inquiry, Nietzsche realizes that Darwinism is not only involved in the same axiological play of metaphysics, but it also ends up providing a naturalistic justification of the latter. With Darwinism, God comes back to life even stronger as natural law. As we noticed, Nietzsche's solution consists in acknowledging and releasing what western metaphysics, i.e., Christianity, always attempted to tame: the power of life. Only by doing so, western philosophy can truly accomplish the death of god. We do not need a genealogy which justify the existing morality, but rather a braver a truly radical «transvaluation of values.»[3] The *powerful animal* is a living matter which does not demand to be saved from its alleged defective finitude; the *powerful animal* demands instead to be free to exercise its inner power in spite of those weak who, afflicted by resentment, wants to keep him in the docile and fearful state of bad conscience. The *powerful animal* revolts to that modern taming of life fostered by the weak ones.

The *suffering animal* and the *powerful animal*: two conceptual paradigms which, despite their common aim, end up disagreeing so deeply that they eventually rule each other out.

[2] Esposito, *Bíos*, pp. 21-24.

[3] Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker. The Perfect Nihilist*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 36-37.

The Nietzsche-Darwin conflict sketches the two fundamental guidelines of following materialist reflection. Two paths which respectively entail two different way of thinking the human-animal relationship. Because, as we have noticed so far, what is at stake with this struggle among materialism is a certain understanding of the ethical condition of the living. Albeit the *rational animal* always manages to recover even before the hardest assaults – Kant showed us very clearly how certain theoretical structures *must* be postulated even when metaphysics become «impossible» -, after Darwin and Nietzsche any hyper-rationalist understanding of the human will be but a stubborn vanity. Nevertheless, Nietzsche's critique of Darwin has marked a rift which will amply characterize the development of contemporary materialist thought. The latter can be even considered as the continuation of the path traced by Nietzsche (I say "Nietzsche" to subsume a tradition of anti-Darwinian vitalistic materialism" whereof Nietzsche is only one of the most influential advocate), thereby reiterating and increasing a whole series of bias and distortions on Darwinism in contemporary philosophy.

Indeed, Darwin as theorist of a "naturalistic justification of slave morality" is a judgement which goes to increase a wide range of harsh and well-consolidated misinterpretations of Darwinism in the field of philosophy (and, perhaps, it is the only one which really hits the mark): Darwinism as a philosophy of history applied to the field of biology (Arendt)[4]; Darwinism as the basic ideology of modern racial bio-politics (Foucault)[5]; Darwinism as a new metaphysics of life (Tarizzo).[6] These are prejudices which tend to nourish the idea of Darwin as forefather of Hitlerism. Yet, they all move from the same historical-philosophical presupposition: that Darwinism is the ultimate settling of the modern rationalistic project. As I pointed out in the first chapter, contemporary philosophy is characterized by a very critical attitude towards modern philosophy. An anti-modern narration which contains several interpretative distortions. As Roberto Mordacci pointed out, contemporary critiques towards modern philosophy, especially those coming from the post-modern tradition, lie upon a completely misleading understanding of the philosophical reflection which took place between the 16th and the 17th centuries. Indeed, by reducing more than two centuries to a homogenous block, without any nuances and entirely contained in its beginning (the Cartesian *cogito*), they project on modernity tensions and contradictions which, if anything,

[4] Arendt, *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, p. 463: «The difference between Marx's historical and Darwin's naturalistic approach has frequently been pointed out, usually and rightly in favor of Marx. This has led us to forget the great and positive interest Marx took in Darwin's theories; Engels could not think of a greater compliment to Marx's scholarly. achievements than to call him the "Darwin of history". If one considers, not the actual achievement, but the basic philosophies of both men, it turns out that ultimately the movement of history and the
movement of nature are one and the same. Darwin's introduction of the concept of development into nature, his insistence that, at least in the field of biology, natural movement is not circular but unilinear, moving in an infinitely progressing direction, means in fact that nature is, as it were, being swept into history, that natural life is considered to be historical. The "natural" law of the survival of the fittest is just as much a historical law and could be used as such by racism as Marx's law of the survival of the most progressive class.»

[5] Michel Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended". Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, New York, Picador, 2003, p. 257: «Basically, evolutionism, understood in the broad sense—or in other words, not so much Darwin's theory itself as a set, a bundle, of notions (such as: the hierarchy of species that grow from a common evolutionary tree, the struggle for existence among species, the selection that eliminates the less fit) - naturally became within a few years during the nineteenth century I not simply a way of transcribing a political discourse into biological terms, and not simply a way of dressing up a political discourse in scientific clothing, but a real way of thinking about the relations between colonization, the necessity for wars, criminality, the phenomena of madness and mental illness, the history of societies with their different classes, and so on. Whenever, in other words, there was a confrontation, a killing or the risk of death, the nineteenth century was quite literally obliged to think about them in the form of evolutionism.»

[6] Davide Tarizzo, *Life. A Modern Invention*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

are typical of nineteenth-century idealism and positivism.[7] In other words, modern age has been read backwards, that is starting from its most radical rationalist and idealist outcomes. By doing so, contemporary interpreters not only saw a *telos* which does not actually exist – as if Descartes' *Meditations* should necessarily lead to Hegel's *Science of Logic* -, but they especially concealed the colorful and antagonistic account of modern philosophy. Of course, Darwin is deeply implicated in modern philosophy, but, at this point, we should rather understand which modernity we are talking of: the modernity of *res extensa* or the modernity of *res cogitans*? Is Darwin either the heir of the «metaphysics of autonomous life» ushered in by Kant[8], or the heir of a materialist-mechanist tradition which attempted to understand the phenomenon of life beyond metaphysics? In the second chapter, I attempted to locate Darwin within this second tradition, highlighting a basic theoretical continuity between Descartes' mechanist theory of the *animal-machine* and Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. If so, I think we need to better understand whether and how Darwin's biology should be located within the development of the modern «synthetic notion of life» that Foucault reconstructed in *The Order of Things*.[9] If, as Davide Tarizzo pointed out, Darwin's theory is involved in a philosophical process which gave birth to a new metaphysics of life, it is however true that Darwin's most significative philosophical move was to understand life not as a basic principle of the living world, but as a «law». Darwin *weakened* life: it is "simply" an algorithmic process which needs very precise conditions in order to work. Life is a contingency, a very fragile phenomenon within the history of this planet.[10] Moreover, for Darwin, there is no life before the living world: life is immanent to the evolutionary process. Not by chance, Darwin hypothesized the existence of a «common ancestor»[11]: a very first product of the laws of life starting from which evolution «diverges». The «variety» of forms can be explained without leaping over immanence only by supposing a starting point which, due to lack of finalities and of vague inner potentiality, is nothing but a chance and fragile condition of possibility. As Stephen J. Gould loved repeating: life is so «improbable» that if we are to «reply life's tape», then the whole process might either develop differently or even not develop at all.[12] The view of life fostered by Darwinism is so abyssal and dizzying that it cannot be traced, unless one works for inaccurate stretches ("Darwin's evolution is a teleology"), to the frameworks of metaphysics. Nothing goes beyond or below the algorithm. A law is not a God, and, with Darwin, the law of life finally does not require any God or immaterial principle to work (otherwise, we should really worry!). In few words, Darwin gave us a first, even though still perfectible, accomplished material reductionism capable of processing all those questions (such as meaning, morality, evil, and so on) whereon metaphysics always claimed an exclusive ownership. After all, are Descartes's *cogito* and its idealist outcomes nothing but the sign of modern attempt to push the specter of materialist reductionism away? As I will attempt to show in the following

[7] Roberto Mordacci, *La condizione neomoderna*, Torino, Einaudi, 2017, p. 5.
[8] Cf. Tarizzo, *Life. A Modern Invention*.
[9] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An archeology of the human sciences*, London, Routledge, 1970, p. 293.
[10] Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, p. 144: «Now here is a fascinating thought. The answer to our question – of how much luck we are allowed to postulate - depends upon whether our planet is the only one that has life, or whether life abounds all around the universe. The one thing we know for certain is that life has arisen once, here on this very planet. But we have no idea at all whether there is life anywhere else in the universe. It is entirely possible that there isn't.»
[11] Darwin, *Origin of Species*, pp. 90-97.
[12] Cf. Gould, *Wonderful Life*, pp. 45ff. See also, Telmo Pievani, *Imperfezione. Una storia naturale*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2019, p. 14 (digital edition): «Hindsight is the worst enemy for the understanding of evolution as it tends to underestimate the countless alternative outcomes which would have been possible starting from the same conditions. The hindsight makes what is utterly imperfect look necessary and accomplished, that is perfect. It also induces us to overturn reality.» Translation mine.

pages, the deepest reason behind the disconcerting absence of Darwin within contemporary materialist reflections is due to such a difficulty to deal with reductionism and its implications, that is accepting, without reservations, the weakness and the meaningless of life. As Daniel Dennett pointed out:

> Darwin's dangerous idea is reductionism incarnate (Yes, incarnate. Think about it: would we want to say it was reductionism *in spirit?*), promising to unite and explain just about everything in one magnificent vision. Its being the idea of an *algorithmic* process makes it all the more powerful, since the substrate neutrality it thereby possesses permits us to consider its application to just about anything. It is no respecter of material boundaries. It applies, as we have already begun to see, even to itself. The most common fear about Darwin's idea is that it will not just explain but *explain away* the Minds and Purposes and Meanings that we all hold dear. People fear that once this universal acid has passed through the monuments we cherish, they will cease to exist, dissolved in an unrecognizable and unlovable puddle of scientistic destruction.[13]

All these reasons led to a gradual decline of the paradigm of the *suffering animal* within contemporary materialism. On the contrary, the *powerful animal* has stood out increasingly. In order to understand both the decline of the *suffering animal* and the rise of the *powerful animal*, I will take into account Gilles Deleuze's philosophy. The motives behind this choice are fundamentally two. First, Deleuze represents one of the few contemporary philosophers who really attempted to provide a new ontology. An ontology which lies upon the main tasks of mid-1900s anti-metaphysical reflection: the recognition of difference, the affirmation of immanence, the refusal of humanist anthropology and the defeat of Hegelian dialectic. Moreover, Deleuze's ontology has become, although often clichéd, the theoretical foundation of the so called «New Materialism.»[14] Later, among the main philosophers of his age, Deleuze attempted one of the most interesting and challenging historical-philosophical analysis of modern age. In particular, Deleuze was able to highlight the anti-metaphysical side of modern philosophy, thereby finding theoretical alternatives that are still waiting to be expressed and accomplished.[15] Because of his importance for the current debate on materialism and its ethical, political and anthropological employments, Gilles Deleuze's philosophy deserves to be accounted and inspected. Of course, we are talking of an author who inspired an impressive scholarship. Therefore, I do not aim here to present and to reconstruct Deleuze's philosophy in every detail. I will rather focus my analysis on some aspects such as the human-animal relationship, the question of suffering, and the nexus between life and power.

From the moderns to Darwin, the human-animal relationship proved to be the philosophical question which our understanding of life depends upon. The *suffering animal* is the face of a living being who discovered the weakness and precariousness is made of. Instead, the *powerful animal* is the face of a living being who discovered the power and the vitality which go through them. Deleuze shows us the joy of this latter discovery.

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[13] Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, p. 82.

[14] For an introductory overview on Deleuzian New Materialism see Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2010; Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, *New Materialism. Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2010; Rosi Braidotti, Rick Dolphijn, *This Deleuzian Century. Art, Activism, Life*, Leiden, Brill, 2014.

[15] Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze. An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, London, UCL Press, 2005, pp. XVIII-XIX.

Releasing Life: Hume and Bergson

As Michael Hardt pointed out, Deleuze's works on history of philosophy rise from the very poststructuralist attempt to overcome Hegelian dialectic.[16] Within the colorful generation of poststructuralist thinkers, Deleuze is surely who brought more into focus the very aim of such an anti-Hegelianism: to release the category of difference from the centuries-old theoretical condemnation which has reduced it to a negative destined for negation. A way of thinking that, for Deleuze, is structured upon the ethical-theoretical acts of *representation*, *recognition*, and *judgment*. Hegel's dialectic represents the peak, the ultimate systematization, of a "pathology of sameness" which western philosophy, from Plato, has been always affected by ad which claims the primacy of One on the multiplicity, the primacy of the subject on the object, the primacy of the inwardness on the outward, and so. The outcome of this play of primacies, which are nothing but acts of subordination, is the authoritarian reduction of difference to a defective negativity needy of "redemption", that is to be taken back to the significant unities of God, of Reason, of the One.

Deleuze's works are characterized by a very illuminating dialogue with the history of philosophy. I am obviously talking about his well-known monographies devoted to Hume, Kant, Bergson, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Nietzsche, to quote the most known. As I will attempt to underline, over his historical reconstruction, Deleuze stresses the different declinations that a materialist discourse can assume depending on which element one might consider to be truly disruptive for metaphysics. As we know, it is a choice between two fundamental options: either *suffering* or *power*. Deleuze establishes his materialism upon a line which, from Spinoza, to Hume, to Nietzsche, and even Bergson has, according to him, attempted to release the *power of life* from the constrictions imposed by metaphysics. The questions I will constantly ask though the following pages is: what of *suffering*? Why, according to Deleuze, *suffering* cannot be the ethical-ontological element capable of getting really over metaphysics?

Deleuze's journey in the history of philosophy starts in 1953 with *Empiricism and Subjectivity. An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*.[17] As Gaetano Rametta pointed out, this work represents Deleuze's «humorous attitude» to «go against the grain»[18], to question the "scholastic of the capital H" (Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger)[19]. Deleuze decides to contrast this series with another H, that of Hume. In my opinion, Deleuze's work on Hume does not simply highlight a theoretical alternative to Hegel's dialectic or to Husserl's phenomenology, both affected by the "pathology of sameness". The essay on Hume stresses a deeper antagonism: Hume as the anti-Kant. As is known, Deleuze will devote an entire monography to Kant in 1963 entitled *Kant's Critical Philosophy.*[20] As Deleuze stated in a 1968 interview with Jean-Noel Vuarnet:

> Kant, for example, is the perfect incarnation of false critique: that's why he fascinates me. But when you're facing such a work of genius, there's no point saying you disagree. First you have to know how to admire; you have to rediscover the problems *he* poses, his particular machinery. It is through admiration that you will come to genuine critique. The mania of people today is not knowing how to admire anything: either they're "against," or they situate everything at their own level while they chit-

[16] Ibidem, pp. IX-XI. See also Daniel W. Smith, *Deleuze and the History of Philosophy*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Deleuze*, ed. Daniel W. Smith and Henry Somers-Hall, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 13-32.
[17] Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity. An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2001.
[18] Gaetano Rametta, *Deleuze interprete di Hume*, Milano, Mimesis, 2020, p. 7. Translation mine.
[19] Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, new York, Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 12.
[20] Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*.

> chat and scrutinize. That's no way to go about it. You have to work your way back to those problems which an author of genius has posed, all the way back to that which he does not say *in* what he says, in order to extract something that still belongs to him, though you also turn it against him. You have to be inspired, visited by the geniuses you denounce.[21]

In Deleuze's eyes, Kant's transcendentalism represents a missed opportunity or, as I stated in the first chapter, a "great retreat". Indeed, for Deleuze, Kant is a "conservative" thinker who could not push the critique to the fullest and, by doing so, fell back into the trap of sameness: a «vicious circle which makes the condition refer to the conditioned as it reproduces its image».[22] Moreover, Kant's critique does not demolish anything; rather, what is questioned ends up being reinforced and declared as irrevocable: «ideal knowledge, true morality, and faith come out perfectly intact.»[23] As Deleuze states in 1968 *Difference and Repetition*:

> We see to what degree the Kantian Critique is ultimately respectful: knowledge, morality, reflection and faith are supposed to correspond to natural interests of reason, and are never themselves called into question; only the use of the faculties is declared legitimate or not in relation to one or other of these interests. Throughout, the variable model of recognition fixes good usage in the form of a harmony between the faculties determined by a dominant faculty under a given common sense. For this reason, illegitimate usage (illusion) is explained solely in the following manner: in its natural *state*, thought confuses its interests and allows its various domains to encroach upon one another. This does not prevent thought from having at its base a good natural *law*, on which Critique bestows its civil sanction; nor does it mean that the domains, interests, limits and properties are not sacred and grounded upon inalienable right. Critique has everything - a tribunal of justices of the peace, a registration room, a register - except the power of a new politics which would overturn the image of thought. Even the dead God and the fractured I are no more than a passing bad moment, the speculative moment: they are resuscitated in a more integrated and certain form than ever, more sure of themselves, but with other, practical or moral, interests.[24]

For Deleuze, Kant's critique deceives itself and repeats an «image of thought» established on the schemes of Sameness, that is *representation*, *recognition* and *judgment*. Kant's transcendentalism is the *repetition* of the sameness. Hence, in Kant, *representation* and *recognition* serve the purpose of tracing difference back to what is established a priori, while *judgment*, the ultimate act of Reason, is the synthetic activity which imposes its authoritarian law to the world. Therefore, *representation*, *recognition* and *judgment* compose a metaphysical machine which wants to apply *its* truth to the multiplicity of the world. And this is not only a gnoseological act. Any judgment has a «moral aftertaste».[25]

> I have always felt that I am an empiricist, that is, a pluralist. But what does this equivalence between empiricism and pluralism mean? It derives from the two characteristics by which Whitehead defined empiricism: the abstract does not explain, but must itself be explained; and the aim is not to rediscover the eternal or the universal, but to find the conditions under which something new is produced (creativeness). In so-called rationalist philosophies, the abstract is given the task of explaining, and it is the abstract that is realized in the concrete. One starts with abstractions such as the One, the Whole, the Subject, and one looks for the process by which they are embodied in a world which they make conform to their requirements (this process can be knowledge, virtue, history…). Even if it means undergoing a terrible crisis each time that one sees rational unity or totality turning into their opposites, or the subject generating monstrosities . Empiricism starts with a completely different evaluation: analysing the states of things, in such a way that non-preexistent concepts can be extracted from them . States of things are neither unities nor totalities, but multiplicities. It is not just that there are several states of things (each

[21] Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*, ed. David Lapoujade, New York, Semiotext(e), 2004, p. 139.
[22] Id., *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, London, Athlone Press, 1990, p. 105
[23] Ibidem, p. 138.
[24] Id., *Difference and Repetition*, London, Continuum, 2001, p. 137.
[25] David Lapoujade, *Deleuze, les mouvements aberrants*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 2014, chap. II.

> one of which would be yet another) ; nor that each state of things is itself multiple (which would simply be to indicate its resistance to unification). The essential thing, from the point of view of empiricism, is the noun multiplicity, which designates a set of lines or dimensions which are irreducible to one another. Every "thing" is made up in this way.[26]

Deleuze finds in empiricism the great philosophical alternative capable of stressing the limits and viciousness of rationalism. For Deleuze, Kant did not "resolve" Hume's radical empiricism by means of transcendentalism; rather, Kant battened down the hatches to Hume's challenge. As is known, the core of this challenge is the concept of causality. Hume removes from causality any ontological and epistemological value, sweeping away not only the belief in a preconceived uniformity of nature upon which establish human knowledge, but, above all, the very concept of God as organizing cause of the world.[27] By doing so, Hume anchored human knowledge to habit[28]: «What are we? We are habits, nothing but habits - the habit of saying "I". Perhaps, there is no more striking answer to the problem of the self.»[29] On his part, Kant, who follows Hume's lesson on the phenomenal level, transposes causality within the transcendental (and such a transposition allows also to think of the inner causality of free will), thereby avoiding a skeptical drift which, according to him, would force us to silence. Yet, as Deleuze asks, *why should we not stay silent?*

> There is not the slightest reason for thinking that modes of existence need transcendent values by which they could be compared, selected, and judged relative to one another. On the contrary, there are only immanent criteria. A possibility of life is evaluated through itself in the movements it lays out and the intensities it creates on a plane of immanence: what is not laid out or created is rejected. A mode of existence is good or bad, noble or vulgar, complete or empty, independently of Good and Evil or any transcendent value: there are never any criteria other than the tenor of existence, the intensification of life […] it may be that believing in this world, in this life, becomes our most difficult task, or the task of a mode of existence still to be discovered on our plane of immanence today. This is the empiricist conversion.[30]

What does this empiricist conversion consist in? For Deleuze, empiricism entails a point of view on life which tries to gain leverage through free connections among the data of our experience. By using a very Humean image, the mind becomes a «screen»[31] whereon things freely flow. Since there is neither a preconceived causality nor a preconceived human nature

[26] Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, p. VII.
[27] Mori, *L'ateismo dei moderni*, pp. 177ff.
[28] Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, p. 66: «In Hume's empiricism, genesis is always understood in terms of principles, and itself as a principle. To derive causality from probability is to confuse the gradual formation of a principle upon which reason depends with the progress of reasoning. In fact, experimental reason is the result of habit-and not vice versa. Habit is the root of reason, and indeed the principle from which reason stems as an effect.»
[29] Ibidem, p. X.
[30] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, pp. 74-75.
[31] Deleuze, *The Brain is the Screen* (1986), in *Two Regimes of Madness. Text and Interviews 1975-1995*, ed. David Lapoujade, New York, Semiotext(e), 2006, p. 284: «The screen, in other words, we ourselves, can be deficient idiot brain, as well as the brain of creative genius.»

– a «beautiful soul»[32] -, then thinking such a flow means adopting a «practice of AND»[33] which, instead of representing, recognizing, and eventually judging, focuses on relations, proximities, and intensities. As Deleuze states: «Thinking with AND, instead of thinking IS, instead of thinking for IS: empiricism has never had another secret.»[34] Hence, empiricism is the thought of difference, a thought which lets the power and the creativity of mind express freely. Through his all reflection, Deleuze will attempt to outline an ontological perspective capable of combining mind and being: the immanent and impersonal theory of «transcendental empiricism.» As Deleuze will claim in his last piece of writing *Immanence: a Life*: «Without a consciousness, the transcendental field could be defined as a pure plane of immanence, because it escapes all transcendence, both of the subject and of the object: Absolute immanence in itself it is nor in anything, nor can it be attributed to something; it does not depend on an object or belong to subject.»[35] As is known, Deleuze's research of transcendental empiricism will require the recourse to other philosophers, such as Bergson, Spinoza and Nietzsche who, unlike Hume, are mainly engaged in ontology. Indeed, Hume's radical empiricism entrap the subject in their mind, in their mental «screen»: empiricism does not deny the external world as the latter is the source of our impressions, but what we are allowed to say about it only depends on the intensity of the impressions we receive. This "only" is as abyssal as it permits to think more than what rationalists such as Kant maintain. From this point of view, the silence empiricist skepticism would lead us to is the silence of a though which, rather than judging, tune in differences. A thought that stops organizing and classifying, and that eventually *becomes* purely creative. In Hume, the world is "lawless", a chaos where phenomena simply happen.[36] From the internal point of view, the idea of a preconceived subjectivity who arrogantly judges the external world utterly fails. Probably, Hume worked for the most destructive critique of human subjectivity, so destructive to lead Kant to say "Enough!". Of course, Hume still talked of «Human Nature», but, as Deleuze continuously points out, his main questions were «*how does the mind become human nature*?», «*how the mind become subject*»?[37], that is how a mind, lets' say a "plastic matter", assumes the configuration of a human nature by relating to the external world.[38] This is why Deleuze goes to maintain that «one must be a moralist, sociologist, or historian *before* being a psychologist, *in order to* be a psychologist. Here, the project of the human sciences reaches

[32] Id., *Difference and Repetition*, p. XX: «There are certainly many dangers in invoking pure differences which have become independent of the negative and liberated from the identical. The greatest danger is that of lapsing into the representations of a beautiful soul: there are only reconcilable and federative differences, far removed from bloody struggles. The beautiful soul says: we are different, but not opposed... The *notion of a problem*, which we see linked to that of difference, also seems to nurture the sentiments of the beautiful soul: only problems and questions matter.... Nevertheless, we believe that when these problems attain their proper degree of *positivity*, and when difference becomes the object of a corresponding affirmation, they release a power of aggression and selection which destroys the beautiful soul by depriving it of its very identity and breaking its good will.»

[33] Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, 15.

[34] Ibidem, p. 57.

[35] Gilles Deleuze, *Immanence: a Life* (1995), in *Two Regimes of Madness*, p. 385.

[36] Id., *Hume*, in *Desert Islands*, p. 162: «Hume has a peculiar place in the history of philosophy. His empiricism is, so to speak, a kind of universe of science fiction: as in science fiction, the world seems fictional, strange, foreign, experienced by other creatures; but we get the feeling that this world is our own, and we are the creatures. At the same time, science or theory undergoes a conversion: theory becomes *inquiry* (this conception originates with Bacon; recalling this conception, Kant will transform and rationalize it when he conceives of theory as a tribunal). Science or theory is an inquiry, in other words, a practice: a practice of the apparently fictitious world described by empiricism, a study of the conditions of legitimacy of the practices in this our empirical world. This is the great conversion of theory into practice.»

[37] Id., *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, pp. 22-23.

[38]Ibidem, p. 89: «In short, the organism and its senses do not immediately and in themselves have the characteristics of human nature or of a subject; they must acquire these somewhere else.»

the condition which would make knowledge in general possible: the mind must be affected.»[39] Hume's subjectivity is a «practical subject»[40]. As Deleuze asks: «to take possession of an abandoned city is it enough to throw one's spear against the gate, or do you have to touch it with your hand?»[41]

Here, I do not intend to deepen the gnoseological aspects of Deleuze's interpretation of Hume.[42] I will rather attempt to limit my enquiry to the anthropological implications Deleuze deduced from Hume. In my opinion, therein lies a whole series of implicit questions which, along with the ontological gap, will gradually lead Deleuze to get away from the "English" Hume. In this regard, the second chapter of *Empiricism and Subjectivity* dwells upon Hume's main social and anthropological theme: the concept of sympathy. According to Deleuze, «The important and principal sentence of the *Treatise* is this: "Tis not contrary to Reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger.»[43] Is worth quoting a more extended piece of this part of Hume's *Treatise*:

> Where a passion is neither founded on false suppositions, nor chuses means insufficient for the end, the understanding can neither justify nor condemn it. *Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. Tis not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian or person wholly unknown to me.* Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledged lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter. A trivial good may, from certain circumstances, produce a desire superior to what arises from the greatest and most valuable enjoyment; nor is there any thing more extraordinary in this, than in mechanics to see one pound weight raise up a hundred by the advantage of its situation. In short, a passion must be accompany'd with some false judgment, in order to its being unreasonable; and even then tis not the passion, properly speaking, which is unreasonable, but the judgment.[44]

In this section of the *Treatise*, Hume deals with the relationship between reason and passions, questioning the traditional rationalistic account of such a relationship and, as always happens in Hume, providing a radical different perspective: «We speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passion and of reason. Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.»[45] Indeed, according to Hume:

> Since a passion can never, in any sense, be call d unreasonable, but when founded on a false supposition, or when it chuses means insufficient for the design d end, tis impossible, that reason and passion can ever oppose each other, or dispute for the government of the will and actions. The moment we perceive the falsehood of any supposition, or the insufficiency of any means our passions yield to our reason without any opposition. I may desire any fruit as of an excellent relish; but whenever you convince me of my mistake, my longing ceases.[46]

Therefore, it is «not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger» as it is equally «not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian or person wholly unknown to me». It is a

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[39] Ibidem, p. 22.
[40] Ibidem, p. 104: «The fact that there is no theoretical subjectivity, and that there cannot be one, becomes the fundamental claim of empiricism. And if we examine it closely, it is merely another way of saying that the subject is constituted within the given. If the subject is constituted within the given, then, in fact, there is only a practical subject.»
[41] Id., *Hume*, p. 162.
[42] For very effective analysis see Jeffrey A. Bell, *Deleuze's Hume. Philosophy, Culture and the Scottish Enlightenment*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, pp. 9-33, and Alberto Simonetti, *Il penultimo del pensiero. Gilles Deleuze storico della filosofia*, Milano, Mimesis, 2019, pp. 23ff (digital edition).
[43] Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, p. 33.
[44] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 416. Emphasis mine.
[45] Ibidem, p. 415.
[46] Ibidem, pp. 416-417.

very Humean law: «What is possible can never be demonstrated to be false».[47] In other words, from the point of view of moral philosophy, radical selfishness and absolute altruism are equivalent. Now, it is meaningful that Deleuze focuses on the first conjecture, that of radical selfishness. He righteously sees here an important implication of Hume's reflection on sympathy. As Deleuze writes:

> It is the essence of moral conscience to approve and disapprove. The feeling which prompts us to praise or to blame, the pain and pleasure which determine vice and virtue, have an original nature: they are produced with reference to character *in general*, and with no reference to our particular interest. But what can make us abandon the reference to our own point of view, and make us refer, «through mere inspection», to character in general? In other words what can make us the hold of something and live in it, because it is useful or agreeable to the Other or to persons in general? Hume's response is simple: sympathy. There is, however, a paradox of sympathy: it opens up for us a moral space and generality, but the space has no extension, nor does the generality have quantity […]. It is a fact that sympathy exists and that it is extended naturally. But this extension is not affirmed without conclusion: it is impossible for sympathy to extend «without being aided by some circumstances in the present, which strikes upon us in a lively matter,» excluding thereby all cases which do not present these circumstances. The circumstances, from the point of view of the fancy, will be the degree or more precisely the enormity of unhappiness; but from the point of view of human nature, there will be contiguity, resemblance, or causality. Those whom we love, according to circumstances, are those close to us, our peers and our relatives. Briefly, *our natural generosity is limited; what is natural to us is a limited generosity*.[48]

The second chapter of *Empiricism and Subjectivity* dwells upon the anthropological and political implication of Hume's understanding of sympathy. As Deleuze points out, by means of sympathy, Hume aimed to stress a natural sociability of the human being, thereby contesting the very traditional primacy that western moralism bestowed on selfishness. Indeed, «some believe themselves to be philosophers and good thinkers, as they maintain the egoism is the last resort of every activity, but this is too simple.»[49] Hume, attempted instead to distance his anthropology from this very moralist way of thinking, by proving that «human beings are much less egoistic than they are *partial*.»[50] Because, as Deleuze amply stresses, Hume did not play an unconditional altruism against a brutal selfishness. Empiricism does not reason by dualism and dialectical opposition. Empiricism is the thought of complexity, shades and irregularities. As we noticed in the previous chapter, sympathy is not the same as altruism; it rather represents a third way of modern moralism, whereby eventually overcoming the very rigid frame of contractarianism. As Deleuze states, «we condemn the parents who prefer strangers to their own children», that is, as human, our sympathy towards others is not "universal", but confined to our present situation and our present affections.

> The truth is that an individual always belong to a clan or a community […]. Family, friendship, and neighborliness are, in Hume's work, the natural determinants of sympathy. It is because the essence of passion or the essence of the particular interest is partiality rather than egoism that sympathy, for its part does not transcend the particular interest or passion.[51]

Deleuze's analysis is sharp: sympathy tends to be enclosed within a precise sphere of individual interests. Yet, Hume's focus on sympathy allowed to think a different genealogy of human sociability:

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[47] Id., *An Abstract of A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740), Hamden, Archon Books, 1965, p. 15.
[48] Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, pp. 37-38. Emphasis mine.
[49] Ibidem, p. 38.
[50] Ibidem.
[51] Ibidem.

> However, if sympathy is *like* egoism, what importance should we accord to Hume's observation that we are not egoistically but rather sympathetically inclined? The truth of the matter is that, even of society finds *as much* of an obstacle in sympathy as in the purest egoism, what changes absolutely is the sense or the structure of society itself, depending on whether we consider it from the point of view of egoism or sympathy. Egoism would only have to be limited, but sympathies are another matter, for they must integrate inside a positive totality. What Hume criticized in contractarian theories is precisely that they present us with an abstract and false image of society, that they define society only in a negative way; they see in it a set of limitations of egoism and interests instead of understanding society as a positive system of invented endeavors. That is why it is so important to be reminded that the natural human being is not egoistic; our entire notion of society depends on it.[52]

Here, Deleuze stresses the fundamental conceptual challenge carried out by Hume against the main political paradigms of his age: from the contractarian dualism between nature and society (a dualism caused by monolithic selfish individualities who can socialize only by an unnatural act of self-limitation), to a conventionalist understanding of society. [53] In Hume, society does not rise as the solution of a violent state of nature. Society lies upon narrow units of sympathies only through which it is possible to conceive the possibility of a gradual extension of sympathy: «What we find in nature, without exception, are families; the state of nature is always already more than a simple state of nature.»[54] In the following sections of this chapter, Deleuze will stress Hume's understanding of politics and of institution, according to which the latter are not made to limit and to adjust human nature, but rather to enhance individual utility in a safer and more stable environment. For Deleuze, what really matters in Hume is that «society is no longer conceived as a system of legal and contractarian limitations, but as an institutional invention: How do we *invent artifices*, create institutions that force the passions to go beyond their partiality, producing moral, juridical, and political feelings (for example, the feeling of justice)»?[55] Nevertheless, in my opinion, starting from here, Deleuze's analysis gets less in tune with Hume. Indeed, Hume's anthropological innovations introduce a set of problems that Deleuze seems to – it is not clear how intentionally - overlook. Among these, what I consider to be the trickiest issue is the relationship between nature and morality.

> We see the difference between morality and nature, or rather, the lack of adequation between nature and morality. The reality of the moral world requires the constitution of a whole, of a society, that is the establishment of an invariable system. This reality is not natural, it is artificial. «The rules of justice, in virtue of their universality and absolute inflexibility, cannot be derived from nature, nor can they be the direct creation of a natural inclination or motive.» *All the elements of morality (sympathies) are naturally given, but they are impotent by themselves to constitute to constitute a moral world*. Partialities or particular interests cannot be naturally totalized, because they are mutually exclusive. Once can only invent a whole, since the only invention possible is that of the whole.[56]

After all, Hume posed the *is-ought* problem. Indeed, if sympathy is the trace of human natural sociability, why should we suppose a swerve between nature and morality/politics? Why should we not consider politics and morality as the direct expression of our natural sociability? The puzzling issue is always the *partial* nature of sympathy. As we noticed before, sympathy is not unconditional altruism: to state that the human beings are not

[52] Ibidem, p. 39.
[53] Id., *Hume*, p. 167: «Hume is certainly the first to break with the restrictive model of contract and law that still dominates the sociology of the eighteenth-century. He proposes instead the positive model of artifice and institution. Consequently, the whole problem of humanity has been displaced: it is no longer a question, as it is in understanding, of the complex relationship between fiction and human nature, but between human nature and artifice (humankind as an inventive species).»
[54] Id., *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, p. 39.
[55] Ibidem, p. 167.
[56] Ibidem, p. 40.

naturally selfish, i.e., brutal and aggressive, does not necessarily entail that they are naturally altruistic, i.e., good and meek. As Deleuze points out:

> Nature and culture form, therefore, a whole or a composite. Hume repudiates the arguments which assign everything, including justice, to the instinct, and the argument which assign everything, including the meaning of virtue, to politics and education. The former, as they forget nature, deform culture. Above all, Hume centers his critique on the theory of egoism, which is not even a correct psychology of human nature, since it neglects the equally natural phenomenon of sympathy. If by "egoism" we understand the fact that all drives pursue their own satisfaction, we posit only the principle of identity, A=A, that is, the formal and empty principle of a science of humanity – moreover, of an uncultivated and abstract humanity without history and without difference […]. In the same manner in which he introduces a dimension of sympathy into nature, Hume adds many other motives to interest – motives that are often contradictory (prodigality, ignorance, heredity, custom, habit, or «spirit of greed and endeavor, of luxury and abundance»).[57]

Nevertheless, Deleuze seems to overlook a crucial aspect of the very conceptual structure of sympathy. [58] By stressing human sympathy, Hume did not intend to provide an alternative passion to selfishness, but rather to outline a more complex understanding of the human being as social animal. Sympathy is established on selfishness as the latter represent the natural self-centering posture of living beings. This is why sympathy is *partial*: because it is structurally affected by selfishness. And this is also why, over its development, human society will eventually need to turn to the artifice of «government»[59] : because the stability of human cohabitation will be always haunted by individuals' «self-love». As Hume states:

> Men invented the three fundamental laws of nature, when they observ'd the necessity of to their mutual subsistance, and found, that 'twas impossible to maintain any correspondence together, without some restraint on their natural appetites. The same selflove, therefore, which renders men so incommodious to each other, taking a new and more convenient direction, produces the rules of justice, and is the first motive of their observance. But when men have observ'd, that tho' the rules of justice be sufficient to maintain any society, yet tis impossible for them, of themselves, to observe those rules, in large and polish d societies; they establish government, as a new invention to attain their ends, and preserve the old, or procure new advantages, by a more strict execution of justice. So far, therefore, our civil duties are connected with our natural, that the former are invented chiefly for the sake of the latter; and that the principal object of government is to constrain men to observe the laws of nature. [60]

This is the core of Hume's modernity: our nature is affected by a structural «infirmity», that caused by self-preservation, which makes us prefer immediate pleasures to future advantages, albeit greater. Yet, as the moderns taught us, if we are so obsessed with pleasure and utility is because we are *suffering animals* who run from pain.[61] As Hume claims:

> Next to the ridicule of denying an evident truth, is that of taking much pains to defend it; and no truth appears to me more evident, than that beasts are endow'd with thought and reason as well as men. The arguments are in this case so obvious, that they never escape the most stupid and ignorant. We are conscious, that we ourselves, in adapting means to ends, are guided by reason and design, and that tis not ignorantly nor casually we perform those actions, which tend to self-preservation, to the obtaining pleasure, and avoiding pain. When therefore we see other creatures, in millions of instances, perform

[57] Ibidem, pp. 44-45.
[58] Cf. Clifford Scott Stagoll, *Deleuze's Becoming-Subject: Difference and the Human Individual*, University of Warwick,1998, p. 45.
[59] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 534ff.
[60] Ibidem, p. 543.
[61] Ibidem, p. 439: «Desire arises from good consider d simply, and aversion is deriv'd from evil. The will exerts itself, when either the good or the absence of the evil may be attain d by any action of the mind or body.»

like actions, and direct them to like ends, all our principles of reason and probability carry us with an invincible force to believe the existence of a like cause.[62]

Therefore, Hume's understanding of sympathy marks a further problematization of the conceptual core of modern materialism, where the individual tendency to run form pain (self-preservation) leads to the recognition of other individuals' pain (sympathy). Such an ambivalent nature of our sociability, although initially partial and limited, also represents the condition of possibility of its gradual expansion. This is what eventually fosters the passage from nature to civilization. Yet, the latter is not only a long-lasting gradual process[63]; first and foremost, it is an «oscillating» development lacking any sort of teleology of progress.[64] As we noticed in the previous chapter, Hume represented one of the most important sources for Darwin's naturalistic genealogy of moral sense. Moreover – this is really important – the unerasability of selfishness is the ethical presupposition of the ontological individualism that, as we noticed in the second chapter, Darwin will pose as the cornerstone of his materialism.[65] There is a common thread which connects Bayle, Hume and Darwin within the theoretical horizon of the *suffering animal*[66], wherein the category of civilization (which subsumes the conventionalist understanding of sociability) is endowed with a very deep philosophical meaning. Civilization does not simply consist of a certain institutional arrangement (that of Great Britain or, more broadly, that of the West). The process of civilization is essentially the development of the "struggle against pain" carried out by sentient beings during the evolution of life on this planet.

In Deleuze's essay on Hume, this set of historical-philosophical problems is not processed.[67] On the one hand, Deleuze stresses the creative and artificial character of institutions[68]; on the other hand, by highlighting the anthropological question of sympathy, he remarks upon the concrete, not to say human, character of Hume's economical thought: «nothing is further from the *homo oeconomicus* than Hume's analysis. History, the true science of human motivation, must denounce the double error of an abstract economy and

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[62] Ibidem, p. 176.

[63] Ibidem, p. 541: «The state of society without government is one of the most natural states of men, and must subsist with the conjunction of many families, and long after the first generation. Nothing but an encrease of riches possessions cou'd oblige men to quit it ; and so barbarous and uninstructed are all societies on their first formation, that many years must elapse before these can encrease to such a degree, as to disturb men in the enjoyment of peace and concord.»

[64] Cf. Ryu Susato, *Hume's oscillating civilization theory*, in «History of European Ideas», 3/2006, pp. 263-277. Hume devoted one his earliest essays to the question of civilization, where the latter is understood as a gradual softening of costumes and manners (embodied by modern values of chivalry and honor) compared to the brutal practices of «barbarians». Cfr. Ernest Campbell Mossner, *David Hume's "An Historical Essay on Chivalry and Modern Honour"*, in «Modern Philology», 1/1947, pp. 54-60.

[65] At this point, we might ask: What if a quota, even residual, of selfishness were the fundamental clause of a fully-fledged materialism?

[66] On this point, Hume's *Early Memoranda* are meaningful. In particular, the second section on *Philosophy* proves the great influence of Pierre Bayle on Hume's reflection on suffering, pleasure and their implication in atheism. Here are some eloquent quotations: «*Men love Pleasure more than they hate Pain. Baile*»; «*Strato's Atheism the most dangerous of the Antient, holding the Ori- gin of the World from Nature, or a Matter endu'd with Activity. Baile thinks there are none but the Cartesians can refute this Atheism*»; «*Men might have been determin'd to avoid things harmful & seek the useful by the Augmentation & Diminution of [Pain crossed out] Pleasure as well as by Pain. In Heaven men are suppos'd to be lyable to no Pain. Baile.*»; «*God cou'd have prevented all Abuses of Liberty without taking away Liberty. Therefore Liberty no Solution of Difficultys. Baile.*». Cfr. Ernest Campbell Mossner, *Hume's Early Memoranda, 1729-1740: The Complete Text*, in «Journal of the History of Idea», 4/1948, pp. 501-502. Emphasis mine.

[67] Cf. Davide Panaglia, *Inconsistencies of Character: David Hume on Sympathy, Intensity and Artifice*, in *Deleuze and Philosophy*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2006, pp. 85-97.

[68] Deleuze already dealt with this question in 1955 *Instincts and Institutions* (in *Desert Islands*, pp. 19-21). On Deleuze's interests in Hume's artificial account of human institutions see also Bell, *Deleuze's Hume*, pp. 82ff.

falsified nature.»[69] For Deleuze, sympathy is the key concept to distance Hume form that rationalist tradition which, by leveraging on a selfish nature, establishes a capitalism as competitive as it is brutal. By doing so, Deleuze can really affirm the fundamental importance of Hume for contemporary critique to modern rationalism. Moreover, Hume's sympathy allows to tear the monopoly of morality away from metaphysics: we do not need to impose our "ought-to-be" on nature, we should not judge nature for its alleged deficiency; we should rather make the most of its immanent resources. Nevertheless, in my opinion, Deleuze excessively bends Hume to his personal interpretive demands, thereby ending up including Hume within a conceptual plot wherein, as we will notice later, he will gradually find less and less citizenship. Besides the ontological question, Hume's anthropological and moral reflection, insofar as it is praised in *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, contains a whole series of assumptions and implication which are destined to become troublesome for Deleuze's following research. Indeed, after the second chapter of *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, the Humean question of sympathy will basically disappear. From here on, until 1991 *What Is Philosophy?*, Hume will be *only* the empiricist philosopher (the anti-Kant *par excellence*[70]), who provided Deleuze with the gnoseological foundations of his seminal definition of philosophy as «continuous creation of concepts.» Finally, I do think that, for Deleuze's philosophy of difference, Hume's sympathy represented a crossroad: on the one hand, there stands the route which leads to Darwin, the route of the *suffering animal*; on the other hand, there stands instead the route which leads to Nietzsche, the route of the *powerful animal*.

Hume did not express his view on how the world might be. We cannot leave our minds and, because of this, we cannot apply our beliefs to the outwards. This is the judgmental temptation which nourishes metaphysics. Hume's lesson is radical: it is only a matter of habits, even causality. This is a puzzling crux of empiricism that Deleuze promptly underline: «it seems impossible to define empiricism as a theory according to which knowledge derives from experience […]. This means that empiricism will not be correctly defined except by means of dualism. Such an empirical dualism exists […] between *the hidden powers of natur*e and the principle of human nature.»[71] Hume delivers the image of a rootless world: a chaotic world wherein free associations constantly take place. Therefore, Deleuze needed to inspect more the world beyond mind, but Hume alone did not allow this. Here is where Henry Bergson comes to Deleuze's aid. As Jeffrey Bell pointed out, «Deleuze ultimately fails in his effort to reconcile the dualism of empiricism with his assertion that being is univocal.»[72] As is known, Deleuze will amply glean from Dun Scotus's thesis on the univocity of being to build his personal ontological perspective. In the seminal essay *The Clamor of Being*, Alan Badiou went even to define Deleuze's ontology as «metaphysics of the One». As Badiou maintains:

> Deleuze's fundamental problem is most certainly not to liberate the multiple but to submit thinking to a renewed concept of the One. What must the One be, for the multiple to be integrally conceivable therein as the production of simulacra? Or, yet again: in what way should the All be determined, in order that the existence of each portion of this All-far from being positioned as independent or as surging forth unpredictably-be nothing other than an expressive profile of «the powerful, nonorganic Life that embraces the world?»[73]

[69] Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, p. 45 and 52-54.
[70] Deleuze, Guattari, *What Is Philosophy*?, pp. 53-54: «we find in Kant many of these features inherited from Hume, but again at the price of a profound mutation, on a new plane or according to another image.»
[71] Id., *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, pp. 108-109. Emphasis mine.
[72] Bell, *Deleuze's Hume*, p. 2.
[73] Alan Badiou, *Deleuze. The Clamor of Being*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 10.

Badiou's remarks highlighted a fundamental feature of Deleuze's reflection on difference. Indeed, according to Deleuze, in order to «liberate the multiple», it is not sufficient to deny the existence of a "univocal" principle: we would obtain a chaotic multiplicity, potentially conflicting. Something similar to Hobbes' "applied atomism" to the state nature, where the conflict between individualities can only be pacified by a principle of order and stability. After all, is this the «falsified nature» that Hume's empiricism questioned? Yet, as Deleuze's seems to maintain, a principle, a One, appears to be necessary exactly to avoid the image of a multiplicity as free as it is conflicting. Therefore, it is a matter of how thinking of this univocal principle.[74] And, thanks to Hume, the presence of sympathy among individualities tells us of a common solidarity which fosters cohabitation and mutual enhancement rather than conflict and violence. Thus, the principle we are talking of should express such a solidarity. A principle immanent to multiplicity and which, rather than put the latter in order (as a transcendent principle would do), expresses «the powerful, non-organic Life which grips the world.»[75] A non-judgmental principle. In other words, a principle of *power*.

Bergson is the author who gave Deleuze the categories to build such an ontology of power. Indeed, according to Badiou, «Deleuze is a marvelous reader of Bergson, who, in my opinion, is his real master, far more than Spinoza, or perhaps even Nietzsche.»[76] Categories such as *duration*, *virtuality* and *élan vital* allow Deleuze not only to think of the question of difference beyond the scheme of dialectic[77], but especially to make differentiation the very movement of life.[78] In other words, Deleuze continues Bergson's attempt to build a philosophy of life beyond the traditional alternatives between mechanism and finalism. Indeed, according to Bergson, both mechanism and finalism fails to explain the *vitality* of the «organic world.» On the one hand, mechanism attempts to reduce the living matter to the laws of causality. On the other hand, finalism turns out to be affected by the same rigidity since it «implies that things and beings merely realize a program previously arranged.»[79] Yet, as Bergson argues in 1907 *Creative Evolution*, we should neither repair the easiest answer of traditional vitalism.

> We shall not reproach [vitalistic theories], as is ordinarily done, with replying to the question by the question itself: the "vital principle" may indeed not explain much, but it is at least a sort of label affixed to our ignorance, so as to remind us of this occasionally, while mechanism invites us to ignore that ignorance. But the position of vitalism is rendered very difficult by the fact that, in nature, there is neither purely internal finality nor absolutely distinct individuality. The organized elements composing the individual have themselves a certain individuality, and each will claim its vital principle if the individual pretends to have its own. But, on the other hand, the individual itself is not sufficiently independent, not sufficiently cut off from other things, for us to allow it a "vital principle" of its own […]. Where, then, does the vital principle of the individual begin or end ? Gradually we shall be carried further and further back, up to the individual's remotest ancestors: we shall find him solidary with each of them, solidary with that little mass of protoplasmic jelly which is probably at the root of the genealogical tree of life. Being, to a certain extent, one with this primitive ancestor, he is also solidary with all that descends from the ancestor in divergent directions. In this sense each individual may be

[74] Cf. Lapoujade, *Deleuze, les mouvements aberrants*.
[75] Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 81.
[76] Badiou, *Deleuze*, p. 38.
[77] On the anti-Hegelian use of Bergson in Deleuze see Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze*, pp. 1ff.
[78] Gilles Deleuze, *Bergson, 1859-1941* (1956), in *Desert Islands*, p. 25: «Bergson denounces a common danger in science and in metaphysics: allowing difference to escape because science conceives the thing as a product and a result, while metaphysics conceives being as something unmovable that serves as a principle. Both seek to attain being or to recompose it starting from resemblances and ever greater oppositions, but resemblance and opposition are almost always *practical*, not ontological, categories. Whence Bergson's insistence on showing us that for the sake of resemblance we risk putting extremely different things, things that differ in nature, under the same word. Being in fact is on the side of difference, neither singular nor multiple.»
[79] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, New York, The Modern Library, 1944, p. 45.

> said to remain united with the totality of living beings by invisible bonds. So it is of no use to try to restrict finality to the individuality of the living being. *If there is finality in the world of life, it includes the whole of life in a single indivisible embrace*.[80]

Therefore, the vitalist principle Bergson is seeking is an intrinsic feature of the living matter as a Whole connected by the creative power of life: «As soon as we go out of the encasings in which radical mechanism and radical finalism confine our thought, reality appears as a ceaseless upspringing of something new, which has no sooner arisen to make the present than it has already fallen back into the past.»[81] This is the "impersonal One", namely life, which, as Badiou pointed out, will amply influence Deleuze's ontological reflection: the individual is the «simulacrum» of something deeper and all-encompassing.

> Finalism is not, like mechanism, a doctrine with fixed rigid outlines. It admits of as many inflections as we like. The mechanistic philosophy is to be taken or left: it must be left if the least grain of dust, by straying from the path foreseen by mechanics, should show the slightest trace of spontaneity. The doctrine of final causes, on the contrary, will never be definitively refuted. If one form of it be put aside, it will t ake another. Its principle, which is essentially psychological, is very flexible. It is .o extensible, and thereby so comprehensive, that one accepts something of it as soon as one rejects pure mechanism. The theory we shall put forward in this book will therefore necessarily partake of finalism to a certain extent.[82]

Bergson's is a sort of "a-teleological finalism", a released finalism that contemplates multiple directions which, in their duration, can be investigated as finalities only backwards: «once the road has been traveled, we can glance over it, mark its direction, note this in psychological terms and speak as if there had been pursuit of an end.»[83] In this sense, the notion of *virtuality* plays a fundamental role. Indeed, it allows to overcome the teleological character of the potentiality-actuality binomial, and therefore to think of the process of differentiation of life in terms of creativity, of explosive power. As Bergson finally recaps: «from its origin, life is the continuation of one and the same impetus, divided into divergent lines of evolution.»[84]
This is the Bergsonian «metaphysical image of thought»[85] whereof Deleuze takes possession. As he writes in 1966 *Bergsonism*:

> What does Bergson mean when he talks about *élan vital?* It is always a case of a virtuality in the process of being actualized, a simplicity in the process of differentiating, a totality in the process of dividing up: Proceeding "by dissociation and division", by "dichotomy", is the essence of life. In the most familiar examples, life is divided into plant and animal; the animal is divided into instinct and intelligence; an instinct in tum divides into several directions that are actualized in different species; intelligence itself has its particular modes or actualizations. It is as if Life were merged into the very movement of differentiation, in ramified series. Movement is undoubtedly explained by the insertion of duration into matter: Duration is differentiated according to the obstacles it meets in matter, according to the materiality through which it passes, according to the kind of extension that it contracts.[86]

Here, Deleuze introduces a fundamental feature of Bergson's understanding of the evolution of life: the nexus between *élan vital* and matter. As Bergson claims in *Creative Evolution*:

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[80] Ibidem, pp. 48-50.
[81] Ibidem, p. 53.
[82] Ibidem, p. 46.
[83] Ibidem, p. 58.
[84] Ibidem, p. 60.
[85] Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, New York, Zone Books, 1997, p. 117.
[86] Ibidem, p. 94.

> The evolution movement would be a simple one, and we should soon have been able to determine its direction, if life had described a single course, like that of a solid ball shot from a cannon. But it proceeds rather like a shell, which suddenly bursts into fragments, which fragments, being themselves shells, burst in their turn into fragments destined to burst again, and so on for a time incommensurably long […]. The resistance of inert matter was the obstacle that had first to be overcome. Life seems to have succeeded in this by dint of humility, by making itself very small and very insinuating, bending to physical and chemical forces, consenting even to go a part of the way with them, like the switch that adopts for a while the direction of the rail it is endeavoring to leave. Of phenomena in the simplest forms of life, it is hard to say whether they are still physical and chemical or whether they are already vital. Life had to enter thus into the habits of inert matter, in order to draw it little by little, magnetized, as it were, to another track […] But organized matter has a limit of expansion that is very quickly reached; beyond a certain point it divides instead of growing. Ages of effort and prodigies of subtlety were probably necessary for life to get past this new obstacle. It succeeded in inducing an increasing number of elements, ready to divide, to remain united. By the division of labor it knotted between them an indissoluble bond. The complex and quasi-discontinuous organism is thus made to function as would a continuous living mass which had simply grown bigger.[87]

Hence, within the immanent plane of evolution, there stand, on the one hand, the original impulse of life, on the other hand, the «inert matter.» Since the latter is limited, life needed to diverge in a plurality of forms. If matter were not limited, we would have had a big unique living organism. Thus, for Bergson, living matter is alive because of the creative *élan vital*, whose «labor» against the restraints put by matter is what eventually produces the variety of the living. Matter is weak, limited, whereas life is powerful, creative. Here is where Bergson distances his understanding of evolution from Darwinism:

> That adaptation to environment is the necessary condition of evolution we do not question for a moment. It is quite evident that a species would disappear, should it fail to bend to the conditions of existence which are imposed on it. But it is one thing to recognize that outer circumstances are forces evolution must reckon with, another to claim that they are the directing causes of evolution. This latter theory is that of mechanism. It excludes absolutely the hypothesis of an original impetus, I mean an internal push that has carried life, by more and more complex forms, to higher and higher destinies.[88]

According to Bergson, like any form of materialism, Darwinism attempts to understand life within a mechanical model, wherein, given certain conditions, life is eventually produced deterministically.[89] It is a limited view since it downplays the original, that is independent from external conditions, character of life.

> The truth is that adaptation explains the sinuosities of the movement of evolution, but not its general directions, still less the movement itself. The road that leads to the town is obliged to follow the ups and downs of the hills; it adapts itself to the accidents of the ground; but the accidents of the ground are not the cause of the road, nor have they given it its direction. At every moment they furnish it with what is indispensable, namely, the soil on which it lies ; but if we consider the whole of the road, instead of each of its parts, the accidents of the ground appear only as impediments or causes of delay, for the road aims simply at the town and would fain be a straight line. Just so as regards the evolution of life and the circumstances through which it passes-with this difference, that evolution does not mark out a solitary route, that it takes directions without aiming at ends, and that it remains inventive even in its adaptations.[90]

Therefore, in Bergson's eyes, Darwinism weakens the *élan vital*. As Deleuze underlines: «In his idea of evolution, Darwin helped associate the problem of difference with life, even though Darwin himself had a false conception of vital difference. Opposing a particular

[87] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp. 109-110.
[88] Ibidem, p. 113.
[89] On Bergson's anti-determinism see Roberto Bondi and Antonello La Vergata, *Natura*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2014, pp. 77-78.
[90] Ibidem, pp. 113-114.

mechanism, Bergson shows that vital difference is an *internal* difference […]. Not only is vital difference not a determination, but it is very much the opposite: it is indetermination itself.»[91]As we will see, Deleuze will always maintain such a bivalent attitude towards Darwinism: on the one hand, he acknowledges the latter the «the merit of reminding us that life is production, creation of differences»[92]; on the other hand, he stresses, and then refutes, Darwin's «mistake […] to conceive of vital variations as so many actual determinations that should then combine on a single line.»[93] Like Bergson, by acknowledging the «merit» of Darwinism, Deleuze affirms his materialistic purposes in the understanding of life. Life is a phenomenon utterly contained in immanence. Just as Bergson, Deleuze's ontological project is anchored in natural science.[94] Yet, according to Deleuze, Darwinism reduces the power of difference to a mere mechanic procedure which denies the vitality of life, namely what makes life an original and non-teleological power.[95] In few words, when applied to organic matter, materialism should not confuse reductionism ("there is only immanence") with weakening ("life is *only* and *simply* an algorithm"). As Deleuze states in *Bergsonism*:

> The three requirements of a philosophy of life are as follows: (1) the vital difference can only be experienced and thought of as internal difference; it is only in this sense that the "tendency to change" is not accidental, and that the variations themselves find an internal cause in that tendency; (2) these variations do not enter into relationships of association and addition, but on the contrary, they enter into relationships of dissociation or division; (3) they therefore involve a virtuality that is actualized according to the lines of divergence; so that evolution does not move from one actual term to another actual term in a homogeneous unilinear series, but from a virtual term to the heterogeneous terms that actualize it along a ramified series.[96]

As mechanism contains life in its beginning, as finalism contains life in its development. Indeed, the process of continuous differentiation characterizing life is the trace of a power that we all share as living beings. As Bergson claims: «Nature is more and better than a plan in course of realization […]. Before the evolution of life, the portals of the future remain wide open. It is a creation that goes on forever in virtue of an initial movement. This movement Constitutes the unity of the organized world-a prolific unity, of an infinite richness, superior to any that the intellect could dream of, for the intellect is only one of its aspects or products.»[97] Bergson remarks on Darwinism can be located within what Peter J. Bowler named «the eclipse of Darwinism» to describe the debate on evolution between the early Twentieth Century and the so-called "modern synthesis".[98] Although Bowler reconstruction mainly refers to the scientific debate, the motives which led to such an «eclipse» are mainly philosophical. As Bowler states: «These [anti-Darwinian] theories were supported in part because they preserved an element of teleology that countered the apparent materialism of the Darwinian theory. Biologists reluctant to concede that evolution is a

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[91] Gilles Deleuze, *Bergson's Conception of Difference* (1956), in *Desert Islands*, pp. 39-40.
[92] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 98.
[93] Ibidem, p. 99.
[94] Brett Buchanan, *Onto-Ethologies. The Animal Environment of Uexküll, Heidegger, Marleau-Ponty, and Deleuze*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2008, pp. 152-154.
[95] According to Deleuze, the category of virtuality allows to think the evolution of forms of live and their adaptive solutions without turning to the mechanic scheme of the «possible and real.» Indeed, as Deleuze claims, «Every time we pose the question in terms of possible and real, we are forced to conceive of existence as a brute eruption, a pure act or leap which always occurs behind our backs and is subject to a law of all or nothing.» In summary, virtuality succeed in explaining "the why" of life beyond the categories of being and not being, categories amply involved in the metaphysical discourse. Cf. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 211.
[96] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, pp. 99-100
[97] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 116.
[98] Bowler, *Evolution*, pp. 224ff. On Bergson's vitalism see ibidem, pp. 320-321.

haphazard, trial-and-error process preferred to believe that development is predisposed to advance in purposeful or orderly directions.»[99] Not by chance, this period coincides with the revival of Lamarckism, which attempted to replace the too mechanic principle of natural selection with "more flexible" vitalist and teleological explanations. And, as Bowler points out, Neo-Lamarckism has been very influential especially in philosophy[100], thereby confirming Darwin's great concern: that biology cannot be processed as any other science; that, in our philosophical culture, life *must* be something more than a fully material phenomenon. As Bergson promptly claims it in the introduction of *Creative Evolution*: «evolutionist philosophy does not hesitate to extend to the things of life the same methods of explanation which have succeeded in the case of unorganized matter.»[101] However, the eclipse of Darwinism does not lead to a naïve revival of spiritualism. From here on, the traditional struggle between Cartesians and Materialists will be less dualistic and more subtle: the two rivals will compete for the last word on immanence. Indeed, these critiques of Darwinism do not allude to an immaterial and transcendent dimension where to locate the principle of life in. They rather talk of energy, impulses, that is something explosive, an immanent element of chaos which continuously mismatches the always temporary order of things. In few words, *the powerful life has become the contemporary source of the freedom of the living*.

However, vitalism always hides a stubborn desire for anthropocentrism. As Bergson states: «The history of the evolution of life, incomplete as it yet is, already reveals to us how the intellect has been formed, by an uninterrupted progress, along a line which ascends through the vertebrate series up to man.»[102] Moreover, «the line of evolution that ends in man is not the only one. On other paths, divergent from it, other forms of consciousness have been developed, which *have not been able to free themselves from external constraints or to regain control over themselves, as the human intellect has done*, but which, none the less, also express something that is immanent and essential in the evolutionary movement.»[103] The evolution of life comes along through divergences, each of which express the labor of life on inert matter, that is the degree of development of consciousness. *But* when it comes to the human being, something utterly different takes place (what a coincidence!). Something that should not be confused with a divergence among the others, but acknowledged as a highly expressive moment where life reveals its power. Behind such a "all-differences-are-equal-but", Bergson distances himself once again from Darwin:

> From the fact that two brains, like that of the ape and that of the man, are very much alike, we cannot conclude that the corresponding consciousnesses are comparable or commensurable. But the two brains may perhaps be less alike than we suppose. How can we help being struck by the fact that, while man is capable of learning any sort of exercise, of constructing any sort of object, in short of acquiring any kind of motor habit whatsoever, the faculty of combining new movements is strictly limited in the best-endowed animal, even in the ape? The cerebral characteristic of man is there. The human brain differs from other brains in this, that the number of mechanisms it can set up, and consequently the choice that it gives as to which among them shall be released, is unlimited. Now, from the limited to the unlimited there is all the distance between the closed and the open. *It is not a difference of degree, but of kind*.

And, as if that were not enough:

> Radical therefore, also, is the difference between animal consciousness, even the most intelligent, and human consciousness. For consciousness corresponds exactly to the living being's power of choice […].

[99] Ibidem, p. 225.
[100] Ibidem, pp. 237-238.
[101] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. XXI.
[102] Ibidem, p. XIX.
[103] Ibidem, p. XXII.

> Now, in the animal, invention is never anything but a variation on the theme of routine […]. With man, consciousness breaks the chain. In man, and in man alone, it sets itself free. The whole history of life until man has been that of the effort of consciousness to raise matter, and of the more or less complete overwhelming of consciousness by the matter which has fallen back on it. The enterprise was paradoxical, if, indeed, we may speak here otherwise than by metaphor of enterprise and of effort. It was to create with matter, which is necessity itself, an instrument of freedom.[104]

These are the basic elements of a plot that we already know the end of: human being's exceptionality is given by «the superiority of his brain», by «language» and by «society». In few words, human consciousness and its «immaterial» products are «the "term" and the "end" of evolution.»[105]. As Bergson finally claims, «They tell, each after its manner, the unique, exceptional success which life has won at a given moment of its evolution. They express the difference of kind, and not only of degree, which separates man from the rest of the animal world.»[106]

Hence, Bergson ends up thinking of the human-animal relationship in terms which I would easily define as hyper-cartesian. Once again, the capability of materialism to be consistent with his premises is eventually given by the definition of the human-animal relationship. From this point of view, it is clear why, according to Bergson, Darwin's view is limited: because there is nothing exceptional in it. Is this an empirical demand? Or, as it seems, the power of life is nothing but a subtle way behind which the anthropocentric idolisation of freedom lies? When life is power, the human being comes out on top (again: what a coincidence!). More than a remark on evolutionary theory, Bergson's *élan vital* rather seems to be a metaphysical claim *against* evolutionary materialism.

In the last section of *Bergsonism*, Deleuze, as an honest historian of philosophy, reports and highlight Bergson's residual anthropocentrism. He acknowledges that, at first glance, it might contrast with a non-dialectical understanding of difference. As Deleuze points out:

> If we concentrate only on the actuals that conclude each line, we establish relationships between them - whether of gradation or opposition. Between plant and animal, for example, between animal and man, we now only see differences in degree. Or we will situate a fundamental opposition in each one of them: We will see in one the negative of the other, the inversion of the other, or the obstacle that is opposed to the other. Bergson often expresses himself in this way, in terms of contrariety: Matter is presented as the obstacle that the *elan vital* must get around, and materiality, as the inversion of the movement of life. It should not, however, be thought that Bergson is going back to a conception of the negative that he had previously condemned, any more than he returns to a theory of deteriorations. For one only has to replace the actual terms in the movement that produces them to bring them back to the virtuality actualized in them, in order to see that differentiation is never a negation but a creation, and that difference is never negative but essentially positive and creative.[107]

In these final remarks, Deleuze emphasizes the social-political aspect of Bergson's theory. Indeed, the *èlan vital* is a creative force which manifests itself practically. According to Deleuze, the privilege that Bergson bestows on the human being is more ethical-political than ontological. Human exceptionality does not consist in intelligence. Human exceptionality is not actual, but virtual.

> Sociability (in the human sense) can only exist *in* intelligent beings, but it is not grounded *on* their intelligence: Social life is immanent to intelligence, it begins with it but does not derive from it […]. For if we consider intelligence and sociability, both in their complementarity and in their difference, nothing yet justifies man's privilege. The societies that he forms are no less closed than animal species; they form part of a plan *(plan)* of nature, as much as animal species and societies; and man goes round

[104] Ibidem, pp. 287-288. Emphasis mine.
[105] Ibidem, p. 289.
[106] Ibidem, p. 279.
[107] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, pp. 101-103.

> in circles in his society just as much as the species do in theirs or ants in their domain. Nothing here seems to be capable of giving man the previously mentioned exceptional opening, as the power of going beyond his "plane" *(plan)* and his condition.[108]

The «circle» Deleuze is talking about is the Humean circularity between «intelligence» and «society», between «egoism» and «social requirements.»

> If intelligence hesitates and sometimes rebels, it is primarily in the name of an egoism that it seeks to preserve against social requirements. And while society makes itself obeyed it is thanks to the story-telling function, which persuades the intelligence that it is in its interest to confirm the social obligation. We therefore seem to be constantly sent back from one term to another. But everything changes when something appears in the interval. [109]

Such a circularity establishes a «closed society», that is, according to Bergson's view, the temporary configuration assumed by a certain path of divergence of the *élan vital*. And, as any actualization, it eventually tends to «close», to crystalize itself in a stable form halting the creative *èlan* of the evolution of life. The human being «goes around» in this circle like any other animal capable of producing social cohabitation. From this point of view, society is but a condition of equilibrium between internal selfishness and the external socializing pressures. But this society is «closed», that is established on a system of obligations that keep the system halted. Therefore, liberation comes «when something appears in the interval», something capable of breaking the circle, something which replicates the spontaneity of the *élan vital* and which does not reduce morality to a system of obligations. This is the «creative emotion», a fundamental notion of Bergson's 1932 *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. As Deleuze points out:

> The little interval "between the pressure of society and the resistance of intelligence" defines a variability appropriate to human societies. Now, by means of this interval, something extraordinary is produced or embodied: creative emotion. This no longer has anything to do with the pressures of society, nor with the disputes of the individual. It no longer has anything to do with an individual who contests or even invents, nor with a society that constrains, that persuades or even tells stories. It has only made use of their circular play in order to break the circle […]. And what is this creative emotion, if not precisely a cosmic Memory, that actualizes all the levels at the same time, that liberates man from the plane *(plan)* or the level that is proper to him, in order to make him a creator, adequate to the whole movement of creation? This liberation, this embodiment of cosmic memory […]. It is the genesis of intuition in intelligence. If man accedes to the open creative totality, it is therefore by acting, by creating rather than by contemplating.[110]

In my opinion, Bergson's *creative emotion* is what allows Deleuze to overcome the tricky questions posed by the *partial*, i.e., selfish, nature of Hume's sympathy.[111] For Bergson,

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[108] Ibidem, pp. 108-109.
[109] Ibidem, p. 109.
[110] Ibidem, p. 111.
[111] As Antonello La Vergata pointed out, starting from the late nineteenth century, French social and ethical debate on Darwinism was characterized by a sort of "social Lamarckism" which emphasises solidarity and cooperation instead of competition and agonism. Indeed, unlike Darwinism, Lamarckism understands struggle for existence as a «stimulator of individual development» rather than a «competition which eventually decides upon the fittest.» In other words, as La Vergata explains, for Lamarckism, struggle for existence is the challenge that an organism faces with environment in order to outdo itself. This «*effort pour la vie*» requires cooperation and solidarity: the better the environment, that is society, is, the more individuals can outdo themselves. Jean-Lous de Lanessan (1843-1919) was one of the first French biologist who established a strict connection between Lamarckism and solidarity by means of the concept of *association pour la lutte* (cooperation for the struggle against the environment), thereby providing a biological foundation for the «solidaristic creed» which characterized the political though of French Third Republic. Such a political solidaristic creed aimed to reject the very British Darwinian doctrine as established upon a very aggressive and individualistic mentality. In other words, Social Lamarckism was a way to claim the principle of French revolution and its civilizing

«sympathy» (*sympathie*) is the expression of «the morality that is generally accepted» and it cannot be therefore considered a proper source of morality as such.[112] Sympathy is still anchored to the individual dimension, a limit posed by inert matter. On the contrary, as Deleuze underlines, *creative emotion*, «although personal, it is not individual; transcendent, it is like the God in us.»[113] Selfishness, which entails an altruistic obligation to be deactivated, is only a *partial* perspective on «the Whole». The source of morality lies «beyond» intelligence, in that «emotion» which connects individuals to the vitality of life, to the creative power of *élan vital*. In few words, *creative emotion* is the practical expression of the *élan vital*, the expression of the original solidarity among the living beings. It is an impersonal dimension of power wherefrom individuals can draw to recirculate the creative impulse of life, eventually establishing an «open society.» Here is where the human being proves his exceptionality, although Deleuze, on the basis of Bergson's text, promptly underlines that «this liberation […] takes place in privileged souls»[114] (saints, artists and mystics), whose «overflowing vitality»[115] becomes contagious. As Deleuze points out: «Man therefore creates a differentiation that is valid for the Whole, and he alone traces out an open direction that is able to express a whole that is itself open. Whereas the other directions are closed and go round in circles […], man is capable of scrambling the planes, of going beyond his own plane as his own condition, in order finally to express naturing Nature.»[116] In other words, as Deleuze concludes *Bergsonism*, «The *elan vital*, finally, designates the actualization of this virtual according to the *lines of differentiation* that correspond to the degrees - up to this precise line of man where the *Elan Vital* gains self-consciousness.»[117]

As Michael Hardt pointed out, these final passages of Deleuze's *Bergsonism* might appear controversial, not say inconsistent. Indeed, here Deleuze clearly overlooks not only the anthropocentric and idealist character of Bergson's understanding of the evolution life, but also the theological background of his moral proposal.[118] Suddenly, after having made Bergson the philosopher who gave the question of difference the proper ontological support, we started talking again about the primacy of self-consciousness, human exceptionality and God. Those very categories which, since the dawn of time, have always reduced difference to a negative residual of the true being (for Bergson, animals are «losses» of creative evolution).[119] Nevertheless, Hardt reminds the we should always account Deleuze's

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mission. Therefore, cooperation and solidarity becomes a universal law of nature, the driving for of progress and civilization. Cf. La Vergata, *Colpa di Darwin*?, pp. 81-84

[112] Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1974, pp. 111-112: «General interest, personal interest, self-love, sympathy, pity, logical consistency, etc., there is no principle of action from which it is not possible to deduce more or less the morality that is generally accepted […]. *The philosopher went in search of his quarry in the social environment, where everything interpenetrates everything, where egoism and vanity are impregnated with sociability*; it is in no way surprising, then, that he should find again in each principle the morality that he has put or left there.» Emphasis mine.

[113] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 110.

[114] Ibidem, p. 111.

[115] Bergson, *Two Sources*, p. 86: «The creative emotion which exalted these exceptional souls, and which was an overflowing of vitality, has spread far and wide about them; enthusiasts themselves, they radiated enthusiasm which has never been completely quenched, and which can be readily fanned into flame again.»

[116] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 107.

[117] Ibidem, p. 113.

[118] Hardt, *Deleuze*, pp. 22-25.

[119] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 290: «Life, we have said, transcends finality as it transcends the other categories. It is essentially a current sent through matter, drawing from it what it can. There has not, therefore, properly speaking, been any project or plan. On the other hand, it is abundantly evident that the rest of nature is not for the sake of man : we struggle like the other species, we have struggled against other species […]. From our point of view, life appears in its entirety as an immense wave which, starting from a center, spreads outwards, and which on almost the whole of its circumference is stopped and converted into oscillation: at one single point the obstacle has been forced, the impulsion has passed freely. It is this freedom that the human

«selectivity»[120] regarding history of philosophy: «If a philosopher presents arguments with which Deleuze might find fault, he does not critique them but simply leaves them out of his discussion.»[121] Indeed, Deleuze' historical works aims to trace categories and perspective within the history of philosophy that «fits in with the scope of his project»[122]. In few words, thanks to Bergson, empiricism becomes the way of thinking which matches with the dynamism of life. The power of mind lies in the power of life. Furthermore, as Hardt points out, Deleuze's reading of Bergson's philosophy in 1966 *Bergsonism* is affected by the previous encounter with Nietzsche's works (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* was published in 1962). As Hardt claims:

> Deleuze feels the pressure to bring the ontological to the social and the ethical. In *Bergsonism* Deleuze succeeds in addressing this pressure to an extent. More important, however, this reorientation announces the need for and the advent of Nietzsche in Deleuze's thought. Nietzsche gives Deleuze the means to explore the real being of becoming and the positive organization of the actual multiplicity. Furthermore, by shifting the terrain from the plane of logic to that of values, Nietzsche allows Deleuze to translate the positive ontology he has developed through the study of Bergson toward a positive ethics.[123]

Although we always need to account Deleuze's selectivity when we deal with his historical works, however I think we should not reduce Deleuze's inquiry to an adventurous and eclectic collage of concepts. He surely attempts to make history of philosophy less static and more creative[124], but this never entails superficiality or inaccuracy.[125] For these reasons, I do consider Deleuze's ostensible omissions more as "forced deviations" than as "eclectic selection". Moreover, to purify certain concepts and certain categories from their "manufacturing defects" does not guarantee that, soon or later, those "flaws" will eventually present again. This risks being a temporary cover-up. Indeed, if anthropocentrism is, by its very nature, selective and discriminatory, and if, as Bergson case shows, it seems to be the ultimate corollary of an understanding of life as power, then does the category of power itself not risk being affected by the same discriminatory attitude? It is clear that Deleuze could not rely on Bergson to «bring the ontological to the social and the ethical.» Nietzsche might have seemed a more consistent terrain whereon working for such a translation.

> There's a profound link between signs, events, life, and vitalism: the power of nonorganic life that can be found in a line that's drawn, a line of writing, a line of music. It's organisms that die, not life. Any

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form registers […] It is as if a vague and formless being, whom we may call, as we will, *man or superman*, had sought to realize himself, and had succeeded only by abandoning a part of himself on the way. *The losses are represented by the rest of the animal world*, and even by the vegetable world, at least in what these have that is positive and above the accidents of evolution.» Emphasis mine.

[120] Hardt, *Deleuze*, p. 23.

[121] Ibidem, p. XIX.

[122] Ibidem, p. 31. In a 1969 interview, Jeanette Colombel ask Deleuze: «Sometimes your reception seems too favorable even: for example, when you silence the conservative aspects of Bergson's thought. On the other hand, you are merciless with Hegel. Why is that?» As Deleuze replies: «Precisely, by virtue of those criteria of staging or collage we just discussed, it seems admissible to extract from a philosophy considered conservative as a whole those singularities which are not really singularities: that is what I did for Bergsonism and its image of life, its image of liberty or mental illness. Why not Hegel? Well, somebody has to play the role of traitor.» Cfr. Jeanette Colombel, *Gilles Deleuze Talks Philosophy*, in *Desert Islands*, p. 144.

[123] Ibidem, p. 22.

[124] Deleuze, Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 83: «The history of philosophy is completely without interest if it does not undertake to awaken a dormant concept and to play it again on a new stage, even if this comes at the price of turning it against itself.»

[125] See the voice *H as in History of Philosophy* from Deleuze's 1988-1989 *Abécédaire*. Text available at <https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/seminars/gilles-deleuze-abc-primer/lecture-recording-2-g-m>.

> work of art points a way through for life, finds a way through the cracks. Everything I've written is vitalistic, at least I hope it is, and amounts to a theory of signs and events[126]

Thanks to Hume and Bergson, Deleuze succeeds in releasing the power of life from the restriction imposed by metaphysic and radical materialism. In other words, Deleuze's philosophy of difference can finally distance both from Hegel and from Darwin. If Hume's empiricism was still amply implicated in a theoretical path which, once taken to the extreme, eventually leads to Darwin and the *suffering animal*; instead, Bergson veers towards Nietzsche and the *powerful animal*.

Releasing the Living: Spinoza and Nietzsche

«I did begin with books on the history of philosophy, but all the authors I dealt with had for me something in common. And it all tended toward *the great Spinoza-Nietzsche equation*.»[127] As Michael Hardt pointed out:

> When we look at Deleuze's early work from a historical perspective, as an evolution, the most striking fact is that he wrote his first book when he was rather young (he was twenty-eight years old in 1953 when *Empiricism and Subjectivity* appeared) and then waited eight years before publishing his next book. Eight years might not seem like a very long break for some authors, but for Deleuze, who after 1962 consistently published a book each year, eight years represents an enormous gap […]. This eight-year hole in Deleuze's intellectual life does in fact represent a period of movement, a dramatic reorientation of his philosophical approach. During this period, in effect, he shifts from the Hume-Bergson axis that characterizes his very early work to the Nietzsche-Spinoza identity that carries his work to its maturity.[128]

This shift from the Hume-Bergson axis to the Nietzsche-Spinoza equation marks a passage from the plane of ontology to that of ethics. From here on, Deleuze will establish a very intense circularity between ontology and ethics: *in order to be ethical, the power of difference must be ontological*.[129] Deleuze's challenge consists in thinking such a circularity within immanence alone, that is without falling into an emanative, not to say «Neoplatonic»[130], ontology that divides the Power from the powers, the transcendent One from its immanent determinations. This is why Spinoza becomes the fundamental source for this gradual transition from ontology to ethics. As Deleuze states in *What is Philosophy?*: «[Spinoza] is the prince of philosophers. Perhaps he is the only philosopher never to have compromised with transcendence and to have hunted it down everywhere.»[131] Because, «Whenever there is transcendence, vertical Being, imperial State in the sky or on earth, there is religion; and there is Philosophy whenever there is immanence.»[132] In other words, philosophy is the thought of immanence, and immanence is the only place where life is free from judgment. Spinoza is the philosopher of the "non-judged life".

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[126] Deleuze, *Conversation with Raymond Bellour and François Ewald* (1988), in *Negotiation, 1972-1990*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 143.
[127] Ibidem, p. 135. Emphasis mine.
[128] Hardt, *Deleuze*, p. XX.
[129] As Miguel de Beistegui pointed out, thanks to Spinoza, Deleuze can distinguish between morality, as a system of values imposed to being, and ethics, as modal expression of an ontological power. By doing so, Deleuze can consistently continue contest the naturalistic fallacy, highlighting how, by following Nietzsche, the latter consists of a strategy whereby reinforcing the demands of morality (always historical and, therefore, always variable) on being. Cf. Miguel de Beistegui, *Immanence. Deleuze and Philosophy*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2010, pp. 105-117.
[130] Badiou, *Deleuze*, pp. 23-25.
[131] Deleuze, Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 48.
[132] Ibidem, p. 43.

Therefore, in Spinoza, Deleuze finds the «architecture of realitye» whereby harmonizing power and immanence.[133] As if Deleuze, thanks to Bergson, realized that power becomes a very unstable substance once it comes into contact with immanence. The equilibrium point is given by Spinoza's notion of «expression» to which Deleuze devotes 1968 *Expressionism in Philosophy*.

> Finite things are parts of the divine power because they are modes of God's attribute. But the reduction of "creatures" to the status of modes, far from taking away their own power, shows rather how a part of their power properly belongs to them, along with their essence. The identity of power and essence is to be asserted equally (under the same conditions) of modes and substance. These conditions are the attributes, through which substance possesses an omnipotence identical to its essence. And thus modes, implicating these same attributes that constitute God's essence are said to "explicate" or "express" divine power. Reducing things to modes of a single substance is not a way of making them mere appearances, phantoms […], but is rather the only way, according to Spinoza, to make them "natural" beings, endowed with force of power.[134]

Expression is not emanation. As Deleuze remarks, «emanation serves as the principle of a universe rendered hierarchical; the difference of beings is in general conceived as h hierarchical difference; each term is as it were the image of the superior term that precedes it, and is defined by the degree of distance that separates it from the first cause or first principle.»[135] On the contrary, «expression» entails a non-hierarchical relationship between the One and the Many, between Life and the Living, between Power and powers: «The One remains involved in what expresses it, imprinted in what unfolds it, immanent in whatever manifests it: expression is in this respect an involvement.»[136] Such a mutual involvement makes immanence a an expressive field wherein power flows freely. As Deleuze claims: «The significance of Spinozism seems to me this: it asserts immanence as a principle and frees expression from any subordination to emanative or exemplary causality.»[137]

From an historical point of view, Deleuze's remarks on Spinoza's ontology hit the spot. As Deleuze puts it, Spinoza is the meeting point of two specular tradition of western philosophy: on the one hand, the «theological tradition» which asserts «the identity of power and act, not only in God, but in Nature» (Neoplatonism, Cusa, Bruno); on the other hand, the «tradition of materialism in physical theory» which asserts the «actual character of all power in created things themselves» and wherein «the distinction of power and act, potentially and actually, was substituted the correlation of *a power of acting and a power of being acted on or suffering action*, both actual» (Hobbes).[138] The first is related to the «essence of substance», while the second to «the essence of modes.» Therefore, Spinozism portrays Nature, viz. Life, as a constant actual power, absolute positivity that the modes, viz. the living beings, express according to their «degree of power.»[139] Such a declination of expression in affective terms allows to think of simultaneously the ontological equality of the livings and their differentiation on the ethical plane. This is the anti-anthropocentric understanding of power that Bergson failed to think, and that Deleuze finally finds in Spinoza. As Deleuze points out:

> A mode is, in its essence, always a certain degree, a certain quantity, of a quality. Precisely thereby is it, within the attribute containing it, a part so to speak of God's power. Being common forms, attributes

[133] Daniel C. Barber, *Deleuze and the Naming of God. Post-Secularism and the Future of Immanence*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014, p. 41
[134] Deleuze., *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, New York, Zone Books, 1990, p. 92.
[135] Ibidem, p. 173.
[136] Ibidem, p. 16.
[137] Ibidem, p. 180.
[138] Ibidem, p. 93. Emphasis mine.
[139] Ibidem, pp. 198-199.

> are the conditions of substance having an omnipotence identical with its essence, and also of modes possessing a part of this power identical with their essence. God's power expresses or explicates itself modally, but only in and through such quantitative differentiation. *Man thus loses in Spinozism all the privileges owed to a quality supposed proper to him, which belonged to him only from the viewpoint of imitative participation. Modes are distinguished quantitatively: each mode expresses or explicates God's essence, insofar as that essence explicates itself through the mode's essence, that is, divides itself according to the quantity corresponding to that mode*.[140]

The notion of «mode» overcomes any ontological dualism among the living, especially between humanity and animality. As is known, from a macro-ontological point of view, Spinoza reduces *extension* and *cogito* to attributes of the unique substance. From a micro-ontological point of view, he defines the relationship between mind and body by mean of the theory of parallelism.[141] In Spinoza, modes express power according to their «capacity to be affected.»[142] Immanence is the place wherein affection takes place and wherein modes affect each other. Affection is the vitality of life practically expressed.

In *Expressionism in Philosophy*, Deleuze amply dwells upon the intricate relationship between Descartes and Spinoza. As is known, Spinoza's philosophical operation consist in takin Descartes' ontological dualism to the extreme. Indeed, as we noticed in the first chapter, Descartes' dualism is as smart as it often becomes uneconomic, especially regarding theology. Spinoza "resolves" Descartes: if we remove all the theistic clauses which keep Cartesian ontological dualism going, what we eventually obtain is a necessary unique substance, whereof mind and matter are two of its infinite attributes. Ontological necessity: this is what the «atheist Spinoza»[143] claimed against rationalistic theology. And where there is necessity, there is no room for the free God of theism. Spinoza's Nature is the execution of a necessary process where ideas such as free will, Providence, Miracle, Good, and Evil no longer make sense. Spinoza's theory of affects emerges from such deterministic horizon in which immanence and necessity overlap. Deleuze finds in such a compression the perfect terrain whereon carrying out his ethical discourse on Power.[144] Indeed, the key point is the consequentialist perspective that Spinoza reaps from his assault to metaphysics. As Deleuze states:

> One may call "rationalist moralism" (optimism) a tradition that has its sources in Plato, and its fullest development in the philosophy of Leibniz; Evil is nothing because only Being is, or rather because Being, superior to existence, determines all that is. The Good, or the Better, *make things be.* Spinoza's position has nothing to do with this tradition: it amounts to rationalist "amoralism". For according to Spinoza, Good has no more sense than Evil: in Nature there is neither Good nor Evil […]. The question of Spinoza's atheism […] can only be posed in relation to what most people call "God" from a religious viewpoint: a God, that is to say, inseparable from a *ratio boni*, proceeding by the moral law, acting as a judge. Spinoza is clearly an atheist in this sense: the moral pseudo-law is simply the measure of our misunderstanding of natural laws; the idea of rewards and punishments reflects only our ignorance of the true relation between an act and its consequences […]. But because there is no Good or Evil, this does not mean that all distinctions vanish. There is no Good or Evil in Nature, but there are good and bad things for each existing mode. The moral opposition of Good and Evil disappears, but this disappearance does not make all things, or all beings, equal. As Nietzsche puts it, «"*Beyond Good and Evil*"…at least this does *not* mean "Beyond Good and Bad".» there are increases in our power of action, reductions in our power of action. The distinction between good things and bad provides the basis for a real ethical difference, which we must substitute for a false moral opposition.[145]

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[140] Ibidem, p. 183. Emphasis mine.
[141] Ibidem, p. 200.
[142] Ibidem, p. 93.
[143] Mori, *L'ateismo dei moderni*, pp. 35ff.
[144] Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, p. 146: «All modes participate in the power of God: just as our body participates in the power of existing, our soul participates in the power of thinking.»
[145] Ibidem, pp. 253-254.

Spinoza's consequentialism will amply inspire Deleuze's following ethical reflection. 1970 *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*[146] and 1980-1981 seminar on Spinoza held at the University of Vincennes (Paris)[147] amply testify Deleuze's fruitful employment of Spinoza's ethics: «Spinoza didn't title his book *Ontology*, he's too shrewd for that; he titles it *Ethics*»[148]. Indeed, Deleuze's ethics orbits the most leading question of Spinoza's *Ethics*: «*What Can a Body Do?*» I will come back on this point in the next paragraph. For now, it is important to underline that Spinoza's consequentialism can be really considered as the historical-philosophical foundation of Deleuze's well-known category of «becoming». Hence, Spinoza provide further material to deepen an insight that Deleuze already grasped in Hume's empiricism: the idea the ethics consists of an incessant «apprenticeship.» Spinoza – who, not by chance, is considered by Deleuze as an «empiricist»[149] -, allows to extend this perspective beyond the boundary of humanity. As Deleuze claims, Spinoza's ethics does not lead to a morality, but it is actually a real «ethology.»[150] Moreover, thanks to Spinoza's "ethology of power", Deleuze can intensify further his understanding of immanence. Spinoza's ethics is released from God's judgment: immanence is a field of power where bodies are nothing but points of intensity expressing such a power. In Spinoza's, we do not find an oppressive verticality, but a pulsating horizontality. In this sense, ethics is a performance of our own power, the «*slow effort of discovering our joys*.»[151]

> To do all we can is our ethical task properly so called. It is here that the *Ethics* takes the body as a model; for very body extends its power as far as it can. In a sense every being, each moment, does all it can. "What it can do" is its capacity to be affected, which is necessarily and constantly exercised by the thing's relations with other beings. But in another sense, our capacity to be affected may be exercised in such a way that we are cut off from our power of action, and such that this incessantly diminishes. In this second sense it can happen that we live cut off from "what e can do". This indeed is the fate of most man, most of the time. The *weak man, the slave, is not someone of lesser strength an absolute terms*. The weak man is he who, whatever his strength, remains cut off from his power of action, kept in slavery or impotence. To do all we can amounts to two things: How exercise out capacity to be affected in such a way that our power of action increases? And how increase this power to the point where, finally, we produce active affections? There are weak men and strong, slaves and free men. There is no Good and Evil in Nature, there is no moral opposition, but there is an ethical difference. The difference lies in the immanent existing modes involved in what we feel, do and think.[152]

Atheism, consequentialism and anti-hierarchical understanding of the living: in Spinoza we find all the basic elements of modern materialism. Once again, Deleuze's historical

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[146] Id., *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*.
[147] Id., *Spinoza: The Velocity of Though*, Seminar At The University Of Paris, Vincennes-St. Denis, 1980-1981. The English transcription is available at <https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/seminars/spinoza-velocities-thought>.
[148] Ibidem, Lecture I, 25 November 1980.
[149] Id., *Expressionism in Philosophy*, p. 148-149: «In Spinoza it is the same with truth as with freedom: they are not given to us in principle, but appear as the result of a long activity through which we produce adequate ideas, liberated from the sequence of external necessity. Spinoza's inspiration is in this respect profoundly empiricist […]. If we listen to the rationalists, truth and freedom are, above all, rights; they wonder how we can lose these rights, fall into error to lose our liberty. Thus rationalism finds in the Adamic tradition […] a theme that suits its preoccupations particularly well. From an empiricist viewpoint everything is inverted […]. One may recognize Spinoza's empiricist inspiration simply by the end.»
[150] Deleuze, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 27: «Thus, animals are defined less by the abstract notions of genus and species than by a capacity for being affected, by the affections of which they are "capable" by the excitations to which they react within the limits of their capability. Consideration of genera and species still implies a "morality", whereas the *Ethics* is an *ethology* which, with regard to men and animals, in each case only considers their capacity for being affected.» On Spinoza's ethics as ethology see also Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp. 256-257.
[151] Ibidem, p. 262. Emphasis mine.
[152] Ibidem, p. 269.

reflection intersects the philosophical plot of the *suffering animal*. Indeed, as Deleuze claims, Spinoza constitutes a «new "naturalism"» which provides «the true thrust of the Anticartesian reaction.»[153] An «Anticartesian reaction» which, against the Cartesian-mechanist devaluation of the «immanent power» of nature, re-establishes «the claims of a Nature endowed with forces or power.»[154] In other words, we are still within the Bergsonian critique to radical materialism as a form of reductionism which, albeit effectively succeeds in rejecting metaphysic, however ends up weakening life. Therefore, a fully-fledged materialism should rather claim the intrinsic power of living matter. In few words, materialism is a matter of restoring power in its place. The Divine judgment is nothing but the resentful attempt to punish life for its outrageous vitality.

If, from the ontological viewpoint, such a transfer of power results in the recognition of an «absolutely infinite power»[155]; from the ethical one, such a materialism of power claims the primacy of «Joy», namely the free execution of one's own power. From here on, the Spinoza-Nietzsche equation becomes the load-bearing axis of Deleuze's reflection.[156] It is a continual coming and going where Spinoza becomes Nietzschean and Nietzsche becomes Spinozist depending on Deleuze's theoretical demands. By doing so, Deleuze can extract the best from both authors to finally conceive a fully-fledged materialism of power.[157] Thus, in Deleuze, Spinoza is the first historical episode which sketches a line that, by flexing near to Hume, directly leads to Nietzsche and Bergson. Yet, such a curve does not represent a negation, but rather the deviation of some themes in favor of others. This is Deleuze's main goal: to elude the *suffering animal* in order to affirm the *powerful animal*. To do so, it is necessary to neutralize the tricky question of evil.[158]

In the *Appendix* of the first part of *Ethics*, Spinoza calls into question both theodicy, as it «advocates»[159] a mistaken conception of God, and atheism, as it blames God for an issue, as that of evil, which actually does not exist.

> Look at how they ended up! Along with many conveniences in Nature they couldn't avoid finding many inconveniences - storms, earthquakes, diseases, etc. They hold that these happen because the Gods - whom they judge on the basis of themselves - are angry with men for wronging them or making mistakes in their worship. And though their daily experience contradicted this, and though countless examples showed that conveniences and inconveniences happen indiscriminately to the pious and the impious alike, that didn't lead them to give up their longstanding prejudice […]. Many people are accustomed to arguing in this way: If all things have followed from the necessity of God's most perfect nature, why are there so many imperfections in Nature? why are things so rotten that they stink? so ugly that they make us sick? why is there confusion, evil, and wrong-doing? I repeat that those who argue like this are easily answered. For the perfection of things is to be judged solely from their nature and power; things

[153] Ibidem, p. 227.
[154] Ibidem, pp. 227-228
[155] Deleuze, *Velocities of Thought*, Lecture 0, January 24th 1978 *Spinoza: affect and idea*.
[156] Deleuze, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 17: «It is not enough to show how pantheism and atheism are combined in this thesis, which denies the existence of a moral, transcendent, creator God. We must start rather from the practical theses that made Spinozism an object of scandal. These theses imply a triple denunciation: of "consciousness", of "values" and of "sad passions". These are the three major resemblances with Nietzsche.»
[157] On the peculiarity of Deleuze's materialism in relation to the notion of power see Arjen Kleinherenbrink, *Against Continuity. Gilles Deleuze's Speculative Realism*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2019, pp. 148-165.
[158] On Deleuze's neutralisation of the negative see Benjamin Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative. A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2010, pp. 51ff, and Roberto Esposito, *Pensiero istituente. Tre paradigm di ontologia politica*, Torino, Einaudi, 2020, pp. 75ff.
[159] As Deleuze states in 1988 *Fold* on Leibniz: «If this world exists, it is not because it is the one that is. The philosopher is still not *the Inquisitor he will soon become with empiricism*, and he is even less the *Judge he will become with Kant* (the tribunal of Reason). He is a *Lawyer, or God's attorney*. He defends God's Cause, following the word that Leibniz invents, "theodicy".» Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*, London, Athlone Press, 1993, p. 68.

> are not more or less perfect because they please or offend men's senses, or because they are useful or harmful to human nature. But to those who ask "Why didn't God create all men so that they would be governed by the command of reason?" I answer only: "Because God had the material to create all things, from the highest degree of perfection to the lowest"; or, to put it more accurately, "Because the laws of God's nature have been so ample that they sufficed for producing all things that can be conceived by an unlimited intellect" - that is, producing everything that is conceivable or possible.[160]

Spinoza's consequentialism reduces the question of evil to a matter of bad encounters and, by doing so, eventually centers ethics on «joy».[161] As Deleuze points out, this allows to go strongly against «to the whole philosophical tradition which is a meditation on death».[162] Thus, with Spinoza, ethics becomes a matter of power, a purely positive act which banishes those «sad passions» weakening the power our bodies are capable of. As Deleuze claims:

> There is, then, a philosophy of "life" in Spinoza; it consists precisely in denouncing all that separates us from life, all these transcendent values that are turned against life, these values that are tied to the conditions and illusions of consciousness. Life is poisoned by the categories of Good and Evil, of blame and merit, of sin and redemption.1[6] What poisons life is hatred, including the hatred that is turned back against oneself in the form of guilt […]. Before Nietzsche, he denounces all the falsifications of life, all the values in the name of which we disparage life. We do not live, we only lead a semblance of life; we can only think of how to keep from dying, and our whole life is a death worship.[163]

Good is what enhances the power we are endowed with (joyful passions), whereas evil is what, on the contrary, diminishes it (sad passions). If so, the real ethical question is: «*How does one arrive at a maximum of joyful passions?*, proceeding from there to free and active feelings (*although* our place in Nature seems to condemn us to bad encounters and sadness).»[164] Before proceeding further, we should briefly dwell upon this «although». In my opinion, this is the very critical point of Deleuze's use of Spinoza.

In the article *Spinoza* of the *Dictionnaire*, Pierre Bayle develops a harsh critique of Spinozist doctrine. As Bayle claims: «this is the most monstrous hypothesis that could be imagined, the most absurd, and the most diametrically opposed to the most evident notions of our mind.»[165] Basically, Bayle's *Spinoza* is a defense of Cartesian metaphysic against the «ill use» Spinoza made of Cartesian maxims. The long and complex *note N* develops a serial confutation of Spinoza's ontological thesis in order to reaffirm the greater heuristic validity of Christian metaphysics.[166] Yet, in the *Note O*, Bayle highlights what seems to be the greatest difficulty. Indeed, according to Bayle, the unsustainability of Spinoza's monism definitively emerges when it faces the question of evil.[167] As Bayle writes:

> It follows from this supposition, that this necessary cause, setting no limits to its power and having as a rule of its actions neither goodness, nor justice, nor knowledge, but only the infinite force of his nature had to modify itself according to all possible realities; so that errors and crimes, pain and vexation, being modalities as real as truths, and virtues, and pleasures, must be contained by the universe. Spinoza thought that by this means he could satisfy the objections of the Manicheans against one principle. They

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[160] Spinoza, *Ethics*, pp. 19-22.
[161] Ibidem, p. 113: «A free man thinks about death less than he thinks about anything else; his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death.».
[162] Deleuze, *Velocities of Thought*, Lecture 0.
[163] Id., *Practical Philosophy*, p. 26.
[164] Ibidem, p. 28. Emphasis mine.
[165] Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, pp. 296-297. In Bayle's 1682 *Various Thoughts On The Occasion Of A Comet*, Spinoza represents instead the emblem of the *virtuous atheist*, the «the greatest atheist there ever was.» Cf. *Various Thoughts On The Occasion Of A Comet*, Albany, State University of New York, 2000, p. 227. For Deleuze, Bayle's portrait of Spinoza is «hostile and caricatural.» Cf. Deleuze, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 16.
[166] Cf. Gianluca Mori, *Bayle philosophe*, Paris, Edition Champion, 1999, pp. 155-188.
[167] Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, pp. 170-181.

> are forceful only against the supposition that a unique principle acts by choice, that it can act or not act, and that it limits its power in accordance with the rules of its goodness and equity, or in accordance with malicious instinct. Supposing this, one asks, "Where does evil come from if this unique principle is good?" Spinoza would reply, "Since my unique principle has the power to do evil and good and does all that it can do, it is completely necessary that there be good and evil in the universe".[168]

"Evil is not only necessary, but also ontologically equivalent to Good: we might as well accept this". This is what, in Bayle's eyes, Spinoza seems to propose. According to Bayle, it is a sort of "take it or leave it" so ethically out of use that we had better maintain the established «custom.» In other words, at any rates, Descartes' provisional code of morals has «the advantage of promising us great benefits for the future and giving us a thousand consolations for the miseries of this life.»[169] Yet, we already know what is the actual purpose of Bayle's dialectical retaliation: «To have good grounds for rejecting Spinoza's hypothesis, it would suffice then to be able to say, "It is open to no fewer objections than the Christian hypothesis".»[170] Hence, Spinoza does not succeed in answering the question of evil since his answer is as fideistic as that of theism ("take it or leave it"). It does not give us anything better than a new theodicy.[171] Rather, Spinoza even wants to persuade us that pain and death are nothing. Nevertheless, as Bayle taught us, the theoretical and moral strength of atheism consists exactly in the opposite: when our flesh and nerves feel pain, this experience is so atrociously real that, in that very moment, any sort of consolation one might provide is meaningless. Spinoza gives us a sterile consolation, a false «innovation»: nothing new under the sun.

We find a more straightforward critique in Schopenhauer. As is known, the relationship between Schopenhauer and Spinoza is complex, an intricate dialogue where convergences and disapprovals alternates.[172] Not by chance, the question of evil is what marks the greatest distance between the two. As Schopenhauer claims in the 1944 supplements to the fourth book of *The World as Will and Representation* (1819):

> Since Socrates, the problem of philosophy has been to connect the force which produces the phenomenon of the world and in consequence determines its nature, with the morality of the disposition or character, and thus to demonstrate a moral world-order as the basis of the physical. Theism achieved this in a childlike manner which was unable to satisfy mature mankind. Therefore pantheism opposed itself to theism, as soon as it ventured to do so, and demonstrated that nature carries within herself the power by virtue of which she appears. With this, however, ethics was bound to be lost. It is true that here and there Spinoza attempts to save it by sophisms, but he often gives it up altogether, and with an audacity that excites astonishment and indignation he declares the difference between right and wrong, and in general between good and evil, to be merely conventional, and therefore in itself hollow and empty […]. All pantheism must ultimately be shipwrecked on the inescapable demands of ethics, and then on the evil and suffering of the world. If the world is a theophany, then everything done by man, and even by the animal, is equally divine and excellent; nothing can be more censurable and nothing more praiseworthy than anything else; hence there is no ethics […]. Hence in this way is pantheism related to ethics. The evils and misery of the world, however, are not in accord even with theism; and so it tried to help itself by all kinds of shifts, evasions, and theodicies which nevertheless succumbed irretrievably to the arguments of Hume and Voltaire. But pantheism is wholly untenable in face of that evil side of the world. Thus, only when we consider the world entirely from without and solely from the physical side, and keep in view nothing but the order of things which always renews itself, and thereby the comparative imperishableness of the whole, is it perhaps feasible to declare the world to be a God, yet always only symbolically. But if we enter within, and therefore take in addition the subjective and

[168] Ibidem, p. 315.
[169] Ibidem, p. 316.
[170] Ibidem.
[171] As we noticed in the second chapter, Nietzsche will have the same doubt: «How does one explain Spinoza's position, his renunciation and rejection of moral value judgments? (Was it one consequence of a theodicy?).»
[172] For a brief reconstruction see Henry Walter Brann, *Schopenhauer and Spinoza*, in «Journal of the History of Philosophy», 2/1972, pp. 181-196.

> the moral side, with its preponderance of want, suffering, and misery, of dissension, wickedness, infamy, and absurdity, we soon become aware with horror that we have before us anything but a theophany.[173]

Schopenhauer's remarks highlight two fundamental questions. First, *can we really avoid posing the question of evil when we think of life and of the way we experience it?* Moreover, from an ethical viewpoint, *can we really dismiss themes such as suffering and death as obsessions of an axiological order established on «sad passions» restraining our vital power?* To put it in more political terms (we are getting closer to Nietzsche), is the question of evil the *instrumentum regni* whereby the tyrant attempts to makes us docile and timorous slaves?[174]

In my opinion this set of questions - to which Deleuze will never provide a clear answer -, represents the most problematic aspect of the Spinoza-Nietzsche equation. Indeed, the main problem lies in Deleuze's excessive "nietzscheanisation" of Spinoza.[175] This becomes clear especially regarding Deleuze's use of Spinoza's *conatus*. As we noticed in the second chapter, the theory of *conatus* is what will lead Nietzsche to locate the «consumptive Spinoza» within the philosophy of «self-preservation» culminating with Darwin. In few words, for Nietzsche, Spinoza stands by the *suffering animal*. This represents a conceptual crux that Deleuze attempted to solve at the price of not negligible stretches. As is known, Spinoza defines the concept of *conatus* in the third part of *Ethics*. [176] The logic which underlies his argumentation is the follow:

> Nothing can be destroyed except through an external cause (Prop. IV); Each thing that express in a certain and determinate way God's power, as far as it can by its own power, tries *[conatur]* to stay in existence (Prop. VI); The power or effort *[potentia sive conatus]* by which it tries *[conatur]* to stay in existence is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself (Prop. VII); The effort *[conatus]* by which each thing tries to stay in existence involves no finite time, but an indefinite time (Prop. VIII)**.**

Therefore, in Spinoza, modes, i.e., living beings, do not simply exist: they rather «*try to stay in existence*.» However, within his ontology, Spinoza can redefine what we usually name as "instinct of self-preservation" in term of expression of power, the latter conceived, since in God, as infinite and always actual. Because of this, ethics is nothing but the

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[173] Artur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. II, New York, Dover, 1966, Chapter XLVII *On Ethics*, pp. 590-591.

[174] Deleuze, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 12: «In his whole way of living and of thinking, Spinoza projects an image of the positive, affirmative life, which stands in opposition to the semblances that men are content with. Not only are they content with the latter, they feel a hatred of life, they are ashamed of it; a humanity bent on self-destruction, multiplying the cults of death, bringing about the union of the tyrant and the slave, the priest, the judge, and the soldier, always busy running life into the ground, mutilating it, killing it outright or by degrees, overlaying it or suffocating it with laws, properties, duties, empires-this is what Spinoza diagnoses in the world, this betrayal of the universe and of mankind.» On the political implication of "sad passions" see Remo Bodei, *Geometry of the Passion. Fear, Hope, Happiness: Philosophy and Political Use*, Toronto, Toronto University Press 2018.

[175] As Nietzsche writes to Franz Overbeck in a well-known letter dated July 30th 1881: «I am really amazed, really delighted! I have a precursor, and *what* a precursor! I hardly knew Spinoza: what brought me to him now was the guidance of instinct. Not only is his whole tendency like my own - to make knowledge the most *powerful passion* - but also in five main points of his doctrine I find myself; this most abnormal and lonely thinker is closest to me in these points precisely: he denies free will, purposes, the moral world order, the nonegoistical, evil; of course the differences are enormous, but they are differences more of period, culture, field of knowledge. *In summa:* my solitariness which, as on very high mountains, has often, often made me gasp for breath and lose blood, is now at least a solitude for two. Strange!» Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, ed. Christopher Middleton, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1996, p. 176.

[176] For a very effective reconstruction see Justin B. Jacobs, *The ancient notion of self-preservation in the theories of Hobbes and Spinoza*, University of Cambridge, 2011; Cristina Santinelli, *Conatus e corpora simplicisima. Hobbes e Spinoza sulla natura e origine del moto*, in «Rivista di Filosofia», 3/2018, 383-405.

modulation of such an «effort» towards a greater power in order to avoid those «external causes» which can weaken us, as living beings, up to dissolution. A trace of real modernity: sentient beings seek pleasure to avoid pain. In Spinoza – on this point, Nietzsche hits the mark – the affective condition characterizing the living see the compresence of passivity and activity, sadness (suffering) and joy (pleasure). Hence, Spinoza's *conatus* expresses the «effort» through which living beings attempt to stay alive in a world that, on the contrary, constantly put frictions. In Spinoza, human judgment on nature is forbidden: what takes place in nature must be seen from the point of view of the Whole. Otherwise, we would end up blaming a provident God that does not exist, and uselessly commiserating our condition. Spinoza offers us a detached perspective wherefrom looking at life. As he claims in *Ethics*: «*There is no individual thing in Nature that isn't surpassed in strength and power by some other thing. Given any individual thing, there is another more powerful one that can destroy it*.»[177] Here is where Deleuze makes his "nietzscheanisation". Deleuze does not hide it. Indeed, when questioned about his partial interpretation of Spinoza's *conatus* he resolutely claims:

> Someone who reads, you understand, is necessarily forced to emphasize one point or another. It's like in music, the accents are placed within a piece. So, here we have Comtesse who already the last time, he told me, "ok that's all very fine, but the conatus, that is, a term usually translated as 'the tendency to persevere in being,' what do you do with it?" And I responded: well, listen, you'll have to excuse me, for the moment I cannot introduce it because, in my reading, *I am stressing other Spinozist notions, and the "tendency to persevere in being", already went without saying. In light of what I was saying, I would conclude [that] whatever importance that I give to it, I will derive it from other notions which are, for me, the essential notions, those of power of action (puissance) and affect* [...]. Therefore, from the point of view of power of action, insofar as each, according to natural right, endeavors to persevere in his being, that is, to realize his power action, -- you see, I am still never following (in parentheses) effort there because…-- it is not that he makes an effort to persevere, it's not because he is trying. In any case, he perseveres in his being as much as there is in him. *This is why I do not like the idea of conatus, of effort, which does not translate, it seems to me, Spinoza's thought in fact. For what he calls an effort to persevere in being is the fact that I exercise my power of action at each moment, as much as there is in me* […] But from the point of view of power of action, therefore, I can say that each person is valued the same, not at all because each person would have the same power of action […]: each realizes as much power of action as there is in him. *This is natural right; this is the world of nature*. Fine, from this point of view, I could not establish any difference.[178]

Therefore, Deleuze prefers to stress the equation between *conatus* and power than that between *conatus* and self-preservation. After all, As Deleuze himself claims, «in a reading, you are forced to place your own accents.»[179] Indeed, according to Deleuze, the *conatus-power equation* provides a more in-depth comprehension of Spinoza's position than what the notion of «effort» does.[180] Every mode expresses a power (egalitarian ontological principle), and the power each mode is given to express is what differentiates a mode to another (differential principle). Of course, there are modes more powerful than others, but, as Deleuze underlines, "this is natural right; this is the world of nature"! As Spinoza states

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[177] Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part IV, a1, p. 87. Emphasis mine.
[178] Deleuze, *Velocities of Thought*, Lecture IV, December 16th 1980. Emphasis mine.
[179] Ibidem, Lecture XIII, March 17th 1981.
[180] Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, n. 15, p. 362: «Spinoza does of course often speak of an effort to persevere in being. But this *conatus* is itself a *potential agenda*.». See also Hardt, *Deleuze*, p. 93: «Spinoza's theory of conatus (or striving) marks precisely the intersection of production and affection that is so important to Deleuze […]. Conatus is the physical instantiation of the ontological principle of power. On one hand, it is the essence of being insofar as being is productive; it is the motor that animates being as the world […]. On the other hand, however, conatus is also the instantiation of the ontological principle of power in that conatus is a sensibility […]. It is this rich synthesis of spontaneity and affectivity that marks the continuity between the ontological principle of power and conatus.»

in in the well-known overture of Chapter XVI of the *Treatise on Theology and Politics*: «By the right and established practice of nature I mean the rules of the nature of each individual—rules that we think of as governing the existence and the behaviour of each thing. For example, it's because of their nature that fish swim, and that big fish eat small fish; so fish have a supreme natural right to swim, and *big fish have a supreme natural right to eat little ones*.»[181] Hence, we might ask Deleuze, what happens when a more powerful mode encounters a less powerful one? Deleuze's answer is emblematic:

> I can only speak of opposition between two individuals to the extent that these individuals are considered to exist, here and now. That's very important for the formation of relations of opposition. It is solely to the extent that individuals are considered to exist here and now that they can enter. This is not a question of kindness or wickedness. This is a question of logical possibility. I can only have opposition to another individual based on what? Imagine this sad situation: I am fighting with a dog to eat, to eat a kind of mash. […] You have three terms: food, the dog and me. So, I bite the dog to grab his food. The dog, he swipes me with his paw [...]. And all of that swirls around, and all of that collides. Namely, me, I want to conquer the extensive parts of the meat to assimilate them to myself [...] The dog wants the same thing. I bite the dog, he bites me. Finally, we get stuck in this. This is the domain of oppositions. Opposition is effort. This is the respective effort of each existent to appropriate the extensive parts. What does it mean to appropriate extensive parts, that is, to act so that they realize the relation that corresponds to a particular individual? I can always say: *I am destroyed by what's stronger than I am*. And indeed, *as long as I exist, this is the risk of existence*. *And this risk of existence is as one with what is called* death since, once again, what is death? It is the fact that Spinoza will call necessary in the sense of inevitability, that the extensive parts, which belonged to me within one of my characteristic relations, cease to belong to me and pass under another relation which characterizes other bodies. This is inevitable by the very law of existence. An essence will always encounter a stronger essence than its own within conditions of existence which means that, henceforth, the stronger essence destroys, destroys what? Literally, it destroys the belonging of the extensive parts to the first essence.[182]

Why living beings struggle against each other for their self-preservation? Why might some eventually die? Well, as Deleuze claims, these are «risks» of existence, inevitable «laws» of life: «Spinoza is not at all calling for the Salvation Army, "you have to save everyone", no.»[183] Thanks to Spinoza, Deleuze acquires a vocabulary, a viewpoint on life, through which understanding existence solely in terms of power.[184] By doing so, suffering becomes a "matter of bad encounters", struggle for existence "appropriation of extensive parts", and death "dispossession".[185] Detached terms, stated from the point of view of the Whole (the impersonal One denounced by Badiou), aimed to save us from «ascetics» and

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[181] Baruch Spinoza, *Treatise on Theology and Politics*, Jonathan Bennet, 2017, p. 122. Emphasis mine. Text available at <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/spinoza1669.pdf>. This explain Spinoza's extremely realist position regarding the question of human morality towards animals. As Spinoza claims in *Ethics*: «They make it clear that a law against killing animals owes more to empty superstition and womanish compassion than to sound reason. Our reason for seeking our own advantage teaches us that we must unite with men, but not with the lower animals or with anything else whose nature is different from human nature. We have the same right against them that they have against us. Indeed, because each individual's virtue = power settles what right it has, men have a far greater right against the lower animals than they have against men. I'm not denying that the lower animals can feel. But I do deny that their having feelings debars us from considering our own advantage, using them as we please, and treating them in whatever way best suit us. For their natures are unlike ours, and their affects are different in nature from human affects.» Cfr. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part IV, prop. 37, n2, p. 101.

[182] Deleuze, *Velocities of Thought*, Lecture XIII. Emphasis mine.

[183] Ibidem.

[184] On Deleuze's spinozist understanding of death see Bruce Baugh, *Death and Temporality in Deleuze and Derrida*, in «Journal of Theoretical Humanities», 2/200, pp. 77-81.

[185] Claire Colebrook, *Deleuze and the Meaning of Life*, New York, Continuum, 2010, p. 108: «For Deleuze and Guattari, by contrast, vitality is not opposed to death and systematicity; there is a profound inorganic life that can be intuited once death is considered not as a model (as the dissolution of the organism's wholeness) but as an experience.»

their «hatred against the world, against nature.»[186] Because this is what Deleuze learnt from Spinoza: in order to affirm the completely positive character of differences, immanence, namely live, *must* be grounded on power alone. To do so, the *suffering animal* must be silenced. In other words, life and ethics *must* correspond: «ontology entails or must it entail a political philosophy.»[187] A materialism of power, a «pure ontology», works only if the question of evil is deactivated. [188] This is a very Nietzschean Spinoza who says "yes" to life without hesitation.[189]

> The problem of an ontology is, consequently, a function of this: Being is said of everything that is; this is how to be free, that is, how to realize its power of action under the best conditions […]. We will find this problem again, in fact, in Nietzsche, on this level. What is it, what is equal? What is equal is quite simple: that each being, whatever it is, in every way realizes all that it can of its power of action. That makes all beings equal. Powers of action are not equal. For example, the power of action of the stone and the power of action of an animal are not the same. But each one endeavors to "persevere in its being", that is, to realize its power of action. And, from this point of view, all are equal, all beings are the same. They are all in Being and Being is equal. Being is equally said of everything that is, but everything that is, is not equal, that is, does not have the same power [...] In this light, it doesn't prevent there being differences between beings. So, from the point of view of the difference between beings, a whole idea of aristocracy can be established, yes, namely there are some better, there are some better.[190]

In Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, Nietzsche intervenes exactly on the narrow threshold that in Spinoza separates ethics and politics. Nietzsche helps Deleuze to overcome a non-marginal theoretical obstacle: Spinoza's contractarianism.[191] Indeed, the latter prevents a complete correspondence between ethics and ontology. Somehow, Spinoza's hesitates. Although centered on the freedom-power binomial rather than, unlike Hobbes, on the security-obedience one[192], Spinoza's politics cannot avoid conceiving an "artificial" solution

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[186] Ibidem.

[187] Deleuze, *Velocities of Thought*, Lecture IV, December 16th 1980.

[188] Ibidem: «this negation of the Good as of evil did not prevent Spinoza from creating an ethics. How can I create an ethics if there is neither good nor evil? You see, starting from the same expression, in the same era, if you take "evil is nothing", signed by Leibniz and signed by Spinoza, they both are using the same expression, "evil is nothing", but it has two opposite senses. In Leibniz, he derives it from Plato, and in Spinoza, he creates a pure ontology.»

[189] Badiou even goes to defines Deleuze's Spinoza an «unrecognizable creature.» Cfr. Badiou, *Deleuze*, p. 1.

[190] Deleuze, *Velocities of Thought*, Lecture IV.

[191] Cfr. Ibidem; Id., *Expressionism in Philosophy*, pp. 266 and 390-391 (note 29); Id., *Practical Philosophy*, pp. 11 and 108. In all these occurrences, Deleuze betrays a certain difficulty to combine his interpretation of the theory of power contained in *Ethics* with the contractarianism exposed in the *Treatise on Theology and Politics*. It is interesting how Deleuze constantly alludes to the unfinished chapter on democracy of Spinoza's *Political Treatise* in order to highlight not only a more democratic perspective («at the time of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Spinoza still believed in the chances of a liberal monarchy»), but also a greater continuity between ontology (the power of life), ethics (the power of individuals) and politics (power of the multitude). Therefore, Deleuze needs a very democratic Spinoza in order to think the difference of power among individuals without turning to "limiting" political institutions. In other words, the materialism of power requires an absolute correspondence between ontology and ethics to work independently. As Deleuze claims: «Spinoza did not go along with Hobbes at all. The problem of an ontology is, consequently, a function of this: Being is said of everything that is; this is how to be free, that is, how to realize its power of action under the best conditions. And the State, even more the civil State, that is, the entire society, is thought like this: the aggregate of conditions under which man can realize his power of action in the best way. So, this is not at all a relation of obedience. Obedience will come as something more; they are not idiots. They know that obedience is included there. But obedience will have to be justified by what it inscribes in a system in which society can mean only one thing, namely the best means for man of realizing his power of action. Obedience is second compared to this requirement, whereas in a philosophy of the One, obedience is obviously primary, that is, the political relation is the relation of obedience; it is not the relation of the exercise of power of action.»

[192] Id., *Velocities of Thought*, Lecture IV.

for the disparity of power present in nature, especially those among human beings.[193] Spinoza's institutional solution does not suppress, unlike Hobbes, the power of nature, but it rather aims to enhance it collectively. Therefore, the Spinoza theorist of «multitude» to which Deleuze often alludes[194] is surely not akin to Schopenhauer, but he is neither akin to Nietzsche. And, after all, Nietzsche himself highlighted it when he located Spinoza, along with Darwin, on the "reactive" side of the *suffering animal*. As Nietzsche loudly invoked: «just try digging up the foundation of Spinoza's ethics and theology!»[195]

As is known, the ultimate aim of Spinoza's philosophy is to obtain «adequate ideas» whereby reaching an overflowing joy, a beatitude utterly liberated from the sufferings of life. Because suffering does exist, and, therefore, it must be avoided. This is the theory of the «three kinds of knowledge» whereof Deleuze provides a quite shaky interpretation[196], even going to resemble a sort of consolatory philosophy wherein death and life stand opposite one another. Since life is powerful, death cannot come from within, but only from the outward.[197] Deleuze already told us: «It's organisms that die, not life». Yet, if we really are powerful animals, if life is so powerful, why should we be consoled? Why can we not see and experience such a power around and inside us? Why should we need to obtain, after a long apprentice, «adequate ideas» to see it? As we know, Nietzsche has the answer: it is the *suffering animal*'s and his pastors' fault.

> A man who would not accuse or depreciate existence - would he still be a man, would he think like a man? Would he not already be something other than a man , almost the Overman? To have ressentiment or not to have res sentiment - there is no greater difference […]. For a long time we have only been able to think in terms of ressentiment and bad conscience. We have had no other ideal but the ascetic ideal . We have opposed knowledge to life in order to judge life , in order to make it something blameworthy, responsible or erroneous. We turned will into something bad, something stricken by a basic contradiction: we have said that it must be rectified , restrained, limited and even denied and suppressed . It was only any good at this price. There is no philosopher who, discovering the essence of will , has not groaned at his own discovery and , like the timid fortuneteller, has not immediately seen bad omens for the future and the source of all evils of the past [...]. Nietzsche is the only one who does not groan at the discovery of the will , who does not try to exorcise it, or limit its effect.[198]

With Nietzsche, Deleuze finally find a fully-fledge «new way of thinking», «an affirmative thought which affirms life and the will to life, a thought which finally expels the whole of the negative.»[199] In few words, in Deleuze's eyes, Nietzsche is the philosopher who succeeded in establishing the perfect equation between power, life and immanence. Hume, Bergson and Spinoza: all these philosophers contained obstacles and frictions which somehow prevented the accomplishment of such an equation. For Deleuze, to equate power, life and immanence means conceiving a philosophy of difference that deactivates not only

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[193] Spinoza, *Treatise on Theology and Politics*, chapter XVI.

[194] Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, pp. 265-268. See also Gilles Deleuze, *Preface to "The Savage Anomaly"* (1982), in *Two Regimes of Madness*, pp. 25-26.

[195] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 25, pp. 25-26.

[196] Cfr. Enrico Mastropierro, *Il corpo e l'evento. Sullo Spinoza di Deleuze*, Milano, Mimesis, 2012, p. 91 and 102-106.

[197] Deleuze, *Velocities of Thought*, Lecture XIII: «[For Spinoza] death is almost the summit of inadequate life […]. He believes that by nature, death, whatever it is, comes only from outside, that death fundamentally is the law of the parts external to each other, and that otherwise, the very idea of death has no meaning, whereas death always comes from outside. Where Spinoza is very strong, in my opinion, is that he is the only one who completely reconciles the idea that death is inevitable, and that all death comes from the outside […]. Spinoza affirms at once the radical exteriority of death, all death is external, all death comes from outside. There is never a death that comes from within. Spinoza is among those for whom the very idea of a death drive is a grotesque, absolutely grotesque concept, that it really is.»

[198] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2006, p. 35.

[199] Ibidem.

the metaphysical machine, but also the «clerical atheism»[200] grounding materialism on suffering.

> In order to understand the nature of this invention [that of bad conscience] we must assess the importance of a more general problem: what is the meaning of pain? The meaning of existence is completely dependent on it: existence is meaningful only to the extent that the pain of existence has a meaning […]. There is a tendency to invoke pain as an argument against existence; this way of arguing testifies to a way of thinking which is dear to us, a reactive way . We not only put ourselves in the position of the one who suffers, but in the position of the man of ressentiment who no longer acts his reactions. It must be understood that the active meaning of pain appears in other perspectives: pain is not an argument against life , but, on the contrary, a stimulant to life, "a bait for life" , an argument in its favour.[201]

Thanks to Hume, Bergson and Spinoza, Deleuze had enough material wherewith assaulting the "citadel of metaphysics". Nietzsche represents the ultimate «hammer.» As a matter of fact, Nietzschean categories such as «eternal return» and «will to power» will provide Deleuze with the most solid terrain whereon building his own ontology of «difference and repetition.»[202] Yet, in my opinion, Deleuze, grasps Nietzsche's real potential well beyond the critique of metaphysics. Deleuze reading of Nietzsche is sharp, eclectic, detailed, and his merit of having revamp Nietzsche's figure within the philosophical debate of the second half of the Twentieth century (the so-called *Nietzsche-Renaissance*) is amply acknowledged.[203] As Deleuze states in the 1983 *Preface* to the English Translation of *Nietzsche and Philosophy*: «Nietzsche's posthumous fate has been burdened by two ambiguities: was his thought a forerunner of fascist thinking? And was this thought itself really philosophy or was it an over-violent poetry, made up of capricious aphorisms and pathological fragments?»[204] And, as Deleuze continues, «Nietzsche is most misunderstood in relation to the question of power»:

> Every time we interpret will to power as "wanting or seeking power" we encounter platitudes which have nothing to do with Nietzsche's thought. If it is true that all things reflect a state of forces then power designates the element, or rather the differential relationship, of forces which directly confront one another. This relationship expresses itself in the dynamic qualities of types such as "affirmation" and "negation". Power is therefore not what the will wants, but on the contrary, the one that wants in the will . And "to want or seek power" is only the lowest degree of the will to power, its negative form, the guise it assumes when reactive forces prevail in the state of things. One of the most original characteristics of Nietzsche's philosophy is the transformation of the question "what is . . . ?" into "which one is . . . ?" For example, for any given proposition he asks "which one is capable of uttering it?" Here we must rid ourselves of all "personalist" references. The one that . . . does not refer to an individual, to a person, but rather to an event, that is, to the forces in their various relationships in a proposition or a phenomenon, and to the genetic relationship which determines these forces (power).[205]

For Deleuze, Nietzsche's will to power is a matter on «the one that», an impersonal «one that» who acts by selecting only the «active» forces and rejecting the «reactive» ones.[206]

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[200] Ibidem, p. 196.
[201] Ibidem, pp. 129- 130.
[202] Id., *Difference and Repetition*, p. 304: «All that Spinozism needed to do for the univocal to become an object of pure affirmation was to make substance turn around the modes - *in other words, to realise univocity in the form of repetition in the eternal return.*»
[203] Cf. Paolo Vignola, *La funzione N. Sulla macchinazione filosofica in Gilles Deleuze*, Napoli-Salerno, Orthotes, 2018, pp. 23-28.
[204] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. XV.
[205] Ibidem, p. XVII.
[206] Ibidem, pp. XVII-XVIII. The nexus between will to power and selection of active forces is what characterizes Deleuze's eclectic interpretation of Nietzsche's eternal return. As Deleuze summarizes his view, «The eternal return is as badly misunderstood as the will to power. Every time we understand the eternal return

Will to power is an affirmative act that has done with judgment, with representation, and with recognition, that is that transcendentals which constitutes the «bad conscience» restraining the power life. Therefore, thanks to Spinoza's lesson, Deleuze can highlight the ethical breakthrough ushered in by Nietzsche's philosophy, thereby disavowing all those simplifying and deceptive interpretations that read the will to power as a mere will of domination. As Deleuze points out is in 1965 *Nietzsche*:

> The relation of force to force is called "will". That is why we must avoid at all costs the misinterpretations of the Nietzschean principle of the will to power. This principle doesn't mean (or at least doesn't primarily mean) that the will *wants* power or *wishes* to dominate. As long as the will to power is interpreted in terms of a "desire to dominate", we inevitably make it depend on established values, the only ones able to determine, in any given case or conflict, who must be "recognized" as the most powerful. We then cannot recognize the nature of the will to power as an elastic principle of all of our evaluations, as a hidden principle for the creation of new values not yet recognized. The will to power, says Nietzsche, consist not in coveting or even in *taking* but in *creating* and *giving*.[207]

Can we accept Deleuze's interpretative proposal of Nietzsche's will to power? Did Deleuze really succeeded in overcoming false prejudices and misinterpretations or, also this time, it is simply a matter of having «place the accent» in the right place? Because, it is impossible to deny the fact that within Nietzsche's works we can always find an aphorism or a posthumous fragment capable of contesting Deleuze's interpretation, especially in relation to Nietzsche's clear (and very frequent) anti-democratic, anti-egalitarian and anti-humanitarian statements.[208] But this would be a zero-sum game, and Deleuze was well aware

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a s the return of a particular arrangement of things after all the other arrangements have been realised, every time we interpret the eternal return as the return of the identical or the same, we replace Nietzsche's thought with childish hypotheses […] Only action and affirmation return: becoming has being and only becoming has being. That which is opposed to becoming, the same or the identical, strictly speaking, is not. The negative as the lowest degree of power, the reactive as the lowest degree of force, do not return because they are the opposite of becoming and only becoming has being. We can thus see how the eternal return is linked, not to a repetition of the same , but on the contrary, to a transmutation. It is the moment or the eternity of becoming which eliminates all that resists it.» See also Id., *Difference and Repetition*, p. 241: «When we say that the eternal return is not the return of the Same, or of the Similar or the Equal, we mean that it does not presuppose any identity. On the contrary, it is said of a world *without identity*, without resemblance or equality. It is said of a world the very ground of which is difference, in which everything rests upon disparities, upon differences of differences which reverberate to infinity (the world of intensity).» On Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal return and its philological problematicness see Paolo D'Iorio, *The Eternal Return: Genesis and Interpretation*, in «Lexicon Philosophicum», 2/2014, pp. 42-47. For the problematicness concerning the nexus between active (powerful) and reactive (suffering) forces see instead Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche*, pp. 113-116.

[207] Id., *Nietzsche*, in *Pure Immanence. Essays on A Life*, New York, Zone Books, 2001, p. 73.

[208] See, for instance, Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 377, pp. 241-242: «We "conserve" nothing; neither do we want to return to any past; we are by no means "liberal"; we are not working for "progress"; we don't need to plug our ears to the marketplace's sirens of the future: what they sing – "equal rights", "free society", "no more masters and no servants" - has no allure for us. We hold it absolutely undesirable that a realm of justice and concord should be established on earth (because it would certainly be the realm of the most profound levelling down to mediocrity and chinoiserie); we are delighted by all who love, as we do, danger, war, and adventure; who refuse to compromise, to be captured, to reconcile, to be castrated; we consider ourselves conquerors; we contemplate the necessity for new orders as well as for a new slavery - for every strengthening and enhancement of the human type also involves a new kind of enslavement - doesn't it? With all this, can we really be at home in an age that loves to claim the distinction of being the most humane, the mildest, and most righteous age the sun has ever seen? It is bad enough that precisely when we hear these beautiful words, we have the ugliest misgivings. What we find in them is merely an expression - and the masquerade - of a deep weakening, of weariness, of old age, of declining energies! What can it matter to us what sequins the sick may use to cover up their weakness? Let them parade it as their virtue; after all, there is no doubt that weakness makes us mild, so righteous, so inoffensive, so "humane"! The "religion of compassion" to which one would like to convert us - oh, we know these hysterical little men and women well enough who today need just this religion as a veil

of all these hermeneutical issues.[209] For Deleuze, it is not simply a matter of revealing the "real" Nietzsche, but to make the most of his philosophical-historical reconstruction which ends in Nietzsche, a very Deleuzian Nietzsche, to restart, from that moment on, upon a more personal a creative path.[210] Nevertheless, if Nietzsche was of help to free Spinoza from his hesitation, now Spinoza is of help to "keep Nietzsche quite", to subdue Nietzsche's blatant aristocratism.[211] After all, we can liberate Nietzsche from the epithet of "spiritual forefather" of fascism – although we should never forget his belonging to nineteenth century «aristocratic reaction»[212] - , but we cannot pretend that his aristocratism is a "virtuous egalitarianism". Nietzsche's philosophy is aristocratic in the true sense of the word, that is a hierarchical worldview wherein difference means inequality.[213]

However, it is clear that Deleuze's interpretation of the will to power lies upon what he learnt from Spinoza's theory of affects. Nietzsche allows to deactivate the negative that is still working in Spinoza: how can the differences of power among living beings («the big fish have a supreme natural right to eat little ones») not question the joyfulness of life? [214] In other words, how can we conceive the positivity of differences without turning to a unifying principle which weakens their power? Deleuze's move consist in understanding the Spinozist theme of affectivity by means of the Nietzschean binomial between *active forces* and *reactive forces*.

Now, I do think that such a move proves how Deleuze gathered a very important aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy: the latter is not only a sharp (and perhaps even incontrovertible) assault to Christian metaphysics and the axiology which derives from it. Nietzsche, a very shrewd critic of western thought, address his «hammer» also against those materialism that, although overtly anti-metaphysical from the ontological viewpoint, turns out to be incapable of working for a real «transvalutation of values.» As if the method of the genealogy of morality (toward which Nietzsche is «polemic») were nothing but a justification of the existing state of things. As we noticed in the second chapter, this is the terrain upon which Nietzsche built and carried out his critique of Darwin. For Nietzsche, Darwinism represents a form of materialism grounded on a "weak" understanding of life which, by leveraging on the vulnerability and precariousness of existence, end up providing a naturalist justification of Christian axiology (altruism, sympathy, compassion, and so on). A vicious circularity which, in author such as Darwin and Spinoza[215], kills God to revive him even stronger. With

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and finery. We are no humanitarians; we should never dare to allow ourselves to speak of "our love of humanity" - our type is not actor enough for that.»

[209] Cfr. Gilles Deleuze, *Conclusions on the Will to Power and the Eternal Return* (1964), in *Desert Islands*, pp. 117-127.

[210] On Deleuze's creative selectivity on Nietzsche see Vignola, *La funzione N.*

[211] Id., *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, pp. 62-63.

[212] Losurdo, *Nietzsche*, pp. 734-738.

[213] It is interesting how Deleuze uses the active-reactive binomial to explain ethically the question of hierarchy in Nietzsche, thereby avoiding its blatant ant-egalitarian and anti-democratic political meaning. Cf. Ibidem, pp. 60-61: « In Nietzsche the word hierarchy has two senses. It signifies, firstly, the difference between active and reactive forces, the superiority of active to reactive forces [...]. But hierarchy also designates the triumph of reactive forces […], where the weak have conquered, where the strong are contaminated , where the slave who has not stopped being a slave prevails over the master who has stopped being one: the reign of law and of virtue. In this second sense morality and religion are still theories of hierarchy […]. What Nietzsche calls weak or slavish is not the least strong but that which, whatever its strength, is separated from what it can do.»

[214] Spinoza, *Treatise on Theology and Politics*, p. 123: «because everyone who lives in an environment of hostility,

hatred, anger and deception lives anxiously, and does his best to avoid these things.»

[215] Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unpublished Fragments from the Period of Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Summer I882-Winter I883/84)*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2019, 7[20], p. 218: «Just as optics limps along behind sight, so, too, moral theory behind morality. Individual observations are by far the most valuable thing. A mor(al) theory of fundamental error is most often the origin of great philosophical systems: something must be

Bergson, Deleuze already encountered an ontological critique of Darwinism as a radical materialism that denies the vitality of life, the positivity of differences. As we will see, from this point of view, the later Deleuze's position on Darwinism will always fluctuate between vitalistic remarks and epistemological praises. However, with Nietzsche, Deleuze can address a *moral critique* of Darwinism aimed to bring to light its untold conservatism (as for Kant): «Morality is the continuation of religion but by other means […]. The ascetic ideal is everywhere, but its means change».[216] It is a more pungent and less ambiguous attack: indeed, for a late twentieth-century thinker as Deleuze, to question the ontology of Darwinism could easily resemble those early twentieth-century "anti-naturalist philosophical anthropologies"[217] from which Deleuze himself repeatedly distanced.[218] More than Nietzsche, Deleuze does not want to question the scientific validity of Darwinism, but rather the latter's alleged nonevaluative character. This is the lesson that philosopher like Foucault and Deleuze learnt from «Nietzsche's method»: every thesis, both scientific and metaphysical, on life and on the living are products of the will, and the real difference consists in how such a will expresses either power/activity or weakness/reactivity.[219] As Deleuze claims in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*:

> Consciousness merely expresses the relation of certain reactive forces to the active forces which dominate them. Consciousness is essentially reactive; this is why we do not know what a body can do, or what activity it is capable of […]. It is inevitable that consciousness sees the organism from its own point of view and understands it in its own way; that is to say, reactively. What happens is that science follows the paths of consciousness, relying entirely on other reactive forces; the organism is always seen from the petty side, from the side of its reactions. The problem of the organism , according to Nietzsche, is not an issue between mechanism and vitalism. What is the value of vitalism as long as it claims to discover the specificity of life in the same reactive forces that mechanism interprets in another way? The real problem is the discovery of active forces without which the reactions themselves would not be forces. What makes the body superior to all reactions, particularly that reaction of the ego that is called consciousness, is the activity of necessarily unconscious forces […]. The only true science is that of activity, but the science of activity is also the science of what is necessarily unconscious. The idea that science must follow in the footsteps of consciousness, in the same directions, is absurd. We can sense the morality in this idea. In fact there can only be science where there is no consciousness, where there can be no consciousness […]. *Nietzsche criticizes Darwin for interpreting evolution and chance within evolution in an entirely reactive way. He admires Lamarck because Lamarck foretold the existence of a truly active plastic force, primary in relation to adaptations: a force of metamorphosis. For Nietzsche, as for energetics, energy which is capable of transforming itself is called "noble". The power of transformation, the Dionysian power, is the primary definition of activity . But each time we point out the nobility of action and its superiority to reaction in this way we must not forget that reaction also designates a type of force.*[220]

Darwin's understanding of life is reactive. And, as any reactive expression of the will, it conceals dark sides typical of every *slave morality*: resentment, envy, desire for recognition and «the mania for representing.»[221] Deleuze takes this Nietzschean insights to the extreme, going even to make Nietzsche the advocate of a non-agonistic view of power (not by chance, what Spinoza did not succeed in). Because will to power does not call for agonism, but for

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proved which agrees with the praxis of the philosopher (e.g., Spinoza) (Schopenhauer the exception - noblesse therein).»

[216] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 98.

[217] On the stubborn antinaturalism of philosophical anthropology *a là* Heidegger see Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen 2*, pp. 128-130, 461 (note 20).

[218] Gilles Deleuze, *On Nietzsche and the Image of Thought* (1968), in *Desert Islands*, p. 136.

[219] Id., *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, pp. 78-79; Michel Foucault, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* (1971), in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, New York, Pantheon, 1984, pp. 76-100.

[220] Ibidem, pp. 41-42. Emphasis mine.

[221] Ibidem, p. 81.

affirmation, for the power of a self which overcomes the depressing forces of bad consciousness.

> One cannot over emphasise *the extent to which the notions of struggle, war, rivalry or even comparison are foreign to Nietzsche and to his conception of the will to power*. It is not that he denies the existence of struggle : but he does not see it as in any way creative of values. At least, the only values that it creates are those of the triumphant slave. Struggle is not the principle or the motor of hierarchy but the means by which the slave reverses hierarchy. Struggle is never the active expression of forces, nor the manifestation of a will to power that affirms - any more than its result expresses the triumph of the master or the strong. Struggle, on the contrary, is the means by which the weak prevail over the strong, because they are the greatest number. This is why Nietzsche is opposed to Darwin: Darwin confused struggle and selection. He failed to see that the result of struggle was the opposite of what he thought; that it does select , but it selects only the weak and assures their triumph. Nietzsche says of himself that he is much too well bred to struggle.[222]

Hence, with Nietzsche, Deleuze engages a struggle for immanence, a struggle between different conceptions of materialism, carried on the field of life and of the living. Because, it is worth repeating, materialism (what Deleuze names a «pure immanence»), ultimately proves to be consistent with his premises for the way in which it defines the relationship between humanity and animality. In this "war of materialisms", Deleuze, along with Nietzsche, sides with the *powerful animal*.

Thanks to Nietzsche, Deleuze finally found the way to deactivate the thorny question of evil (the natural evil and the physical evil) that has discombobulated his attempt to build a fully-fledged materialism of power so far. The strategy that Deleuze learns from Nietzsche is the following: first, to backfire suffering on the *suffering animal* in order to highlight its *reactive* roots (the Christian priest and the invention of interiority)[223]; later, once having proved that suffering is an "interpretation" of power and not a nailing "fact", to reveal the *suffering animal*'s hidden domination projects: to make the powerful feel guilty, and to level them off towards the weaker and more resentful ones. In summary, the *suffering animal* is weak and wants life, other lives, to be weak as much.[224] This is the civilisation that the *suffering animal* promises us: a «tyranny against life»[225] established on the envy of others' power.

Before proceeding to the next and last paragraph, I think it is necessary to linger briefly over Nietzsche's definition of the human-animal relationship, whereof we already outlined the basic structure in the second chapter. To do so, I will amply refer to Vanessa Lemm's *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy*, a seminal work which attempts to provide a «first systematic treatment of the animal in Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole.»[226] As Lemm points out, the theme of animality is «neither a random theme nor a metaphorical device, but rather that it stands at the center of Nietzsche's renewal of the practice and meaning of philosophy itself.»[227] In Nietzsche, the human-animal relationship is the conceptual nexus which structures a wider question: the relationship between «civilization» and «culture.»[228] As we

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[222] Ibidem, p. 82.
[223] Ibidem, pp. 126ff.
[224] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, VII/2, p. 184: «To put the matter physiologically: when struggling with beasts, making them sick *might* be the only way to make them weak. The church understood this: it has ruined people, it has weakened them, - but it claims to have "improved" them.». See also ibidem, VII/5, p. 186: «*all the methods* that have been used so far to try make humanity moral have been thoroughly *immoral*.»
[225] Id., *Beyond Good and Evil*, 188, p. 77.
[226] Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy. Culture, Politics, and the Animality of the Human Being*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2009, p. 1.
[227] Ibidem.
[228] Ibidem, p. 10. For the political and historical content of the nexus between «*Zivilisation*» and «*Kulture*» in Nietzsche see Losurdo, *Nietzsche*, pp. 42-45.

know, Nietzsche equalizes civilization and taming (animal taming) since what we usually consider to be a process of moralization and improvement of the human beings is actually a process of weakening that restrains their vital power. On the contrary, culture (or cultivation) is – and has always been – the path which keeps such a power active and expressive. Here is where the question of animality comes into play. Indeed, in Nietzsche, the animal is equal to the human; the human being is an animal among animals: a "Darwinian acquisition" that Nietzsche embraces as the anti-metaphysical fact *par excellence*. Civilization intervenes right in this equation by twisting it up and provoking an irreconcilable rift. Therefore, from an ontological, not to say biological, viewpoint, the question of the human-animal relationship is inconsistent. If there is a difference, the latter is purely moral. As Nietzsche claims in 1895 *The Anti-Christ*:

> We have changed our minds. We have become more modest in every way. We have stopped deriving humanity from the "spirit", from the "divinity"; *we have stuck human beings among the animals*. We see them as the strongest animal because they are most cunning: one consequence of this is their spirituality. On the other hand, we are also opposed to a certain vanity that re-emerges here too, acting as if human beings were the great hidden goal of animal evolution. Humans are in no way the crown of creation, all beings occupy the same level of perfection […]. *As far as animals are concerned, it was Descartes who, with admirable boldness, first ventured the idea that they could be seen as* machina*; the whole of physiology has been working to prove this claim. We are even logically consistent enough not to exclude to exclude humans, ad Descartes did: to the extent that human beings are understood at all these days, they are understood as machines* […]. People used to see consciousness, "spirit", as proof that humanity is descended from something higher, that humanity is divine […] We are more sensible about all this too: we see the development of consciousness, "spirit", as a symptom of precisely the relative *imperfection* of the organism, as an experimenting, a groping, a mistaking, as an exertion that is sapping an unnecessarily large amount of strength away from the nervous system, - we deny that anything can be made perfect as long as it is still being made conscious. "Pure spirit" is a pure stupidity: when we discount the nervous system and the senses, the "mortal shroud", we *miscount* – nothing more![229]

Therefore, the human arises from the taming of animality. The "error", the self-deception of consciousness, is what distinguish the human from the animal.[230] As Nietzsche claims in *Human, All Too Human*:

> The beast in us wants to be lied to; morality is an official lie told so that it shall not tear us to pieces. Without the errors that repose in the assumptions of morality man would have remained animal. As it is, he has taken himself for something higher and imposed sterner laws upon himself. That is why he feels a hatred for the grades that have remained closer to animality: which is the explanation of the contempt formerly felt for the slave as a non-man, as a thing.[231]

Therefore, morality, i.e., the process of civilization, tears human beings away from their animality, but, unlike what humanism maintains, it does not elevate them at all. What morality rather succeeds in is to weaken and subjugate the humankind.[232] As Nietzsche states in *The Anti-Christ*:

> A painful, terrible spectacle is playing itself out in front of me: I lifted the curtain to reveal the *corruption* of humanity. This word, coming from my mouth, is absolved of one suspicion at least, the suspicion

[229] Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, 14, p. 12. Emphasis mine.
[230] Id., *Human, All Too Human*, II-II/12, pp. 306-307. On the "four errors" of humanism see also Id., *The Gay Science*, III/115, p. 114.
[231] Ibidem, I/40, p. 35.
[232] In a well-known aphorism of *The Gay Science* entitled *Animals' criticism*, Nietzsche provides a very effective and touching anti-anthropocentric perspective. As Nietzsche writes: «I fear that the animals see man as a being like them who in a most dangerous manner has lost his animal common sense – as the insane animal, the laughing animal, the weeping animal, the miserable animal.» Cf. Id., *The Gay Science*, III/224, p. 145.

> that it implies some moral indictment of human beings […]. I understand corruption (as I am sure you have suggested by now) in the sense of decadence: my claim is that all the values in which humanity has collected its highest desiderata are *values of decadence*. I call an animal, a species, an individual corrupt when it loses its instinct, when it chooses, when it *prefers* things that will harm it […]. I consider life itself to be an instinct for growth, for endurance, for the accumulation of forces, for *power*: when there is no will to power, there is decline. My claim is that *none* of humanity's highest values have had this will, - that *nihilistic* values, values of decline, have taken control under the aegis of the holiest names.[233]

As we know, these «holiest names» are altruism, compassion, sympathy, that is all those «values» of civilisation grounded not simply on suffering as such, but on the defence of the suffering ones.[234]

However, we still need to understand what animality stands for within Nietzsche's anthropological reflection. As we noticed before, for Nietzsche, the human is a moral construction produced historically. Nietzsche's originality within the centuries-old anti-humanistic reflection consist of having emphasized not simply the ontological invalidity of humanism (Darwin already turned the page), but the immorality of that «very idea of humanity» Darwin considered to be our supreme virtue. As Nietzsche claims in *Daybreak*, «An animal which could speak said: "Humanity is a prejudice of which we animals at least are free.» [235] Once again, Nietzsche and Darwin confront on the same terrain: the human is nothing but a moral construction developed historically. What is at stake here is how we intend to judge such a value: either something to dispose of in view of the «over-man» (Nietzsche) or something to hold on to while working to its extension (Darwin). At this point, we can already grasp how Nietzsche brought all these consideration into his understanding of animality: animals represent our "forgotten" power, our "undomesticated" power. As Nietzsche states in *On the Genealogy of Morality*:

> Every animal, including the *bête philosophe*, instinctively strives for an optimum of favourable conditions in which to fully release his power and achieve his maximum of power-sensation; every animal abhors equally instinctively, with an acute sense of smell that is 'higher than all reason', any kind of disturbance and hindrance that blocks or could block his path to the optimum (– it is *not* his path to "happiness" I am talking about, but the path to power, action, the mightiest deeds, and in most cases, actually, his path to misery).[236]

A «path to power» that, as animals, we still have at our disposal. This is what Nietzsche's transvaluation of values look at: «Error has transformed animals into men; is truth perhaps capable of changing man back into an animal?»[237] Nevertheless, as Lemm points out, Nietzsche's does not advocate «anything like a ''return to nature'' and dismisses the romantic longing for a return to a ''higher'' and more ''human'' origin.»[238] Indeed, Nietzsche's position cannot be assimilated neither to the schemes of traditional theriophily nor to a sort of return to the raw animal power. According to Nietzsche, we cannot come back from "humanity"; the invention of «interiority» is irreversible. Indeed, there is too much «depth, breadth and height» in it to resurface and then to return to our original animal

[233] Id., *The Anti-Christ*, 6, pp. 5-6.
[234] Id., *Beyond Good and Evil*, XI/260, p. 156: «[In the slave morality] qualities that serve to alleviate existence for suffering people are pulled out and flooded with light: pity, the obliging, helpful hand, the warm heart, patience, industriousness, humility, and friendliness receive full honors here –, since these are the most useful qualities and practically the only way of holding up under the pressure of existence. Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility.»
[235] Id., *Daybreak*, 333, p. 162.
[236] Id., *On the Genealogy of Morality*, III/6, p. 76.
[237] Id., *Human, All Too Human*, I/519, p. 182.
[238] Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy*, p. 14.

power. [239] Moreover, as Nietzsche states in *Beyond Good and Evil*: «Living – isn't that wanting specifically to be something other than this nature?»

> So you want to *live* "according to nature?" Oh, you noble Stoics, what a fraud is in this phrase! Imagine something like nature, profligate without measure, indifferent without measure, without purpose and regard, without mercy and justice, fertile and barren and uncertain at the same time, think of indifference itself as power – how *could* you live according to this indifference?[240]

Yet, humanity can be a fruitful opportunity to put at disposal of our animal power's. As Nietzsche state in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* «Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman – a rope over an abyss.»[241] Therefore, at first, the human is an obstacle to the free expression of our inner animal power. Yet, once its reactive nature is revealed, humans can take a step towards a never seen form of life that only that animal endowed with «bad consciousness», us, can undertake. Once again, is consciousness, however bad, what eventually endows the human being with possibilities utterly precluded to other animals? Did Nietzsche, who contested Darwin's evolutionary optimism, fall into a sort of «hyper-teleology» where the human being is not the aim of natural evolution because they rather represents the bridge to the overman?[242] This is the trace of Nietzsche's unsolved anthropocentrism, in which animals, although lacking the chains of consciousness, have no power on their power.[243] Therefore, human bad consciousness restrains animal power, but, by doing so, can control it. Hence, it is a matter of controlling such a plasticity of the human affirmatively, that is towards a «no-longer-animal» form of existence.[244]

> Human being is something that must be overcome. What have you done to overcome him? All creatures so far created something beyond themselves; and you want to be the ebb of this great flood and would even rather go back to animals than overcome humans? What is the ape to a human? A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. And that is precisely what the human shall be to the overman: a laughing stock or a painful embarrassment.[245]

As is known, such a transient and plastic character of the human strongly highlighted by Nietzsche will amply inspire contemporary philosophy, from Foucault's thesis on the «death of man», to Deleuze's practice of «becoming», and even the most recent outcome of post-humanism. As Lemm points out, in Nietzsche, «humans are animals, but they are unlike any other animal. From the perspective of culture, human animals are distinguished not only by their illusions of morality, rationality, and the use of the intellect as an instrument of truth, but also by their ability to overcome these all-too-human illusions to become what Nietzsche calls overhuman.»[246] . In other words, bad consciousness can work for a separation of the human from the animal which does not go against life. In Deleuze's words, «the negative changes quality, passes into the service of affirmation […]. Negativity as negativity of the

[239] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, II-16, p. 57.
[240] Id., *Beyond Good and Evil*, I/9, p. 10
[241] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for All and None* (1883-1885), ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, I/4 (1883), p. 7.
[242] Ferraris, *Nietzsche*, p. 63.
[243] Cf. Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*, III/5, p. 209: «To cling so blindly and madly to life, for no higher reward, far from knowing that one is punished or why one is punished in this way, but instead to thirst with the inanity of a horrible desire for precisely this punishment as though it were happiness-that is what it means to be an animal.»
[244] Ibidem, p. 211.
[245] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I/3 (1883), pp. 5-6.
[246] Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy*, p. 24.

positive is one of Nietzsche's anti-dialectic discoveries.»[247] As Nietzsche claims in *Human, All Too Human*:

> Many chains have been laid upon man so that he should no longer behave like an animal: and he has in truth become gentler, more spiritual, more joyful, more reflective than any animal is. Now, however, he suffers from having worn his chains for so long, from being deprived for so long of clear air and free movement: - these chains, however, I shall never cease from repeating, are those heavy and pregnant errors contained in the conceptions of morality, religion and metaphysics. Only when this sickness from one's chains has also been overcome will the first great goal have truly been attained: the separation of man from the animals.[248]

As Michael L. Frazer points out, this sort of hyper-anthropoietics perspective (very distant from those interpretations that see in the «superman» the expression of a violent an aggressive subjectivity[249]) helps to understand Nietzsche's ultimate position regarding «compassion», that is the basic value of slave morality.[250] As Nietzsche states in *Beyond Good and Evil*, «the noble man» – the Deleuzian individual who went beyond recognition («*the slave only conceives of power as the object of a recognition*»)[251] - «helps the unfortunate too, although not (or hardly ever) out of pity, but rather more out of an impulse generated by the over-abundance of power.»[252] In other words, the human-animal led by master morality re-signifies compassion through the expression of their power: «if a man like this has pity, well then! *this* pity is worth something»![253] After all, as Nietzsche asks, «what good is the pity of the sufferer»![254] After all, as Nietzsche pointed out in *On the Genealogy of Morality*: «It is just as absurd to ask strength *not* to express itself as strength, *not* to be a desire to overthrow, crush, become master, to be a thirst for enemies, resistance and triumphs, as it is to ask weakness to express itself as strength.»[255] For this reason, compassion, pity, altruism, that is all those values which reactively look at others' suffering, are incompatible with an ethics that aims to express the vitality, the power, of life.

> Pity is the opposite of the tonic affects that heighten the energy of vital feelings: pity has a depressive effect. You lose strength when you pity. And pity further intensifies and multiplies the loss of strength which in itself brings suffering to life. Pity makes suffering into something infectious; sometimes it can even cause a total loss of life and of vital energy […] The mortal danger of pity will be much more apparent of you measure pity according to the value of reactions it tends to produce. By and large, pity runs counter to the law of development, which is the law of *selection*. Pity preserves things that are ripe for decline, it defends things that have been disowned and condemned by life, and it gives a depressive and questionable character to life itself by keeping alive an abundance of failures of every type.[256]

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[247] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 198.
[248] Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*, II-II/350, p. 393.
[249] Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (1986), Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2006, p. 132: «As Foucault would say, the superman is much less than the disappearance of living men, and much more than a change of concept: it is the advent of a new form that is neither God nor man and which, it is hoped, will not prove worse than its two previous forms.»
[250] Michael L. Frazer, *The Compassion of Zarathustra: Nietzsche on Sympathy and Strength*, in «The Review of Politics», 1/2006, pp. 64ff.
[251] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 10.
[252] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, IX/260, p. 154.
[253] Ibidem, IX/293, p. 174. See also Id., *Twilight of the Idols*, VII/2, p. 177: «*First* example of my "revaluation of all values" – someone who has turned out well, a "happy one", *has to* perform certain acts and will instinctively avoid others, he is the physiological representative of the system he uses in dealing with people and thins. In a word: his virtue is the effect of his happiness...»
[254] Ibidem.
[255] Id., *On the Genealogy of Morality*, I/13, p. 26.
[256] Id., *The Anti-Christ*, 7, p. 6.

In my opinion, this is Nietzsche's main claim on life and on the living: *the powerful animal is the only point of view on suffering that does not deny life*. This is a fundamental acquisition for the materialism of power: one does not need, as Spinoza did, to nullify evil to affirm the power of life. Simply, when it comes to suffering, the *powerful animal* is who should be listened to. Because the *suffering animal* is a reactive viewpoint on life. There is something resentful, not to say wicked, in the call for help of the suffering ones: «the pity which these then express is a consolation for the weak and suffering, inasmuch as it shows them that, all their weakness notwithstanding, they possess at any rate *one power: the power to hurt*.»[257] A resentment towards life whereof the *powerful animal*'s viewpoint is not afflicted. Yet, after all, is this not a judgment on life too? Perhaps, despite his commitment, Deleuze did not really succeed in having done with judgment. We might even suspect that his attempt to overcome judgment ended up providing a new rhetoric of the authenticity[258]: the *powerful animal* is not a judgment because it does not restrain life to their demands; the *powerful animal* "gets along" with life, they see life for what it truly is. A non-judgmental judgment? Perhaps, the *powerful animal*, so proud of his authenticity, represents even a greater judgment: "life is good." Hence, are we not risking devising a reassuring image of life? A life that can never hurt us? Perhaps, this is the *powerful animal*'s greatest delusion.

Becoming the Powerful Animal that We Are

Nietzsche's will to power, Spinoza's doctrine of affects, Bergson's vitalism, and Hume's empiricism: these philosophies contributed, to varying degrees, to provide Deleuze with the new way of thinking whereon establishing his own philosophy: «A thought that would go to the limit of what life can do, a thought that would lead life to the limit of what it can do.»[259] In this last paragraph, I will attempt to understand how Deleuze's research on the materialism of power finally resulted in his following conceptual production. In particular, I will stress the definition of human-animal relationship subtended to two fundamental Deleuzian categories: the *becoming-animal* and the notion of *faciality*. To do so, I will mainly refer to 1980 *A Thousand Plateaus*, the work where these two categories play a fundamental role.[260] This is how Deleuze summarizes his ontological perspective in *A Thousand Plateau*:

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[257] Id., *Human, All too Human*, I/50, p. 39. See also ibidem, II-II/377, p. 295: «In the gilded sheath of pity there is sometimes stuck the dagger of envy.»

[258] According to Simona Forti, this seems to be the same outcome of Agamben's philosophy, where a «sui generis authenticity-inauthenticity dialectic» (laying behind the notion of «*inoperosità*») ends up reproducing «the negation of death in the name of life.» Cf. Simona Forti, *Strategie di decostruzione della nuda vita*, in *Decostruzione o biopolitica*, ed. Elettra Stimilli, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2017, pp. 37-37. Translation mine.

[259] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 101.

[260] As Deleuze states in a 1980 interview with Catherine Clément: «*A Thousand Plateaus* tries to invent numerous concepts: rhizome, smooth space, haecceity, animal-becoming, abstract machine, diagram, etc. Guattari is always inventing concepts and my conception pf philosophy is the same.» Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Eight Years Later: 1980 Interview*, in *Two Regimes of Madness*, p. 176. Moreover, I will not consider the question of the influence of Felix Guattari on *A Thousand Plateaus* and, more generally, on Deleuze's thought as a whole. For a brief reconstruction on the Deleuze-Guattari partnership see Gary Genosko, *Deleuze and Guattari: Guattareuze & Co.*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Deleuze*, pp. 151-169. Therefore, I will not dwell upon Zizek's well-known (and, in my opinion, spot-on) thesis on the difference between an "authentic Deleuze" (philosophically more interesting and weighty) and a «guattarized Deleuze» (scarcely philosophical and politically perilous). Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies. Deleuze and Consequences*, New York, Routledge, 2012. The historical-philosophical reconstruction I carried out in the previous sections aimed also to isolate some thematic focal points "purely" Deleuzian and which, thus, Deleuze brought into his collaboration with Guattari. For this reason, I will always refer only to Deleuze more as the "philosopher behind the book" than as the co-author of his books with Guattari.

> Thus each individual is an infinite multiplicity, and the whole of Nature is a multiplicity of perfectly individuated multiplicities. The plane of consistency of Nature is like an immense Abstract Machine, abstract yet real and individual; its pieces are the various assemblages and individuals, each of which groups together an infinity of particles entering into an infinity of more or less interconnected relations. There is therefore a unity to the plane of nature, which applies equally to the inanimate and the animate, the artificial and the natural. This plane has nothing to do with a form or a figure, nor with a design or a function. Its unity has nothing to do with a ground buried deep within things, nor with an end or a project in the mind of God. Instead, it is a plane upon which everything is laid out, and which is like the intersection of all forms, the machine of all functions; its dimensions, however, increase with those of the multiplicities of individualities it cuts across. It is a fixed plane, upon which things are distinguished from one another only by speed and slowness. A plane of immanence or univocality opposed to analogy. The One is said with a single meaning of all the multiple. Being expresses in a single meaning all that differs. What we are talking about is not the unity of substance but the infinity of the modifications that are part of one another on this unique plane of life.[261]

A multiplicity of individualities, namely differences, all connected within a «unity of plane». A unity that is not a «ground» (that of the hierarchical and judging order of metaphysics), but «a plane upon which everything is laid out», a plane of expression. In other words, by connecting Bergson and Spinoza in an overall ontological perspective, the individuals, in as much as they are expression of «a life», however differentiate one another for their degree of power. This is Deleuze's «cartography»[262] of the living: «This is not animism, any more than it is mechanism; rather, it is universal machinism: a plane of consistency occupied by an immense abstract machine comprising an infinite number of assemblages.»[263] By means of this perspective, Deleuze finally succeeds in completing his theory of the «impersonal» as that expressive field, a «plane of consistency», which does not however dispel the irreducible «singularity» of the individuals.[264] These have always been Deleuze's greatest conceptual efforts: to affirm the positivity of differences within an anti-hierarchical and anti-static ontology; to think of the «plane of immanence» in its becoming; to keep together the One and the Many on the same plane; to make differentiation the immanent movement of being. In a formula: *difference and repetition*.[265]

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[261] Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 254.

[262] Ibidem, pp. 260-261: «On the plane of consistency, *a body is defined only by a longitude and a latitude:* in other words the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential (latitude). Nothing but affects and local movements, differential speeds. The credit goes to Spinoza for calling attention to these two dimensions of the Body, and for having defined the plane of Nature as pure longitude and latitude. Latitude and longitude are the two elements of a cartography.»

[263] Ibidem, p. 256.

[264] Id., *Immanence: a Life*, pp. 386-387: «The life of the individual has given way to an impersonal and yet singular, which foregrounds a pure event that has been liberated from accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and the objectivity of what comes to pass: a "*homo tantum*" with whom everyone sympathized and who attains a kind of beatitude; or an ecceity, which is no longer an individuation, but a singularization.»

[265] Id., *Difference and Repetition*, p. XVI: «After I had studied Hume, Spinoza, Nietzsche and Proust, all of whom fired me with enthusiasm, *Difference and Repetition* was the first book in which I tried to 'do philosophy'. All that I have done since is connected to this book, including what I wrote with Guattari (obviously, I speak from my own point of view). It is very difficult to say why one becomes attached to a particular problem: why was it difference and repetition which preoccupied me rather than something else, and why the two together rather than separately? These were not exactly new problems, since the history of philosophy, and especially contemporary philosophy, dealt with them constantly. But perhaps the majority of philosophers had subordinated difference to identity or to the Same, to the Similar, to the Opposed or to the Analogous: they had introduced difference into the identity of the concept, they had put difference in the concept itself, thereby reaching a conceptual difference, but not a concept of difference.»

Deleuze's reflection on the impersonal lands in the definition of the concept that, starting from 1969 *Logic of Sense*[266] and 1972 *Anti-Oedipus*[267], bears the name (borrowed from Antonin Artaud) of «Body without Organs» (BwO). As Deleuze states in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

> The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism […]. *The body is the body. Alone it stands. And in no need of organs. Organism it never is. Organisms are the enemies of the body* [...]. *The judgment of God,* the system of the judgment of God, the theological system, is precisely the operation of He who makes an organism, an organization of organs called the organism, because He cannot bear the BwO, because He pursues it and rips it apart so He can be first, and have the organism be first […]. The organism is not at all the body, the BwO; rather, it is a stratum on the BwO, in other words, a phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation that, in order to extract useful labor from the BwO, imposes upon it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences […]. But who is this we that is not me, for the subject no less than the organism belongs to and depends on a stratum? Now we have the answer: the BwO is that glacial reality where the alluvions, sedimentations, coagulations, foldings, and recoilings that compose an organism—and also a signification and a subject—occur. For the judgment of God weighs upon and is exercised against the BwO; it is the BwO that undergoes it. It is in the BwO hat the organs enter into the relations of composition called the organism. The BwO howls: "They've made me an organism! They've wrongfully folded me! They've stolen my body"! The judgment of God uproots it from its immanence and makes it an organism, a signification, a subject.[268]

The BwO is the impersonal inhabiting every individuality, the field of virtuality «bound» by the «strata» of judgment (organism, significance, and subjectification).[269] In other words, the BwO is a localised power: «The body without organs is an affective, intensive, anarchist body that consist solely of poles, zones, thresholds, and gradients. *It is traversed by a powerful, nonorganic vitality*.»[270] The BwO is a ray of pure intensity, a ray of power, which tends to define itself through becoming and never as solidification. Solidification is impossible for the BwO; it is inconsistent with its being-becoming. Solidification is a process that can be affixed only from the outside, from above: «The question is fundamentally that of the body - the body they *steal* from us in order to fabricate opposable organisms. This body is stolen first from the girl: Stop behaving like that, you're not a little girl anymore, you're not a tomboy, etc. The girl's becoming is stolen first, in order to impose a history, or prehistory, upon her.»[271] Therefore, the individual, what we usually call "subject", is a simulacrum, a "judged" ray of power. There are no individuals who bump into one another, but «haecceities» who rather «assemble» one another. As Deleuze states, «it is necessary to annul the organs, to shut them away so that their liberated elements can enter into the new relations from which the *becoming-animal*, and the circulation of affects within the *machinic assemblage*, will result.»[272] This is a fundamental point of Deleuze's materialism of power, a "Bergsonian acquisition" which, once again, is helpful to keep Nietzsche's manifest aristocratism "quite": in order to contrast the Hobbesian inclination of western philosophy,

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[266] Id., *The Logic of Sense*, pp. 98-99: «We seek to determine an impersonal and pre-individual transcendental field, which does not resemble the corresponding empirical fields, and which nevertheless is not confused with an undifferentiated depth. This field can not be determined as that of consciousness […]. What is neither individual nor personal are, on the contrary, emissions of singularities insofar as they occur on an unconscious surface and possess a mobile, immanent principle of auto-unification through a *nomadic distribution*.»

[267] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, chap. I/2, pp. 9-16.

[268] Id., *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 158-159.

[269] Ibidem, p. 159ff.

[270] Gilles, Deleuze, *To Have Done With Judgment*, in Id. *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1993), London, Verso, 1998, p. 131.

[271] Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 276.

[272] Ibidem, p. 260. Emphasis mine.

the equation between power and life can work only if we pose an ontological solidarity among powers.[273] Does materialism of power work only by supposing a «sentimentalized» nature?[274] This is a suspect that neither Spinoza's theory of affects nor Nietzsche's perspectivism can entirely remove. Indeed, we have hitherto amply noticed how the condition of possibility of such a solidarity among powers is the deactivation of the thorny question of evil. As Nietzsche would put it, the s*uffering animal* is always the "*killjoy*".[275]

The BwO, the impersonal plane of power, leads to the question of becoming. This is a Spinozist lesson that Deleuze never grows tired of repeating: *ethics is implicated in ontology*. After all, as Deleuze asks, «is not Spinoza's *Ethics* the great book of the BwO?»[276] Yet, if Spinoza provides the ontological support whereby carrying out such a transition to ethics, Nietzsche is he who ultimately allows to start the engine of becoming, he who defines the immanent dynamic of *differentiation and repetition*. As Deleuze states in *The Logic of Sense*:

> Nietzsche's discovery lies elsewhere when having liberated himself from Schopenhauer and Wagner, he explored a world of impersonal and pre-individual singularities, a world he then called Dionysian or of the will to power, a free and unbound energy. These are nomadic singularities which are no longer imprisoned within the fixed individuality of the infinite Being (the notorious immutability of God), nor inside the sedentary boundaries of the finite subject (the notorious limits of knowledge). This is something neither individual nor personal, but rather singular. Being not an undifferentiated abyss, it leaps from one singularity to another, casting always the dice belonging to the same cast, always fragmented and formed again in each throw […]. *As for the subject of this new discourse (except that there is no longer any subject), it is not man or God, and even less man in the place of God. The subject is free, anonymous, and nomadic singularity which traverses men as well as plants and animals independently of the matter of their individuation and the forms of their personality. "Overman" means nothing other than this – the superior type of everything that is*.[277]

Deleuze has no doubt: «it is not enough to say, "Long live the multiple" […]. The multiple *must be made*, not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety, *with the number of dimensions one already has available*.»[278]

Before deepening such an ethical shift of the impersonal, it is finally time to go into the outstanding question of Deleuze's relationship with Darwin. As we noticed in the first paragraph, Deleuze's first reflection on Darwin was influenced by Bergson's vitalism.

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[273] In this regard, the typed summary of Deleuze's 1959-1960 coursework on Rousseau's political philosophy at the Sorbonne suggests Deleuze's interests in anti-Hobbesian perspectives. As Deleuze's states: «How could people be mean when the conditions are absent? The conditions which make meanness possible are those of any determined social state. There is no such thing as disinterested meanness, despite what imbeciles and mean people
sometimes say. All meanness is profit or compensation. There is no human meanness that is not inscribed within relationships of oppression, in accordance with complex social interests. Rousseau is one of those writers who knew how to analyze the relations of oppression and the social structures they presuppose […]. Society constantly puts us in situations where it is in our interest to be mean. Our vanity would have us believe that we are naturally mean. But the truth is much worse: we become mean without knowing it, without even realizing it. It is difficult to be someone's heir without unconsciously wishing for their death now and then.» Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Precursor of Kafka, Celine, and Ponge*, in *Desert Island*, pp. 52-53.

[274] Howard Caygill, *The Topology of Selection: The Limits of Deleuze's Biophilosophy*, in *Deleuze and Philosophy. The Difference Engineer*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson, London, Routledge, 1997, pp. 149-162.

[275] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, II/6, pp. 42-43: « To see suffering does you good, to make suffer, better still – that is a hard proposition, but an ancient, powerful, human-all-too-human proposition to which, by the way, even the apes might subscribe: as people say, in thinking up bizarre cruelties they anticipate and, as it were, act out a "demonstration" of what man will do. No cruelty, no feast: that is what the oldest and longest period in human history teaches us – and punishment, too, has such very strong *festive* aspects!»

[276] Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 153.

[277] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 107. Emphasis mine.

[278] Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 6. Emphasis mine.

Deleuze's judgment was twofold: on the one hand, Darwinism provided a real ontology of difference which makes difference the driving force of life; on the other hand, it defined the difference excessively in mechanic terms, thereby ending up suppressing the vitality of life. In summary, Darwinism represented a powerful anti-metaphysical thought, but, in the end, it was a misleading *bio-logos*. This is a judgment that Deleuze will reinforce further with Spinoza, and, above all, with Nietzsche. Yet, Deleuze did not mean to outline a different evolutionary paradigm, but rather to deactivate the reactive character of Darwinian discourse on life. Deleuze's operation consist in re-circulating power into the schemes of natural selection (in this regards, we could talk of a "Nietzsche-Bergson axis"). As Deleuze claims in *Difference and Repetition*:

> Darwin's great novelty, perhaps, was that of inaugurating the thought of individual difference. The leitmotiv of *The Origin of Species* is: we do not know what individual difference is capable of! We do not know how far it can go, assuming that we add to it natural selection. Darwin's problem is […] a question of knowing under what conditions small, unconnected or free-floating differences become appreciable, connected and fixed differences. Natural selection indeed plays the role of a principle of reality, even of success, and shows how differences become connected to one another and accumulate in a given direction, but also how they tend to diverge further and further in different or even opposed directions. Natural selection plays an essential role: the differenciation of difference (survival of the most divergent). Where selection does not occur or no longer occurs, differences remain or once more become free-floating; where it occurs, it does so to fix the differences and make them diverge. The great taxonomic units - genera, families, orders and classes - no longer provide a means of understanding difference by relating it to such apparent conditions as resemblances, identities, analogies and determined oppositions. *On the contrary*, these taxonomic units are understood on the basis of such fundamental mechanisms of natural selection as difference and the differenciation of difference.[279]

With *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze is finally in possession of the proper conceptual equipment whereby developing a more focused critique of Darwinism. Here Deleuze is no longer the "creative historian of philosophy", but a "creative philosopher" who invents new concepts and new images of thought. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze's topography of life is given by the well-known image of the «rhizome», which, in Deleuze's will, aims to replace the «sad image» (a Spinozian sadness) of the «three and root […] that is forever imitating the multiple on the basis of a centered or segmented higher unity.»[280]

> Let us summarize the principal characteristics of a rhizome: unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four, five, etc. […]. Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature. These lines, or lineaments, should not be confused with lineages of the arborescent type, which are merely localizable linkages between points and positions. Unlike the tree, the rhizome is not the object of reproduction: neither external reproduction as image-tree nor internal reproduction as tree-structure. The rhizome is an antigenealogy. It is a short-term memory, or antimemory. The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots […]. What is at question in the rhizome is a relation to sexuality—but also to the animal, the vegetal, the world, politics, the book, things natural and artificial—that is totally different from the arborescent relation: all manner of "becomings".[281]

[279] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 248.
[280] Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 16.
[281] Ibidem, p. 21.

«The weed produces no Sermons on the Mount.»[282] Here in the West, «the tree has implanted itself in our bodies.»[283] On the contrary, the image of the rhizome does not apply any moral judgments on life, but rather permits the explication of the power. The rhizome prevents morality, and fosters ethics. With the image of rhizome, Deleuze defines the ontological structure of his materialism of power, the cartographic upon which drawing the countless lines of "becoming". Moreover, by opposing the image of the rhizome to that of the tree, Deleuze aims, on the one hand, to stress the limits of Darwinian ontology – whereof, by crossing Bergson and Nietzsche, he previously questioned the reductionist and reactive character -; on the other hand, whilst he contests Darwinism, Deleuze can still situate his «biophilosophy» within the boundaries of contemporary biology by endorsing Neo-Darwinian ontology. [284] Although not always clear, in my opinion, such a distinction is the umpteenth symptom of the tension between theoretical creativity and the legacy of his historical-philosophical references that characterizes *A Thousand Plateau*.[285] Indeed, according to Deleuze, despite all his undeniable innovation, Darwin still thought within the teleological and anthropocentric schemes of traditional «natural history»[286]. In other words, Darwin was still anchored to the image of the three, that is not «an evolution in the strict sense», where nothing "becomes something else" and where there are only separated individualities who *cannot* contaminate one another.[287]

On close inspection, we already know that Deleuze's critique of Darwin's theory is basically unfounded. Indeed, as we noticed in the second chapter, Darwin himself rejected the image of the tree since generally teleological.[288] What Deleuze attempts to conceive through the image of the rhizome, Darwin, in his own time, already succeeded in it with the image of the «coral of life»: a «chaosmos» (a Guattarian notion) wherein every point is connected to the others. [289] In my opinion, beside the purely biological contents, what really makes friction with Deleuze about Darwin is the rigid character of individuality, the ultimate reality of natural selection. This is why, Deleuze stresses the difference between Darwinism and Neo-Darwinism, going even to consider «neoevolutionism» as the true rhizomatic ontology.[290] In Neo-Darwinism, namely Darwinism updated to modern synthesis, Deleuze sees that "life below the individual", that «molecular» reality which makes the plane of

[282] Ibidem, pp. 18-19. It is quotation from Henry Miller's 1939 *Hamlet* (New York, Carrefour, 1939, pp. 105-106).
[283] Ibidem, p. 18.
[284] On the notion of «biophilosophy» in Deleuze see Caygill, *The Topology of Selection*, and Mark Hansen, *Becoming as Creative Involution?:Contextualizing Deleuze and Guattari's Biophilosophy*, in «Postmodern Culture», 1/2000. Text available at <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/27727>.
[285] See, for instance, Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 47-49.
[286] Ibidem, pp. 233-237.
[287] Ibidem, p. 238: «becoming is not an evolution, at least not an evolution by descent and filiation. Becoming produces nothing by filiation; all filiation is imaginary. Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance.»
[288] We might suppose that Deleuze never read Darwin's notebooks since the latter were published in 1987 in English. As far as I know, still today no French translation is available, neither in the *Œuvres complètes de Darwin* edited by Patrick Tort. Cf. <https://charlesdarwin.fr/integrale_livres.html>.
[289] Simonetti, *Il penultimo del pensiero*, p. 49.
[290] Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 239: «Neoevolutionism seems important for two reasons: the animal is defined not by characteristics (specific, generic, etc.) but by populations that vary from milieu to milieu or within the same milieu; movement occurs not only, or not primarily, by filiative productions but also by transversal communications between heterogeneous populations. Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree. Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, "appearing", "being", "equaling", or "producing".»

consistency a moving plane of alliances[291]: «Always look for the molecular, or even submolecular, particle with which we are allied. We evolve and die more from our polymorphous and rhizomatic flus than from hereditary diseases, or diseases that have their own line of descent.» [292]In Neo-Darwinism, Deleuze finds the biological perspective more in tune with his philosophy of difference.[293] Neo-Darwinism, in so far as it contests Darwin's rigid individualism, provides the "empirical" support to Deleuze's conception of the impersonal, thereby finally welding that circularity between ontology and ethics without which the practice of becoming could not work. Yet, as we noticed before, in contemporary philosophy, such a "vitalistic" employment of Neo-Darwinism often tends to be perilously close to overturn in anti-Darwinian positions. Could Deleuze have avoided such a drift? Or, did he carry out the typical "sin" of bio-philosophers: to pick from life sciences what they might find to be consistent with their philosophical tasks, while rejecting what does not fit by accusing it of "reductionism", "scientism", "unintentional metaphysics", and so on.
Through the image of rhizome, Deleuze builds a mobile plane of immanence upon which, given its anti-hierarchical and virtual character, countless «line of flights», i.e., processes of «deterritorializations», constantly undo the points of solidification. This movement bears the name of «becoming.»

> All becomings are already molecular. That is because becoming is not to imitate or identify with something or someone. Nor is it to proportion formal relations. Neither of these two figures of analogy is applicable to becoming: neither the imitation of a subject nor the proportionality of a form. Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire. This principle of proximity or approximation is entirely particular and reintroduces no analogy whatsoever. It indicates as rigorously as possible a *zone of proximity or copresence* of a particle, the movement into which any particle that enters the zone is drawn.[294]

In Deleuze, becoming is said in many ways («becoming-woman», «becoming-child», «becoming-plant», «becoming-clandestine», «becoming-animal», etc.) and it could not be otherwise. Ethics is the practice of the power that we, as living bodies, are capable of. Power of live and power of the livings: two dimensions which entail one another, and which could not exist independently. Nevertheless, ethics is needed when such a power is restrained. In fact, if there were no restrain, there were no need of ethics and there would be simply life, expressed vitality. As Deleuze points out, becoming is neither imitation nor identification, but rather a contamination, that is the creation (or restoration) of fields of solidarity among those individualities that metaphysics considers as separated and conflicting entities.

Among the multiple possibilities of becoming, Deleuze bestows a fundamental role on the *becoming-animal*, which can be *de facto* considered as the macro-category of his theory of becoming.[295] With the *becoming-animal*, Deleuze make the most of the anti-anthropocentrism he learnt from Spinoza and Nietzsche. What does *becoming-animal* mean? In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze devotes a wide and complex section to the theme of the *becoming-animal* (*1730: Becoming-Intense*, *Becoming-Animal*, *Becoming-Imperceptible*).

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[291] On Deleuze's use of Neo-Darwinism see John Marks, *Molecular Biology in the Work of Deleuze and Guattari*, in «Paragraph», 2/2006, pp. 81- 97.
[292] Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 11.
[293] Cf. Nathan Eckstrand, *Deleuze, Darwin and the Categorisation of Life*, in «Deleuze Studies», 4/2014, pp. 415-444.
[294] Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 272-273.
[295] Cf. Alain Beaulieu, *The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought*, in «Journal for Critical Animal Studies», 2/2011, p. 77.

However, he already developed some of these insights in the seminal 1975 *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*.

> To become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs. There is no longer anything but movements, vibrations, thresholds in a deserted matter: animals, mice, dogs, apes, cockroaches are distinguished only by this or that threshold, this or that vibration, by the particular underground tunnel in the rhizome or the burrow. Because these tunnels are underground intensities.[296]

Deleuze's definition of the *becoming-animal* is intentionally obscure. After all, to define what, by definition, aims to dismantle those singularities who claims to be defined once for all would be inconsistent.[297] Because of this, the scholarship on Deleuze's *becoming-animal* ended up being characterized by the same indeterminateness. Within Deleuzian studies, the *becoming-animal* is often employed for its ethical and political meaning, that is for its capability of thinking of zones of solidarity and community among individualities built to be counterposed, even violently.[298] Nevertheless, in my opinion, the role of the *becoming-animal* within Deleuze's materialism of power still need to be properly brought into focus. In order to do, it might be useful to understand how Deleuze define the two poles of such a relation of becoming. In other words, it is time to highlight Deleuze's definition of the human-animal relationship.

As Deleuze states in his study on Kafka, the *becoming-animal* «is a map of intensities. It is an ensemble of states, each distinct from the other, grafted onto the man insofar as he is searching for a way out [...]. In the same way that the egg, in its potentiality, contains two poles, *the becoming-animal is a potentiality that is gifted with two equally real poles - a properly animal pole and a properly familial one*.»[299] Hence, on the one hand, there stand the human, the «familial»; on the other hand, the animal, the «anomalous»[300] which always eludes the «grasping hand» of the Sameness.[301] Among this two poles, there is a «continuum of intensities», namely the impersonal field of power. Therefore, what is at stake in the *becoming-animal* is exactly such an in-between. As Deleuze points out in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

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[296] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 13.

[297] Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 252: «Theology is very strict on the following point: there are no werewolves, human beings cannot become animal. That is because there is no transformation of essential forms; they are inalienable and only entertain relations of analogy.»

[298] See for instance Colin Gardner and Patricia MacCormack (ed.), *Deleuze and the Animal*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2017, part I and III; Gerald L. Bruns, *Becoming-Animal (Some Simple Ways)*, in «New Literary History», 4/2007, pp. 703-720; Leonard Lawlor, *Following the Rats: Becoming-Animal in Deleuze and Guattari*, in «SubStance», 3/2008, pp. 169-187.

[299] Deleuze, Guattari, *Kafka*, p. 36. Emphasis mine.

[300] Id., *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 243-244: « In short, every Animal has its Anomalous […]. The abnormal can be defined only in terms of characteristics, specific or generic; but the anomalous is a position or set of positions in relation to a multiplicity.»

[301] Ibidem, pp. 240-241. In this section of *A Thousand Plateaus* (*Memories of a Sorcerer I*), Deleuze distinguishes between «three kinds of animals»: the «individuated animals» («Oedipal animals» who «invite us to regress, draw us into a narcissistic contemplation»), the «animals with characteristics or attributes» (animals who serves as «genus», «classification», «archetypes or models»), and the «demonic animals», («animals that form a multiplicity, a becoming»). Through this classification, Deleuze aims to contest the uses of animals (the «individuated animals» and the «animals with characteristics or attributes») which reinforce the Sameness and which, thus, suppress the «demonic» character of the animal.

> A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification […]. To become is not to progress or regress along a series […]. Becomings-animal are neither dreams nor phantasies. They are perfectly real. But which reality is at issue here? For if becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal, it is clear that the human being does not "really" become an animal any more than the animal "really" becomes something else. Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes.[302]

Deleuze is clear on this point: «There is a reality of becoming-animal, even though one does not in reality become animal.» Yet, if it is not the concrete animal that we are talking about, then what does Deleuze mean with animality? Simply, it is the "Nietzschean animal", the forgotten power wherefrom consciousness, the bad consciousness, keeps us apart. As Deleuze claims:

> It is at this point that the human being encounters the animal. We do not become animal without a fascination for the pack, for multiplicity. A fascination for the outside? […] For the affect is not a personal feeling, nor is it a characteristic; it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel. *Who has not known the violence of these animal sequences, which uproot one from humanity, if only for an instant, making one scrape at one's bread like a rodent or giving one the yellow eyes of a feline? A fearsome involution calling us toward unheard-of becomings.* These are not regressions, although fragments of regression, sequences of regression may enter in.[303]

The power of life is «outside», we are attracted to it, and the animal is the vehicle whereby satisfying such a desire for power («becoming is the process of desire»). Besides its ethological determinations (apes, cats, dogs, rats, even bacteria), in Deleuze the animal is essentially a "conceptual animal" which combines Spinoza's theory of affects (every living being is a power who can what s/he can) and Nietzsche's anthropology (the human being as a domesticated animal). In other words, *becoming-animal* means *re-becoming powerful*.[304] Yet, as Deleuze promptly points out, such a *re-becoming* is not a regression to a lower and original condition. Like Nietzsche, Deleuze does not foster a naïve theriophily. There is something perilously unstable in animality; a threatening wildness which somehow instills distress in us.[305] For Deleuze, the *becoming-animal* is a rather «*creative involution*»[306]: a reconnection with that virtual field of creativity, i.e., power, that points of solidification such as subjectivity and consciousness (the «Oedipal theater» that Deleuze and Guattari harshly questioned in *Anti-Oedipus*) have succeeded in restraining, in order to create something new.[307] In summary, for the human being, the *becoming-animal* represents the possibility to reactivate the vital power that apparatus of domination such as Christianity, State and

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[302] Ibidem, p. 238.

[303] Ibidem, p. 239-240. Emphasis mine.

[304] Cf. Beistegui, *Immanence*, p. 109: «We don't know what that active power consists of, or how to acquire or regain it. The goal of the *Ethics* is precisely to find out, and make us active (again).»

[305] Cf. Žižek, *Organs without Bodies*, p. 65: « However, even if there is a grain of truth in the reproach of Deleuze's "dualism", and in the remark that the opposition(s) between nomadic and State, molecular and molar, and so forth is not simply the opposition between the Good (nomadic . . .) and the Evil (state . . .), Deleuze is as far as possible from asserting any kind of complementarity between the two poles (in the sense that, while the molar State alone is oppressive, suffocating the flow of desire, the opposite extreme, as the total abolition of the State, would mean "regression" into the psychotic, self-destructive rage of the pure, pre-Oedipal flow of desire). So, what we ostensibly need is the right balance between the two.»

[306] Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 165: «Thus the BwO is never yours or mine. It is always *a* body. It is no more projective than it is regressive. It is an involution, but always a contemporary, creative involution.»

[307] Felice Cimatti, *Unbecoming Human. Philosophy of Animality After Deleuze*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, p. 154: «Becoming-animal should not be understood as a process of animalisation, akin to a 'going back' to an animal condition. There is really no animal condition to return to, for the animality of becoming-animal is in the future rather than the past, it is to be built rather than recovered.»

Capitalism are interested in maintaining at the lowest possible intensity. The dispositif which allows such a domination is the delusion of «personhood».[308] This is the categorical imperative of Deleuze's ethical doctrine of *becoming*: «*Stop thinking of yourself as an ego in order to live as a flow, a set of flows in relation with other flows, outside of oneself and within oneself*.»[309]

At this point, two questions arise: is this *becoming* bidirectional? If the human beings can find in it the space to repossess their animal power, what do animals find instead? As we noticed before, Deleuze located in Spinoza's theory of affects the paradigm of a different thought on the living - «Spinoza's ethics is actually an ethology» -, where bodies contaminate one another (bad and good encounters) in order to apprehend what they are capable of. Deleuze names such a mutual affection among living beings «assemblage», a category that Deleuze himself consider as «the unity of *A Thousand Plateaus.*»

> There are various kinds of assemblages, and various component parts. On the one hand, we are trying to substitute the idea of assemblage for the idea of behavior: whence the importance of ethology, and the analysis of animal assemblages, e.g. territorial assemblages […]. On the other hand, the analysis of assemblages, broken down into their component part, opens up the way to a general logic […]. In assemblages you find states of things, bodies, various combinations of bodies, hodgepodges; but you also find utterances, modes of expression, and whole regimes of signs […]. *Assemblages are bunch of lines. But there are all kinds of line. Some are destructive, sketching death; and some lines are vital and creative. These creative and vital lines open up an assemblage, rather than close it down* […]. There are two ways to suppress or attenuate the distinction between nature and culture. The first is to liken animal behavior to human behavior (*Lorenz tried it, with disquieting political implications*). But what we are saying is that the idea of assemblage can replace the idea of behavior, and thus with respect to the idea of assemblage, the nature-culture distinction no longer matter. In a certain way, behavior is still a contour. But an assemblage is first and foremost what keeps very heterogeneous elements together.[310]

The category of «assemblage» is strictly connected to the «territorialization»-«reterritorialization» binomial, that is the creation of elastic and mobile points of stability.[311] By means of the categories, Deleuze attempts to overcome the antagonistic and static character of ethological notion of «behavior».[312] As always, by following Nietzsche's lesson, Deleuze is not truly interested in contesting the proper epistemological content of these categories, but rather their conceptual background, that is to highlight the persistence within them of certain metaphysical ideas.[313] Reactive ideas. In this respect, the polemic attack to

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[308] On Deleuze's notion of «impersonal» as radical critique of the «dispositive of the person» see Roberto Esposito, *Third Person. Politics of Life and Philosophy of the Impersonal*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012, pp. 142-151.

[309] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Saint Paul, Lawrence and John of Patmos* (1978), in *Essay Critical and Clinical*, p. 51.

[310] Deleuze, *Eight Years Later*, pp. 177-179. Emphasis mine.

[311] Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 314-315: «The territory is in fact an act that affects milieus and rhythms, that "territorializes" them. The territory is the product of a territorialization of milieus and rhythms. It amounts to the same thing to ask when milieus and rhythms […]. It has the interior zone of a residence or shelter, the exterior zone of its domain, more or less retractable limits or membranes, intermediary or even neutralized zones, and energy reserves or annexes […]. There is a territory precisely when milieu components cease to be directional, becoming dimensional instead, when they cease to be functional to become expressive. There is a territory when the rhythm has expressiveness. What defines the territory is the emergence of matters of expression.»

[312] The critique of the ethological category of behavior carried out in *A Thousand Plateaus* is amply influenced by Guattari's previous reflection on behaviourism. For a detailed reconstruction see Gary Genosko, *Deleuze and Guattari*, pp. 160-62.

[313] Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 235: «Ideas do not die. Not that they survive simply as archaisms. At a given moment they may reach a scientific stage, and then lose that status or emigrate to other sciences. Their application and status, even their form and content, may change; yet they retain something essential throughout the process, across the displacement, in the distribution of a new domain. Ideas are always

Konrad Lorenz's ethology is revealing. As we saw in the previous quotation, Deleuze consider Lorenz's "animalization" of human behavior politically *disquieting.* This is due to Lorenz's «constant tendency to present territoriality as an effect of intraspecific aggression.»[314]

> The territory is not primary in relation to the qualitative mark; it is the mark that makes the territory. Functions in a territory are not primary; they presuppose a territory-producing expressiveness. In this sense, the territory, and the functions performed within it, are products of territorialization. Territorialization is an act of rhythm that has become expressive, or of milieu components that have become qualitative. The marking of a territory is dimensional, but it is not a meter, it is a rhythm. It retains the most general characteristic of rhythm, which is to be inscribed on a different plane than that of its actions. But now the distinction between the two planes is between territorializing expressions and territorialized functions. That is why we cannot accept a thesis like Lorenz's, *which tends to make aggressiveness the basis of the territory:* the territory would then be the product of the phylogenetic evolution of an instinct of aggression, starting at the point where that instinct became intraspecific, was turned against the animal's own kind. A territorial animal would direct its aggressiveness against members of its own species; the species would gain the selective advantage of distributing its members throughout a space where each would have its own place. This ambiguous thesis, which has dangerous political overtones, seems to us to have little foundation […]. The T factor, the territorializing factor, must be sought elsewhere: precisely in the becoming-expressive of rhythm or melody, in other words, in the emergence or proper qualities.[315]

Aside from whether Deleuze's critique of Lorenz is pertinent or not (for instance, it is not clear what the dangerous political implications of Lorenz's ethology consist of, unless, like Deleuze, one maintains that ethics should derive from nature[316]), we cannot deny a basic consistency in Deleuze's reflection: to constantly deactivate the question of natural evil. Not by chance, the original German title of Lorenz's *On Aggression* is *Das Sogenannte Böse,* the "so-called evil" . In fact, Deleuze's critique to Lorenz implicitly reaffirms what we might consider to be the cornerstone of his conceptual framework, that is the presupposition of an ontological solidarity among the livings. From *Empiricism and Subjectivity* to *A Thousand Plateaus*, it is undeniable that Deleuze's greatest theoretical effort has been the "domestication" of the question of evil, which has emerged whenever Deleuze claimed the goodness of power. As we noticed so far, Deleuze's strategy, in step with the Nietzsche-Spinoza equation, has consisted in the creation of an "active vocabulary" (affection, BwO, rhizome, assemblage, territorialisation) capable of deactivating the "reactive" account of western moral dictionary.

Hence, once the ontological solidarity has been reaffirmed, what does the animal obtain from the *becoming-animal*? In order to answer this question, we should inspect the theory of affects from the side of animals. In my opinion, this is the raw nerve of Deleuze's definition of the human-animal relationship, where a series of unsolved questions finally disclose their basic ambiguity. My impression is that, despite a programmatic negation of any human exceptionality, Deleuze did not manage to rid his notion of power of the residual anthropocentrism which, as we noticed, affects the philosophies of Bergson, Spinoza, and Nietzsche. In other words, when observed from animals' viewpoint, the question of power, as far as it concerns them as living beings, seems to be a question purely human or, better, a

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reusable, because they have been usable before, but in the most varied of actual modes. For, on the one hand, the relationships between animals are the object not only of science but also of dreams, symbolism, art and poetry, practice and practical use. And on the other hand, the relationships between animals are bound up with the relations between man and animal, man and woman, man and child, man and the elements, man and the physical and microphysical universe.»

[314] Ibidem, Note 9, p. 548.

[315] Ibidem, pp. 315-316.

[316] Not to mention that the German Lorenz shares with the German Nietzsche the idea that the process of civilisation consists in a domestication of the human animality.

becoming-powerful that only humans are able to perform. Such an ambiguity emerges very clearly in a brief passage of *A Thousand Plateau* devoted to Von Uexküll's well-known example of the Tick:

> In the same way that we avoided defining a body by its organs and functions, we will avoid defining it by Species or Genus characteristics […]. A racehorse is more different from a workhorse than a workhorse is from an ox. Von Uexkull, in defining animal worlds, looks for the active and passive affects of which the animal is capable in the individuated assemblage of which it is a part. For example, the Tick, attracted by the light, hoists itself up to the tip of a branch; it is sensitive to the smell of mammals, and lets itself fall when one passes beneath the branch; it digs into its skin, at the least hairy place it can find. *Just three affects*; the rest of the time the tick sleeps, sometimes for years on end, indifferent to all that goes on in the immense forest. Its degree of power is indeed bounded by two limits: the optimal limit of the feast after which it dies, and the pessimal limit of the fast as it waits. It will be said that the tick's three affects assume generic and specific characteristics, organs and functions, legs and snout. This is true from the standpoint of physiology, but not from the standpoint of Ethics. Quite the contrary, in Ethics the organic characteristics derive from longitude and its relations, from latitude and its degrees. We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body.[317]

«*Just three affects*»: this is what the Tick's body can do.[318] Yet, this «just» betrays a subtle "judgment of sufficiency" utterly to the advantage of the privileged ontological indeterminateness of the human-animal. As is known, Uexküll's ethology, in particular his notion of *Umwelt* (environment, surrounding world), was previously employed also by Heidegger to prove, overtly from an anti-Darwinian perspective, the untenable thesis of «animal's poverty in world.»[319] Although Deleuze's position is surely very distant from Heidegger's «anti-biologist onto-anthropology»[320], his understanding of animality is characterized by a duplicity which, while affirming at first animals' greater connection with the power of life, eventually confines them in a condition of harmonious innocence. Indeed, in Deleuze, animality seems to represent an enviable condition of full power lacking that defectivity which moves the human being away from his vital power. Nevertheless, animals are so perfectly at ease with life that they cannot even afford the defect of «stupidity.»[321] The suitability of living beings who, unlike the human-animal, are not exposed to the «ground» of freedom.[322] After all, why should they *become* if there is no power to regain possession

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[317] Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 257. Emphasis mine.

[318] On Deleuze's Spinozist interpretation of Uexküll's ethology see Buchanan, *Onto-Ethologies*, chap. V, pp. 151ff.

[319] Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics. World, Finitude, Solitude* (1929-1930), Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1995, part II-chap. IV, pp. 241-245 and 261-263.

[320] Fuschetto, *Darwin teorico del postumano*, p. 11.

[321] As Deleuze claims in *Difference and Repetition*: «Stupidity *[bêtise]* is not animality. The animal is protected by specific forms which prevent it from being "stupid"*[bête]*. Formal correspondences between the human face and the heads of animals have often been composed; in other words, correspondences between individual differences peculiar to humans and the specific differences of animals. Such correspondences, however, take no account of stupidity as a specifically human form of bestiality […]. How is stupidity (not error) possible? It is possible by virtue of the link between thought and individuation. This link is much more profound than that which appears in the "I think": it is established in a field of intensity which already constitutes the sensibility of the thinking subject. Animals are in a sense forewarned against this ground, protected by their explicit forms. Not so for the I and the Self, undermined by the fields of individuation which work beneath them, defenceless against a rising of the ground which holds up to them a distorted or distorting mirror in which all presently thought forms dissolve.» Cf. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 150-152.

[322] In his 2001-2002 seminar on *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Jacques Derrida highlighted the subtle anthropocentrism that characterizes Deleuze's understanding of animality. As Derrida points out, «Deleuze distinguishes what is proper to man, *bêtise* as proper to man The animal cannot be *bête* […]. In other words, the animal cannot be *bête* because it is not free and has no will; its individuation, which gives it form, does not

of? If so, animals are ethically excluded from the creative apprenticeship of ethics.[323] They do not need it. Some would say "*much power about nothing*".

Hence, Deleuze's definition of the human-animal relationship finds in power the common ontological denominator. For this reason, what seems to be peculiar of the human-animal is not the ability to express power as such – all modes express power -, but to express power "creatively" (it sounds less anthropocentric than "freely").[324] Unlike a certain early twentieth-century philosophical anthropology, in Deleuze, the *human difference* consists of neither an ontological inadequacy (Gehlen), nor an eccentricity (Plessner), nor a structural distance from instincts (Scheler).[325] For Deleuze, the *difference* between the human and the animal takes place on the ethical plane: we are restrained powers, not failed power. Moreover, for Deleuze, talking of instincts and freedom, nature and culture, does no longer make sense: it is a matter of affections and of assemblages. On his side, Deleuze claims a *defective human difference* starting from which ethics, that is the possibility of reconnecting with power, is given. Yet, as Deleuze loves repeating (and this is more Nietzschean that Spinozist), *one always starts from the forms one has*, and, therefore, through the *becoming-animal*, the human being does not restore any original order of things, but simply performs the ethical possibilities given to them as human. Here echoes the Nietzschean mantra of Posthumanism[326]: «Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman.» The human is a contingent, defective and irreversible invention, wherefrom we can only move forward.

Therefore, the *becoming-animal* turns out to be a unilateral relationship in which human beings have everything to gain from animals but nothing to offer them.[327] Indeed, *Becoming-human* would entail *becoming-weak*, *becoming-reactive*, like those «familiar» *pet* who fell prey to human domestication.[328] *Becoming-human is an oxymoron* since, within the cartography of the living, the human represents a point of arrest, a «black hole» which swallows the multiplicity to arrange it in schemes of majority and of similarity.

> Let us try to say it another way: *There is no becoming-man because man is the molar entity par excellence, whereas becomings are molecular. The faciality function showed us the form under which man constitutes the majority, or rather the standard upon which the majority is based: white, male,*

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come away from a relation the ground which is freedom itself.» Cf. Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Vol. I, ed. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet and Ginette Michaud, Chicago, The University of Chicago, 2009, pp. 153-154.

[323] On the limiting account of Deleuze's *becoming-animal* regarding non-human animals see Lori Brown, *Becoming-Animal in the Flesh: Expanding the Ethical Reach of Deleuze and Tenth Plateau*, in «PhaenEx», 2/2007, pp. 260-278.

[324] Deleuze, *Practical Philosophy*, pp. 124-125: «Nature that distributes affects, does not make any distinction at all between things that might be called natural and things that might be called artificial. Artifice is fully a part of Nature, since each thing, on the immanent plane of Nature, is defined by the arrangements of motions and affects into which it enters, whether these arrangements are artificial or natural. Long after Spinoza, biologists and naturalists will try to describe animal worlds defined by affects and capacities for affecting and being affected. For example, J. von Uexkull will do this for the tick, an animal that sucks the blood of mammals. Be will define this animal by three affects: the first has to do with light (climb to the top of a branch); the second is olfactive (let yourself fall onto the mammal that passes beneath the branch); and the third is thermal (seek the area without fur, the warmest spot). A world with only three affects, in the midst of all that goes on in the immense forest» (emphasis mine).

[325] On the relationship between Deleuze and the *Neue Anthropologie* see Carlo Negri, *Deleuze e il postumano. Corpo e soggetto nella postmoderità*, Napoli-Salerno, Orthotes, 2020, pp. 27-56.

[326] On Deleuze and posthumanism see Ibidem, pp. 231-238.

[327] As Steve Baker pointed out, «Animals, for Deleuze and Guattari, seem to operate more as a device of writing - albeit a device which initiated its own forms of political practice - than as living beings whose conditions of life were of direct concern to the writers.» Cf. Steve Baker, *What Does Becoming-Animal Look Like?*, in *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2002, p. 95.

[328] See the voice *A as Animal* of Deleuze's *Abécédaire*. Text available at <https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/seminars/gilles-deleuze-abc-primer/lecture-recording-1-f>.

> *adult, "rational", etc., in short, the average European, the subject of enunciation*. Following the law of arborescence, it is this central Point that moves across all of space or the entire screen, and at every turn nourishes a certain distinctive opposition, depending on which faciality trait is retained: male-(female), adult-(child), white-(black, yellow, or red); rational-(animal). The central point, or third eye, thus has the property of organizing binary distributions within the dualism machines, and of reproducing itself in the principal term of the opposition; the entire opposition at the same time resonates in the central point. The constitution of a "majority" as redundancy. Man constitutes himself as a gigantic memory, through the position of the central point, its frequency (insofar as it is necessarily reproduced by each dominant point), and its resonance (insofar as all of the points tie in with it).

Here, Deleuze introduces the theme of «faciality», one his most intriguing conceptual construction. By means of «faciality», Deleuze can finally conclude the process of destitution of the human carried out so far. Like all the other Deleuzian categories we previously encountered, «faciality» is saturated with the "Spinoza-Nietzsche equation". Indeed, Deleuze already alluded to this theme in *Expressionism in Philosophy*:

> Spinoza carefully distinguishes common notions, on the one hand , and transcendental terms (being, thing, something) or universal notions genera and species, man, horse, dog) on the other. And yet common notions are themselves universal, "more or less" universal according to their degree of generality; one must then suppose that Spinoza is not attacking what is universal, but only a certain conception of abstract universality. Similarly, Spinoza is not criticizing the notions of genus and species in general; he himself speaks of horse and dog as natural types, of man himself as a normative type or model.[329]

According to Elisabeth de Fontenay, the critique of the abstract universality represented one of the most effective and productive empiricist assault to humanist metaphysic. Fontenay pinpoints in Locke the forefather of such an anti-humanist strategy.

> As Locke points out, the Aristotelian definition of the human being capable of *logos* and *polis*, but even more the spiritual account of the Cartesian human being, does not apply to a creature who, although capable of speaking, does not participate in the "*ordinary figure of the human being*". Undoubtedly, this creature would be excluded from humanity and there would be no place to locate it. Locke mentions the case of the Brazilian Parrots […]. Hence, Locke's operation, comparable to that of the skeptics who preceded him and of the materialists who will follows him, consists of eroding the rift between the human and the animal in order to disseminate through the chain of the living the language and the *logos* that Stoics, Aristoteles and Descartes considered as an anthropologic prerogative. This undermines the foundations of humanism and metaphysics, thereby producing being more or less human, more or less animal.[330]

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[329] Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, p. 277. Deleuze refers to Spinoza, *Ethics*, part II, prop. 40, note 1, p. 40: «So many images of men are formed at one time in a human body that they surpass the power of imagining, to the extent that the corresponding mind can't imagine slight differences amongst the particular men (such as the colour and size of each one) or their determinate number, and imagines distinctly only what is common to them all in their effects on the body in question. For the body has been affected most forcefully by what is common to all the men, since each particular man has affected it by this property. And the mind expresses this what-is-common by the word "man", and predicates it of countless particulars. These "universal" notions are not formed by all people in the same way, but vary from one person to another, depending on what the body ·of each person has more often been affected by, and on what the mind of each imagines or recollects more easily. For example, those who have mostly been impressed by men's stature will understand by the word "man" an animal that stands upright. But those who have generally focused on something else will form another common image of men - e.g. that man is an animal capable of laughter, or a featherless biped, or a rational animal. And similarly with the others - each will form universal images of things according to the disposition of his body. Hence it is not surprising that so many controversies have arisen among the philosophers, who have wished to explain natural things by mere images of things.»

[330] Fontenay, *Le Silence des bêtes*, p. 383. Translation mine. Fontenay refers to Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chap. XXVII/8.

As we know, from the ontological point of view, Darwin will give the question of the abstract universality the coup the grace. Notwithstanding, from the ethical point of view, empiricism turns out to be once again one of most powerful deconstructive way of thinking. Especially when it comes to the dualism between humanity and animality. Thus, we are coming back to the beginning of Deleuze's reflection, that is to the discovery of the ethical potentialities of Empiricism. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, the theme of «faciality» aims to contest the abstract universality par excellence: the human. According to Deleuze, the latter is expressed by «face», that section of the impersonal whereon all our moral judgments ultimately sediment. The face is the point of highest moralization of the BwO.

> Although the head, even the human head, is not necessarily a face, the face is produced in humanity. But it is produced by a necessity that does not apply to human beings "in general". The face is not animal, but neither is it human in general; there is even something absolutely inhuman about the face. It would be an error to proceed as though the face became inhuman only beyond a certain threshold: close-up, extreme magnification, recondite expression, etc. The inhuman in human beings: that is what the face is from the start. It is by nature a close-up, with its inanimate white surfaces, its shining black holes, its emptiness and boredom.[331]

The face is essentially inhuman since the human-animals are not given with a face from the beginning. It is the «judgment of God» what bestows a face on them, thereby deciding who is in an who is out. Because the «face» is not anonymous; the «face» is not impersonal. The «face» is «that» face, the «face» that can be recognized. The «face» is not inclusive, is not for everyone. As Deleuze claims, «given a concrete face, the [abstract machine of faciality] judges whether it passes or not, whether it goes or not, on the basis of the elementary facial units. This time, the binary relation is of the "yes-no".»[332] But what does this «face» look like?

> The face is not a universal. It is not even that of the white man; it is White Man himself, with his broad white cheeks and the black hole of his eyes. The face is Christ. The face is the typical European […] Not a universal, but *fades totius universi*. Jesus Christ superstar: he invented the facialization of the entire body and spread it everywhere […]. It's not a man and it's not a woman, so it must be a transvestite: The binary relation is between the "no" of the first category and the "yes" of the following category, which under certain conditions may just as easily mark a tolerance as indicate an enemy to be mowed down at all costs. At any rate, you've been recognized, the abstract machine has you inscribed in its overall grid. It is clear that in its new role as deviance detector, the faciality machine does not restrict itself to individual cases but operates in just as general a fashion as it did in its first role, the computation of normalities. If the face is in fact Christ, in other words, your average ordinary White Man, then the first deviances, the first divergence-types, are racial: yellow man, black man, men in the second or third category. They are also inscribed on the wall, distributed by the hole. They must be Christianized, in other words, facialized.[333]

In the abstract machine of faciality, representation, recognition and judgment, i.e., the tools of affirmation of the Sameness, reveal all their discriminatory power. Faciality is the ultimate negation of difference: «*C'est sous le signe de la croix qu'on a su triturer le visage dans tous les sens, et les processus de visagéification*.»[334] The Sameness is a "moral pathology" affecting the being, let's say, from the outward. I do think that it would not be

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[331] Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 170-171.
[332] Ibidem, p. 177.
[333] Ibidem, pp. 176-178.
[334] Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux. Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, Paris, Minuit, 1980, p. 219. I preferred to quote the original French since, in my opinion, it better expresses the biting tone of Deleuze's argumentation. In the English translation by Brian Massumi I've been using so far we find instead: «It was under the sign of the cross that people learned to steer the face and processes of facialization in all directions». Cf. Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 179-179.

exaggerated claiming that, *for Deleuze, being is innocent*: if it were up to life alone, the question of the violence of Sameness towards difference would have been never posed (I believe, for instance, that Deleuze's critique of Lorenz's theory of aggressivity goes in this direction). The Sameness is our problem; we, humans, are the bearer of such a pathology into life.

The question of faciality pushes Deleuze's ethical inquiry right towards politics. As Gavin Rae pointed out, «face is intimately connected to power, conceptuality, repression and politics.»[335] Indeed, the very subject of these pages is racism. Unlike Lorenz, Deleuze does not process racism as an ethological phenomenon, a natural evil, but rather as the product of a political culture established upon the discriminatory cult of "normalization".[336] Racism is a politics of the Sameness, a Sameness who has the «face» of the White, Wealthy, Western Man.

> European racism as the white man's claim has never operated by exclusion, or by the designation of someone as Other: it is instead in primitive societies that the stranger is grasped as an "other". Racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face, which endeavors to integrate nonconforming traits into increasingly eccentric and backward waves, sometimes tolerating them at given places under given conditions, in a given ghetto, sometimes erasing them from the wall, which never abides alterity (it's a Jew, it's an Arab, it's a Negro, it's a lunatic…). From the viewpoint of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us and whose crime it is not to be. The dividing line is not between inside and outside but rather is internal to simultaneous signifying chains and successive subjective choices. Racism never detects the particles of the other; it propagates waves of sameness until those who resist identification have been wiped out (or those who only allow themselves to be identified at a given degree of divergence). Its cruelty is equaled only by its incompetence and naivete.[337]

Interpreters such as Gavin Rae[338] and Brian Schroeder[339] highlighted the strict parallelism, made of concurrences and radical differences, between Emmanuel Lévinas' «face» and Deleuze's «faciality.» I do think that this comparison can be even more fruitful if processed through Derrida's critique of Lévinas. As is known, in posthumous works such as *The Animal That Therefore I am* and *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida situates Lévinas, along with Heidegger and Lacan, within a philosophical tradition which, although firmly contests modern hyper-rationalist understanding of human subjectivity – what Derrida names *logocentrism* -, however maintains an anthropocentric prejudice that continues to exclude the animal from the traditional prerogatives of the human being (language, consciousness, free will, suffering, and even death). Lévinas represents the most insidious case since his seminal reflection on the "face of the Other" aims exactly to re-define and re-establish our ethical discourse. An ethics wherefrom animals are still excluded though: the face demanding ethical responsibility is always and solely a human face.[340] For his part, Deleuze processes the theme of faciality within the anti-anthropocentric ethical horizon of affects. Hence, we might consider Deleuze's faciality as a political radicalization of Lévinas' face. Indeed, for Deleuze, the face is not simply an ethical feature of the body, but rather a political projection: the human face is the face of a civilization which is such, that is bearer of rights and moral recognition, insofar a head, a human head, fits or nots with that face. This confirms how Deleuze's research on the impersonal is anthropologically

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[335] Gavin Rae, *The Political Significance of the Face: Deleuze's Critique of Levinas*, in «Critical Horizons», 3-4/2016, p. 289.
[336] On this see Arun Saldanha and Jason Michael Adams (ed.), *Deleuze and Race*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press 2013.
[337] Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 178.
[338] Rae, *The Political Significance of the Face*.
[339] Brian Schroeder, *Reterritorializing Subjectivity*, in «Research in Phenomenology», 42/2012, pp. 251-266.
[340] Cf. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I am*, pp. 107-110; Id., *The Beast and The Sovereign*, pp. 236-249.

oriented. Indeed, in his works, we do not find Derrida's pressing ethical interest towards animals, but, in step with Lévinas, he rather considers as more urgent to highlight an anthropological truth which our political and ethical culture, our civilization, has not dealt enough with: the non-concurrence between the human as moral attribute and the human-animal as living body.[341] We might as well identify, as Darwin did, civilization with the aid to our suffering fellows, but we cannot deny the awful truth for which only certain suffering faces seems to us worthy of aid. This is what makes Deleuze's philosophy still fertile and challenging for the present days.[342]

From the point of view of the excluded faces, the victims, faciality is experienced as a violence towards their own difference: the negation of what they are and of what they can be. In the previous chapter, Levi showed us how effective and cruel the process of normalization carried out by the abstract machine of faciality can become. As Levi writes in *If This is a Man*:

> For the civilians we are the untouchables. More or less explicitly, and with all the nuances lying between contempt and pity, they think that, because we have been condemned to this life of ours, because we have been reduced to this condition, we must be tainted by some mysterious, grave sin. They hear us speak in many different languages, which they do not understand and which sound grotesque to them, like animal noises*; they see us as ignoble slaves, without hair, without honor, and without names,* beaten every day, more abject every day, and they never glimpse in our eyes a light of rebellion, or of peace, or of faith. They know us as thieving and untrustworthy, muddy, ragged, and starving, and, mistaking the effect for the cause, they judge us worthy of our abasement. *Who could tell one of our faces from another? For them we are Kazett, a neuter-singular noun.*[343]

Thanks to his unique concreteness, Levi highlighted the fragility of the human: we are humans when we appear such. Our humanity is hung by the sight of the others. Nothing in us is intrinsically human; we are simply organic matter as any other living beings on this planet. Yet, for Levi, such a humanity is what a civilisation should guarantee to any human-animal as member of the human species since this is exactly what uncivilization aimed instead to deny to the majority in the name of a privileged minority.[344] On the contrary, for Deleuze, the real issue is such a humanity, that is the face of a civilization which claims to be universal, whereas it is deeply established upon identitarian and discriminatory logics.[345] In other words, for Deleuze, to defend civilisation as we know is the same as defending the continual perpetration of an "ontological crime".[346] A crime caused by all those reactive

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[341] Cf. Esposito, *Third Person*, pp. 64ff.

[342] On the political newness of Deleuze's faciality see for instance Maira Colín García, *Deleuze's Politics of Faciality: Trump and American Exclusion*, in *Trump and Political Philosophy. Patriotism, Cosmopolitanism and Civic Virtue*, ed. Marc Benjamin Sable and Angel Jaramillo Torres, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 331-341.

[343] Levi, *Complete Works*, I, p. 115. Emphasis mine.

[344] Cf. Franco Baldasso, *Weightless Flight. Primo Levi and the "Break of Civilization"*, in «Nemla Italian Studies», XXXII/2009-2010, p. 71.

[345] Deleuze, *Conversation with Toni Negri Futur Anténeur* 1 (1990), in *Negotiation*, p. 173.

[346] From this point of view, Deleuze's critique of western civilization resembles Hanna Arendt's seminal critique of «Human Rights». Cf. Arendt, *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, part II, chap. IX («*The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man*»), pp. 267ff. As is known, Arendt's thesis will be resumed by Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer*. Cf. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, part III, chap. II (*Biopolitics and the Rights of Man*). Moreover, it is worthy to recall Foucault's more complex (in my opinion, even more interesting) position on the human rights. Although he denies the possibility to talk of a «human nature» (as humanism did), Foucault will never reject the not of human rights, instead preferring to contest it historical limits (always changeable and therefore extendible) and to maintains its political employment. As Foucault states: «Humanism may not be universal but may be quite relative to a certain situation. What we call humanism has been used by Marxists, liberals, Nazis, Catholics. This does not mean that we have to get rid of what we call human rights or freedom, but that we can't say that freedom or human rights has to be limited at certain frontiers.

forces which eventually «facialize» on a Christ who suffers, but makes all the "anti-Christs" suffer. Now, in my opinion, this is an unsolved crux of Deleuze's ontological reflection: Do these reactive forces belong to life? Can life be both active and reactive? I think Deleuze did not properly answered these questions. Indeed, I do believe that, due to Spinoza and Nietzsche, Deleuze remained trapped within a more or less explicit "intellectualism", according to which what is reactive is a tarnished perspective on life and, as such, needs to be brightened. "*To see fearlessly life for what it is*": this is the first step of Deleuze's ethics of joy. After all, there is nothing to be afraid of since life is an impersonal abyss of power from which we have everything to gain. Spinoza's main questions was: «Why are the people proud of their own enslavement?»[347] In summary, we always need a Spinoza, a Nietzsche, or even a Deleuze who come to tell us how things actually are. Someone who see power and freedom where others, affected more or less consciously by "reactivism", see a frightful chaos. This is how Deleuze employs Nietzsche's lesson: we were not born reactive; we became so when the «hatred of life» established their civilization.

What happened if we stop being afraid of life? What if we «dismantle» the face that the hatred of life laid on us? As Deleuze claims, «If the face is a politics, dismantling the face is also a politics involving real becomings, an entire becoming-clandestine.»[348] Nevertheless, «Dismantling the face is no mean affair. Madness is a definite danger […]. The organization of the face is a strong one.»[349] The practice of *becoming* is what we can counterpose to this very rigid system of signification. And, as we know, *becoming* means creation, and not re-establishing what we've lost. Nostalgia is a reactive passion.

> First, it is never a question of a return to… It is not a question of "returning" to the presignifying and presubjective semiotics of primitive peoples. We will always be failures at playing African or Indian, even Chinese, and no voyage to the South Seas, however arduous, will allow us to cross the wall, get out of the hole, or lose our face. We will never succeed in making ourselves a new primitive head and body, human, spiritual, and faceless. It would only be taking more photos and bouncing off the wall again. We will always find ourselves reterritorialized again.[350]

«We can't turn back»[351]: like Nietzsche, Deleuze sees the future of face beyond the "Human". As Deleuze claims, «Yes, the face has a great future, but only if it is destroyed, dismantled. On the road to the asignifying and asubjective.»[352]

> Earlier, when we contrasted the primitive, spiritual, human head with the inhuman face, we were falling victim to a nostalgia for a return or regression. In truth, there are only inhumanities, humans are made exclusively of inhumanities, but very different ones, of very different natures and speeds [...]. Beyond the face lies an altogether different inhumanity: no longer that of the primitive head, but of "probe-heads"; here, cutting edges of deterritorialization become operative and lines of deterritorialization positive and absolute, forming strange new becomings, new polyvocalities. Become clandestine, make rhizome everywhere, for the wonder of a nonhuman life to be created.[353]

For instance, if you asked eighty years ago if feminine virtue was part of universal humanism, everyone would have answered yes.» Cf. Rux Martin, *Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault* (1982), in *Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, p. 15. See also, Michel Foucault, *What is Enlightenment?* (1984), in *The Foucault Reader*, pp. 43-50.

[347] Deleuze, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 10.

[348] Id., *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 188.

[349] Ibidem.

[350] Ibidem.

[351] Ibidem, p. 189.

[352] Ibidem, p. 171.

[353] Ibidem, pp. 190-191.

An inhuman face beyond the human. An active faciality. We already know what this face looks like: it is the *powerful animal*'s. The *powerful animal* is the face of a bundle of intensity who demands to express and experience their difference and who cannot really accept that someone else, from above, decides upon their life. In this (re)affirmation of the *powerful animal* there is all the creativity and indeterminateness which the living is capable of. Power of the living and power of life: this is the circularity grounding Deleuze's ethics of difference.

However, now that the *powerful animal* has finally found the proper ontology wherein they can express their overflowing vitality, we cannot avoid remembering that such a triumph of life lies upon a great premise: that the *suffering animal* falls silent. Yet, for all this time, the *powerful animal* did not realize that, like them, the *suffering animal* revolts against a God who wants to decide upon their life. Above all, the *powerful animal* does not understand that the *suffering animal* does not simply demand to be what they are. The *suffering animal* can even go to demands not to be, to refute life when it gets meaningless. Perhaps, as Simona Forti pointed out, «nowadays, the real difference is that between a philosophy which exalts the power of life to prevent the power of life, and a philosophy which claims their inevitable complementarity.»[354]

I do think that this is exactly what Deleuze deeply misunderstood about the materialist tradition of the *suffering animal* when, by following Nietzsche, he charged it with «clerical atheism.». The *suffering animal* is not the face of Christ. The *suffering animal* is rather a face who promises us nothings better than this fragile life. Christ was more powerful than what he revealed – even Nietzsche suspected it.[355] On their part, the *suffering animal* rather suffer for nothing and what they can only promise us is the abyss of meaninglessness, the true impersonal where we lost everything and gain nothing. Unlike the *powerful animal*, the *suffering animal* stopped believing in that wicked and inegalitarian God who bears the name of life.

[354] Forti, *Strategie di decostruzione della nuda vita*, p. 37. Translation mine.
[355] Cf. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*.

Conclusion

One To One.
The Powerful Animal Encounters the Suffering Animal

> It isn't true that Nature always knows best. Nature doesn't know or care what it does or to who, sometimes it's the birds and the flowers and sometimes it's an old Jewish woman on the seventh floor who can't get down the stairs anymore.
>
> Romain Gary[1]

> Let me tell you, there is a writer I recently read who affected me greatly on this topic. I believe that one of the great motifs in art and thought is a certain "shame of being a man" (*la honte d'être un homme*). I think that Primo Levi is that writer and artist who has expressed this most profoundly. He was able to speak of this "shame of being a man" in an extremely profound book because he wrote it following his return from the Nazi death camps. Levi said, "Yes, when I was freed, the dominant feeling was one of 'the shame at being a man'." It's a statement, I believe, that's at once quite splendid, very beautiful, and not at all abstract, it's quite concrete, "the shame of being a man." But this does not mean certain stupidities that some people might like to have it mean. It does not mean that we are all assassins, that we are all guilty, for example, all guilty of Nazism. Levi says it admirably: it doesn't mean that the executioners and the victims are all the same… You can't make us believe that. There are a lot of people who maintain, "Oh yes, we are all guilty"… No, no, no, nothing of the sort… There will not be any confusion between the executioner and the victim. So "the shame of being a man" does not mean that we are all the same, that we are all compromised, etc. It means, I believe, several things. It's a very complex feeling, not a unified feeling. "The shame of being a man" means at once how could men do that (*hommes*) - *some* men, that is, others than me - how could they do that? And second, how have I myself nonetheless taken sides? I didn't become an executioner, but I still took sides to have survived, and there is a certain shame in having survived in the place of certain friends who did not survive. *So it's therefore an extremely composite feeling, "the shame of being a man", and I believe that at the basis of art, there is this idea or this very strong feeling of shame of being a man that results in art consisting of liberating the life that men have imprisoned. Men never cease imprisoning life, they never cease killing life - "the shame of being a man". The artist is the one who liberates a life, a powerful life, a life [that's] more than personal, it's not his/her life* […]. [2]

And in the end, Gilles Deleuze encounters Primo Levi. The voice *R as Resistance* of the *Abécédaire*, recorded on June the 3rd 1989, is the first chronological occurrence within Deleuze's works concerning Primo Levi. Here, Deleuze claims to have «recently» read Primo Levi, whose 1986 *The Drowned and the Saved* was translated in French in March 1989.[3] Therefore, at the time of the *Abécédaire*, Levi's last work represents a very recent reading by which Deleuze himself has been «greatly affected.» As Dominic Smith pointed out, Primo Levi is one of the last «prominent figures» that Deleuze's encounters in his ethical research; an «apparently minor figure» destined to assume a very «critical importance.»[4] Deleuze's ethics of affection, i.e., the empirical apprenticeship made of good and bad encounters, characterizes also his own research methodology. In fact, as we noticed so far, Deleuze lets himself be affected by the philosophical figures he encounters, taking or rejecting from them concepts and insights whereby building his own philosophical proposal.

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[1] Romain Gary (as Emile Ajar), *Momo*, New York, Doubleday, 1978, p. 97.
[2] Gilles Deleuze, *R as Resistance*, in *Abécédaire*. Text available at <https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/seminars/gilles-deleuze-abc-primer/lecture-recording-3-n-z>. Emphasis mine.
[3] Cf. Primo Levi, *Les naufragés et les rescapées. Quarante ans après Auschwitz*, trad. André Maugé, Paris, Gallimard, 1989.
[4] Dominic Smith, *Deleuze's Ethics of Reading*, in «Angelaki», 3/2007, p. 40.

From Primo Levi, Deleuze takes the concept of «shame»[5] or, more precisely, the concept of «shame of being a man.» According to Deleuze, by his testimony on Nazi death camps[6], Levi provides us with a very «concrete» description of the «complex feeling» of shame that we might have before the evil which we human beings turn out to be capable of. Albeit his encounter with Levi is still fresh, Deleuze proves to have understood the vertiginous depth of Levi's view. Indeed, the «shame of being a man» is bidirectional: it goes towards the evil that other humans commit, and then towards ourselves since we perceive to be somehow involved in such an evil. Hence, the «same of being man» is a vast feeling which ends up embracing both the executioners and the victims. Yet, by following Levi' admonishment, Deleuze promptly underlines that this «doesn't mean that the executioners and the victims are all the same.» Unlike what Agamben will wrongly maintain in 1998 *Remnants of Auschwitz* regarding Levi's notion of «gray zone»[7], Deleuze understands that the «shame of being a man» does not entail a commonality of guilts, the interchange of the victims with the executioners and vice versa. As Deleuze points out, Levi talks of something more abyssal which questions the foundation of ethics: «I didn't become an executioner, but I still took sides to have survived, and there is a certain shame in having survived in the place of certain friends who did not survive.» In the third chapter, I have attempted to deepen the ethical and ontological consequences of Levi's perspective. The way Deleuze processes it is symptomatic of his tendency to take other's concept to reinforce further his own philosophical proposal:

> *I believe that at the basis of art, there is this idea or this very strong feeling of shame of being a man that results in art consisting of liberating the life that men have imprisoned. Men never cease imprisoning life, they never cease killing life - "the shame of being a man." The artist is the one who liberates a life, a powerful life, a life [that's] more than personal, it's not* his/her *life.*

Hence, the «shame of being man» is the shame before the evil human beings commit anytime they «imprison» life. On their side, artists are those who succeed in liberating the impersonal power of life.

> [Levi] committed suicide personally… Ah yes, ah yes, he could no longer hold on, so he committed suicide to his personal life. But, there are four pages or twelve pages or a hundred pages of Primo Levi that will remain, that will remain eternal resistances, so it happens this way. And it's even more… I am talking about "the shame of being a man", but it's not even in the grandiose sense of Primo Levi, you understand? Because if one dares to say something of this sort, for each of us in daily life, there are minuscule events that inspire in us this shame of being a man. We witness a scene in which someone has really been too vulgar, we don't make a big thing of it, but we are upset, upset for the other, we are upset for ourselves because we seem nearly to accept this. Here again, we almost make some sort of compromise. But if we protest, saying "what you're saying is base, shameful" a big drama gets made out of it, and we're caught, and we feel - it doesn't at all compare with Auschwitz - but even on this minuscule

[5] Ibidem, p. 42.

[6] As Deleuze states: «[Levi] was able to speak of this "shame of being a man" in an extremely profound book because he wrote it following his return from the Nazi death camps.» It is not clear here whether Deleuze is alluding to *If this is a man*.

[7] Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 21: «The unprecedented discovery made by Levi at Auschwitz concerns an area that is independent of every establishment of responsibility, an area in which Levi succeeded in isolating something like a new ethical element. Levi calls it the "gray zone". It is the zone in which the "long chain of conjunction between victim and executioner" comes loose, where the oppressed becomes oppressor and the executioner in turn appears as victim. A gray, incessant alchemy in which good and evil and, along with them, all the metals of traditional ethics reach their point of fusion. What is at issue here, therefore, is a zone of irresponsibility and *"impotentia judicandi*" that is situated not beyond good and evil but rather, so to speak, before them.»

> level, there is a small shame of being a man. If one doesn't feel that shame, there is no reason to create art.[8]

Levi's art is the impersonal life that survive his personal life. The feeling of «shame» is the trigger of art, is what makes us perceive that there is something wrong, something constraining, in the forms of life we are constantly immersed in.

The second occurrence concerning Primo Levi is a 1990 conversation with Toni Negri, successively included in 1990 *Negotiations.*

> I was very struck by all the passages in Primo Levi where he explains that Nazi camps have given us "a shame at being human". Not, he says, that we're all responsible for Nazism, as some would have us believe, but that we've all been tainted by it: even the survivors of the camps had to make compromises with it, if only to survive. There's the shame of there being men who became Nazis; the shame of being unable, not seeing how, to stop it; the shame of having compromised with it; there's the whole of what Primo Levi calls this "gray area". And we can feel shame at being human in utterly trivial situations, too: in the face of too great a vulgarization of thinking, in the face of TV entertainment, of a ministerial speech, of "jolly people" gossiping. This is one of the most powerful incentives toward philosophy, and it's what makes all philosophy political. In capitalism only one thing is universal, the market. There's no universal state, precisely because there's a universal market of which states are the centers, the trading floors. But the market's not universalizing, homogenizing, it's an extraordinary generator of both wealth and misery. A concern for human rights shouldn't lead us to extol the "joys" of the liberal capitalism of which they're an integral part. There's no democratic state that's not compromised to the very core by its part in generating human misery. What's so shameful is that we've no sure way of maintaining becomings, or still more of arousing them, even within ourselves. How any group will turn out, how it will fall back into history, presents a constant "concern". There's no longer any image of proletarians around of which it's just a matter of becoming conscious.[9]

During the conversation with Toni Negri, Deleuze inflects Levi's concept of «shame at being human» within a more political frame. Here, the traces of shame we can glimpse in the everyday life are the traces of deeper contradictions which liberal capitalism is established upon. We western live within a society where wealth and poverty, human rights and human misery, entail one another in a twisted play of compromises. And such compromises are what prevent us from «maintaining becoming», keeping us instead unmovable in points of saturation (our compromises in return for the illusory joy provided by capitalism) which kill the power of life, our inner vital power. Therefore, once again, Deleuze uses Levi's concept of shame not only to denounce the restraining force that our society exercise towards our lives, but also to pinpoint in it the cause of the political evil surrounding us. Hence, if we combine the conversation with Negri with the passages of the *Abécédaire*, then Auschwitz ends up representing for Deleuze the extreme peak recently reached by the human tendency to kill life. In few words, for Deleuze, Auschwitz is the place where the impersonal power of life is supremely denied: the more we restrain life, the more we produced death. Auschwitz, Christianity and Capitalism, they all stand at the same side of history; that history of the West where life is glorified right to be dominated. Given this state of things, liberation can only come from art or, better, from an individual or collective life assumed as form of art that, by lettings life exploding, dissolves the forms of subjectification we are constrained to. We must *re-become* explosive bundles of power. We must overcome the "body with organs" we were given, and *become* that unpredictable event we *can* all be as living expression of a wider and deeper powerful life.

> It definitely makes sense to look at the various ways individuals and groups constitute themselves as subjects through processes of subjectification: what counts in such processes is the extent to which, as they take shape, they elude both established forms of knowledge and the dominant forms of power. Even

[8] Deleuze, *R as Resistance*.
[9] Deleuze, *Conversation with Toni Negri*, in *Negotiations*, pp. 172-173.

> if they in turn engender new forms of power or become assimilated into new forms of knowledge. For a while, though, they have a real rebellious spontaneity. This is nothing to do with going back to "the subject", that is, to something invested with duties, power, and knowledge. One might equally well speak of new kinds of event, rather than processes of subjectification: events that can't be explained by the situations that give rise to them, or into which they lead. They appear for a moment, and it's that moment that matters, it's the chance we must seize […]. What we most lack is a belief in the world, we've quite lost the world, it's been taken from us. If you believe in the world you precipitate events, however inconspicuous, that elude control, you engender new space-times, however small their surface or volume. It's what you call *pietas.* Our ability to resist control, or our submission to it, has to be assessed at the level of our every move. We need both creativity *and* a people.[10]

We find the third and final occurrence[11] in 1991 *What is Philosophy?*, where Deleuze's interpretation of Primo Levi finally assumes a more precise and focused account. Both in the *Abécédaire* and in the conversation with Negri, Deleuze's discourse on Levi is extemporaneous, not well defined. Indeed, in these two first occurrences, we can really witness a fresh encounter that really impressed Deleuze, an unexpected discovery that makes him think. Yet, my impression is that Deleuze is not at ease with such a discovery: he reads Levi (probably again and again) seeking in him a confirmation of his view, but something is not quite right. As if Levi is forcing Deleuze to deal with the question he has hitherto attempted to dodge.

In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze mentioned Primo Levi again within his critique of modern partnership between capitalism and liberal democracy.

> If there is no universal democratic State, despite German philosophy's dream of foundation, it is because the market is the only thing that is universal in capitalism […]. It is as if the deterritorialization of States tempered that of capital and provided it with compensatory reterritorializations. Now, models of realization may be very diverse (democratic, dictatorial, totalitarian), they may be really heterogeneous, but they are nonetheless isomorphous with regard to the world market insofar as the latter not only presupposes but produces determinate inequalities of development. That is why, as has often been noted, democratic States are so bound up with, and compromised by, dictatorial States that the defense of human rights must necessarily take up the internal criticism of every democracy […]. Of course, there is no reason to believe that we can no longer think after Auschwitz, or that we are all responsible for Nazism in an unwholesome culpability that, moreover, would only affect the victims. As Primo Levi said, they will not make us confuse the victims with the executioners. But, he says, what Nazism and the camps inspire in us is much more or much less: "the shame of being a man" (because even the survivors had to collude, to compromise themselves). It is not only our States but each of us, every democrat, who finds him or herself not responsible for Nazism but sullied by it.[12]

Hence, in Deleuze, Primo Levi's *gray zone* is of help to stress the fact that we democrats live immersed in a social-political context which overflows with evil, and even though we are not directly responsible for it, we are somehow «sullied» by it. And we are aware of it, despite all the excuses we might find, since deep inside of us there is that «shame of being man» which ethically nails us into the situation we happen to live. Evil surrounds us, albeit we delude ourselves into living in a society established on "human rights", that is purified by what Foucault in his preface to Deleuze's and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* named «fascism in us

[10] Ibidem, p. 176.

[11] In truth, we find the very last, albeit implicit, reference to Primo Levi in 1993 essay *Literature and Life*, where Deleuze writes: «Writing is inseparable from becoming: in writing, one becomes-woman, becomes-animal or vegetable, becomes-molecule to the point of becoming-imperceptible […]. Becoming does not move in the other direction, and one does not become Man, insofar as man presents himself as a dominant form of expression that claims to impose itself on all matter, whereas woman, animal, or molecule always has a component of flight that escapes its own formalization. *The shame of being a man – is there any better reason to write?*» Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Literature and Life*, in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, p. 1. Emphasis mine. I would like to thanks Stefano Bellin for this precious suggestion.

[12] Deleuze, Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, pp. 106-107.

all», the fascism «in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.»[13] As Deleuze claims:

> Human rights are axioms. They can coexist on the market with many other axioms, notably those concerning the security of property, which are unaware of or suspend them even more than they contradict them: "the impure mixture or the impure side by side", said Nietzsche. Who but the police and armed forces that coexist with democracies can control and manage poverty and the deterritorialization-reterritorialization of shanty towns? What social democracy has not given the order to fire when the poor come out of their territory or ghetto? Rights save neither men nor a philosophy that is reterritorialized on the democratic State. Human rights will not make us bless capitalism […]. Human rights say nothing about the immanent modes of existence of people provided with rights. Nor is it only in the extreme situations described by Primo Levi that we experience the shame of being human. We also experience it in insignificant conditions, before the meanness and vulgarity of existence that haunts democracies, before the propagation of these modes of existence and of thought-for-the market, and before the values, ideals, and opinions of our time. The ignominy of the possibilities of life that we are offered appears within. We do not feel ourselves outside of our time but continue undergo shameful compromises with it. *This feeling of shame is one of philosophy's most powerful motifs. We are not responsible for the he victims but responsible before them. And there is no way to escape the ignoble but to play the part of the animal (to growl, burrow, snigger, distort ourselves): thought itself is sometimes closer to an animal that dies than to a living, even democratic, human being.*[14]

Here Deleuze finally defines more precisely the outstanding insights of the *Abécédaire* and of *Negotiations*. Primo Levi represents the textual and conceptual reference which leads Deleuze's ethical reflection to the deepest point: «*We do not feel ourselves outside of our time but continue undergo shameful compromises with it*.» And such a feeling of shame lying on the bottom of our everyday experience is «*one of philosophy's most powerful motifs*.» Yet, the conclusive statement of theses passages devoted to Primo Levi embodies a false note that distorts the «rhythm» of Deleuze's line of reasoning: «*We are not responsible for the he victims but responsible before them. And there is no way to escape the ignoble but to play the part of the animal (to growl, burrow, snigger, distort ourselves): thought itself is sometimes closer to an animal that dies than to a living, even democratic, human being.*» Is evil, the political evil, assuming the role of agent of our *becoming-animal*? Is the «shame of being a man» the impersonal ground wherefrom we can draw the push to overcome the compromised subjectivities which disconnect us from «our time» and our fellows[15]?

> Artaud said: to write *for* the illiterate-to speak for the aphasic, to think for the acephalous. But what does "for" mean? It is not "for their benefit", or yet "in their place". It is "before". It is a question of becoming […]. We become animal so that the animal also becomes something else. *The agony of a rat or the slaughter of a calf remains present in thought not through pity but as the zone of exchange between man and animal in which something of one passes into the other*. This is the constitutive relationship of philosophy with nonphilosophy. *Becoming is always double*, and it is this double becoming that constitutes the people to come and the new earth.[16]

«Becoming is always double.» In the fourth chapter, I questioned the validity of such a statement. In fact, if we attain to the premises of Deleuze's argument, *becoming-animal* is a unilateral movement where human beings draw power from the animals to become, whereas, on their side, animals remain still in their "disposable power". Now, Deleuze seems to suggest that suffering - «*the agony of a rat or the slaughter of a calf*» - is what makes

[13] Idd., *Anti-Oedipus*, p. XIII.
[14] Idd., *What is Philosophy*, pp. 107-108. Emphasis mine.
[15] Barber, *Deleuze and the Naming of God*, p. 164.
[16] Deleuze, Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, p. 109. Emphasis mine.

becoming double, what establishes a terrain of proximity between two poles: the *shameful human being* and the *suffering animal*.

> A people can only he created in abominable sufferings, and it cannot be concerned any more with art or philosophy. But books of philosophy and works of art also contain their sum of unimaginable sufferings that forewarn of the advent of a people. *They have resistance in common - their resistance to death, to servitude, to the intolerable, to shame, and to the present*.[17]

Deleuze already touched upon this question in his 1981 monography on Francis Bacon, where the theme of «faciality» acquired an even more conceptual depth. As Deleuze claims:

> Pity the meat! Meat is undoubtedly the chief object of Bacon's pity, his only object of pity, *his Anglo-Irish pity*. On this point he is like Soutine, with his immense pity for the Jew. Meat is not dead flesh; it retains all the suffering and assumes all the colors of living flesh. It manifests such convulsive pain and vulnerability, but also such delightful invention, color, and acrobatics. Bacon does not say, "Pity the beasts", but rather that every man who suffers is a piece of meat. *Meat is the common zone of man and the beast, their zone of indiscernibility*; it is a "fact", a state where the painter identifies with the object of his horror and his compassion […]. This is not an arrangement of man and beast, nor a resemblance; it is a deep identity, a zone of indiscernibility more profound than any sentimental identification: *the man who suffers is a beast, the beast that suffers is a man. This is the reality of becoming.*[18]

I think it is impossible not to observe a certain discordance with the understanding of *becoming* Deleuze outlined in 1980 *A Thousand Plateau*. If, in *A Thousand Plateau*, power provided the common ground whereon establishing the practice of becoming, in *Logic of sensation*, meat, i.e., the constitutive vulnerability of the living, becomes instead «the common zone of man and the beast», going even to state that «the man who suffers is a beast, the beast that suffers is a man. This is the reality of becoming.» Can the Spinozist-Nietzschean Deleuze end up establishing becoming, that is ethics, on a reactive passion? To make ends meet, Deleuze eventually turns out to the "Nietzschean clause" which denies «pity» the power to re-establish a lost solidarity among living beings. As he states in *What is Philosophy?*: «The agony of a rat or the slaughter of a calf remains present in thought *not through pity* but as the zone of exchange between man and animal in which something of one passes into the other» (after all, also «Bacon does not say, "Pity the beasts", but rather that every man who suffers is a piece of meat»). It is a fundamental clarification which helps Deleuze to maintain his discourse on becoming on the Spinoza-Nietzsche axis.

When Deleuze meets Primo Levi, he is assaulted by so many powerful images of extreme suffering that his "faith in power" seems to waver. Yet, he promptly recovers Nietzsche's admonishment: suffering exists, we cannot deny it, but we must push back pity. It is a matter of making suffering active. Evidently, Deleuze has Nietzsche's third unfashionable observation clear in his mind:

> Human beings of greater profundity have always felt compassion with animals precisely because they suffer from life and yet do not possess the strength to turn the sting of suffering against themselves and understand their existence metaphysically; indeed, the sight of senseless suffering arouses profound indignation […]. To cling so blindly and madly to life, for no higher reward, far from knowing that one is punished or why one is punished in this way, but instead to thirst with the inanity of a horrible desire for precisely this punishment as though it were happiness that is what it means to be an animal. And if all of nature presses onward toward the human being, then in doing so it makes evident that he is necessary for its salvation from animal existence and that in him, finally, existence holds before itself a mirror in which life no longer appears senseless but appears, rather, in its metaphysical meaningfulness. *But consider carefully: where does the animal cease, where does the human being begin! That human*

[17] Ibidem, p. 110. Emphasis mine.
[18] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: the Logic of Sensation*, New York, Continuum, 2004, pp. 23-25. Emphasis mine.

> *being who is nature's sole concern! As long as someone desires life as he desires happiness, he has not elevated his gaze above the horizon of the animal, the only difference being that he desires with more awareness what the animal craves out of blind instinct. But for the greatest part of our lives this is the way it is for all of us: usually we do not transcend animality, we ourselves are those creatures who seem to suffer senselessly*.[19]

If we experience the evil of the world through the lens of pity, we risk remaining entrapped in animals' «inanity», where suffering always wins on happiness and, therefore, eventually appears meaningless. Pity makes us weaker, miserable utilitarian, as the majority of humankind is. Yet, what does the recognition of suffering beyond pity consist of? How can we, suffering animals, understand our suffering «above the horizon of the animal»? In other words, how can we draw power from suffering in order to become something superior both to animals and to the majority of our fellow humans? As Nietzsche finally claims in *Schopenhauer as Educator*:

> As I said, now and again we realize all of this and are quite astonished at all this dizzying fear and haste and at the entire dreamlike state of our life, which seems to dread awakening and whose dreams become all the more vivid and restless the closer it comes to this awakening. But we simultaneously feel that we are too weak to endure those moments of deepest communion very long and that we are not those human beings toward which all of nature presses onward for its own salvation. It is already no small achievement that we can at least sometimes manage to lift our heads enough to notice the stream in which we are so deeply submerged. And we do not accomplish even this-this coming to the surface and awakening for a fleeting instant-by means of our own strength. We have to be lifted up, and who are those who lift us up? They are those true *human beings, those no-longer-animals, the philosophers, artists, and saints*; with their appearance and by means of their appearance, nature, which never leaps, takes its only leap; and it is a leap of joy, for it feels that for the first time it has arrived at its goal, arrived at that place where it realizes that it must unlearn its goals and that it staked too much on the game of living and becoming. With this recognition, nature is transfigured, and a gentle weariness of evening - what human beings call "beauty" - spreads across its face. What it now expresses with these transfigured features is the great *enlightenment* about existence, and the supreme wish that mortals can wish is to participate constantly and with open ears in this enlightenment.[20]

This is the undeniable inegalitarian facet of Nietzsche's understanding of the human-animal relationship. Indeed, while denying animals the possibility to give meaning to their sufferance, Nietzsche ends up including in such an inane animality the majority of human-animals who, as he maintains, live their life seeking happiness because afraid of suffering. In other words, like animals, most of the humankind is incapable of facing the tragedy of life powerfully, with that brave distance typical of those few individuals who really fulfil the existential potentiality of the human. Yet, this true power which grants «great *enlightenment* about existence» can be only prerogative of few superior individuals. Hence, once again, this seems to be the Nietzschean understanding of difference: *we are all powers, but there are powers more powerful than others*. And, as "humanity" is not a positive value for Nietzsche, *only few human-animals eventually can become over-humans*. Nietzsche's will to power can be surely considered a differential principle, but it constitutively tends towards justify and establishing inequalities and, thus, hierarchies which decide upon the humanity or the inhumanity (animality) even among individuals of the same group. By doing so, Nietzsche's view is not as different as that of humanism or any other metaphysics that cannot do without thinking of difference vertically rather than horizontally.

In my opinion, Deleuze's philosophy of difference remains affected by Nietzsche's blatant inegalitarianism, albeit inequality is its very enemy. And this because of Deleuze's tenacious faith in power. As we noticed in the fourth chapter, by turning largely to Spinoza,

[19] Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*, III/5, p. 209-210.
[20] Ibidem, pp. 211-212.

and by harshly criticizing social-cultural structures of Capitalism, Deleuze is convinced of having appeased enough Nietzsche's aristocratic notion of the will to power, making the latter a differentiating principle acting on a horizontal plane of immanence. Nevertheless, we have amply witnessed so far how the category of power easily ends up assuming an inegalitarian account anytime it is to face the problem of evil. In other words, I do think that the category of power itself is the real problem: *power cannot manage the narrow line which separates difference and inequality*. In my opinion, this is the hardest task of a philosophy of difference: to think of difference as an ethical resource, a positive element, acknowledging though its endemic tendency to verticalize. Before being an ethical solution, difference represents an ethical issue. In my opinion, Deleuze's mistakes consist in having processed difference as an "innocent positive", an ontological data intrinsically ethical. To do so, Deleuze centred his philosophy of difference on the notion of power, the latter considered both as the "essence-becoming" of individuals and as the ontological principle of differentiation. In other words, for Deleuze, the movement of differentiation characterizing the very structure of being, if let free to be, would "naturally" produce a dynamic horizontal line made of intensities of power. From this point of view, Nietzsche was not only more unscrupulous, but also less naïve about the goodness of difference. Indeed, for Nietzsche, differences "naturally" tends to verticalize, that is to establish inevitable inequalities, and, therefore, ethics consists but in taking advantage of such an upwards push to liberate ourselves from the reactive forces pushing us downwards. We are different because we are not equal; although we are all endowed with power, our powers, right because different, are not the same. This is the harsh truth about life Nietzsche accepted without reservation, that is without turning to a *bio-dicy* which justifies an evil that we should rather accept pitilessly. As Nietzsche states in a fragment from 1885:

> There is no egoism at all that stays within itself and does not overreach - consequently that "permissible", "morally indifferent" egoism of which you speak does not exist at all. One promotes one's ego constantly at "the expense of another"; life always lives at the expense of other life. – Whoever does not comprehend this has not yet taken the first personal step toward honesty.[21]

Deleuze's attempted instead to find in the very structure of difference the spontaneous (or natural) production of a horizontal line. To do so, he needed to make difference incapable of producing disparities. This explains his stubborn research for an ontological solidarity where differences could coexist as individual expressions of the harmonious One-Whole. In my opinion, this is the raw nerve of Deleuze's «louminus philosophy»[22], a point of vulnerability that the encounter with Primo Levi finally brought to light. Because Deleuze is basically asking us to gamble on the sympathetic potentialities of the bond between difference and power.

When Deleuze encounters Primo Levi, the "shame of being a man" appears to be the shame for an evil, so to speak, "external" to life. Not the "evil of life", but an "evil against life". Hence, Deleuze believes to have found in Levi a confirmation to the possibility to separate life and evil not on the empirical plane – the "fact" of evil is obviously undeniable for Deleuze[23] -, but rather on the practical level, that is to establish ethics only on those vital

[21] Nietzsche, *Unpublished Fragments (Spring 1885 – Spring 1886*, 2 [205], p. 401.
[22] Hanjo Berressem, *Gilles Deleuze's Luminous Philosophy*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, p. 35: «Even in the face of the most horrible wars, of illness, of pain and of death, Deleuze's philosophy never wavers. All horrors, many of which Deleuze knows all too intimately and talks about with great passion and compassion, are immanent to the positivity and luminosity of a more profound anonymous life.»
[23] Ibidem, p.1: «Although Deleuze's thought never shies away from coldness and cruelty, and although it knows pain, illness, suffering and death on a very intimate and personal level, it is never on the side of and it never celebrates negativity, or what Spinoza would consider to be bad encounters. It is a fundamentally positive thought. There is no dark romanticism in Deleuze's philosophy. No apocalypticism.»

forces which produce joy, individually or collectively.[24] Primo Levi would have had something to object about.

Now, Deleuze clearly applies to Levi the typical "play of accents" which characterizes his hermeneutical methodology. Nevertheless, I do think that, this time, his conceptual operation is not as successful as it has been elsewhere, even in the case of thinkers more technical and obscure than Levi. In few words, my impression is that Deleuze's attempt to insert Levi within his theoretical cartography eventually failed. In order to understand this, I think it might be useful to inspect more closely the pages of Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* constantly recalled by Deleuze starting from 1989. First, Deleuze refers to Levi's complex notion of «gray zone», according to which, the condition of possibility of an extreme political evil such as Auschwitz lies in the collaboration of the many, even that of the very victims of the concentration camps. As we noticed before, Deleuze's proves to have understood the main presupposition of Levi's view: the «gray zone» does not represent an area of confusion or indifference, but rather the attempt to define the intricate field of power relationships which make the fundamental dualism between victims and executioners possible and effective. As Levi claims:

> It should be clear that the greatest fault lies with the system, the very structure of the totalitarian state. The criminal complicity of individual collaborators, great and small (never friendly, never transparent!), is always difficult to evaluate. We would prefer to entrust that judgment only to people who have been in similar circumstances and experienced for themselves what it means to act under coercion. Manzoni understood this condition all too well: "The troublemakers, the oppressors, all those who do harm of any sort to others, are guilty not only of the evil they do but also of the perversion of their victims' minds". The condition of victimhood does not exclude guilt, which is often objectively serious, but I do not know a human court that could be delegated to take its measure. If it were up to me, if I had to judge, I would freely absolve anyone whose complicity in the crime was minimal and whose coercion was maximal.[25]

However, Deleuze's interpretation mostly focuses on the chapter *Shame* of *The Drowned and the Saved*. This focus is indicative of Deleuze's philosophical sensitivity which, by following Spinoza and Nietzsche, thinks of ethics starting from the deepest "passions" that harbour in the «human mind.» Therefore, unlike a certain well-established cliché, Deleuze quickly understands that the real philosophical significance of Levi's ethics does not simply lie in his radical rationalism (masterfully testified by the pages devoted to the «gray zone»), but also and especially in his "moralist" ability to inspect in depth the passional world at the base of human behaviour. In the chapter *Shame*, Levi attempts to provide an explanation for the «absurd», not to say paradoxical, «shame» that former inmates of the Lager felt once liberated. Levi goes through «various explanation» which, as far as they prove to be rationally absurd, however they grip individuals' moral sense. As if the clear awareness of one's own innocence as victim forced to carry out shameful actions were not enough to relieve one's consciousness from the «contagion» of other's evil. This Manzonian idea of the «contagion of evil»[26] is what draws Deleuze's attention. Indeed, when he talks of «shame of being a man», Deleuze explicitly refers to the conclusive passages of *Shame*:

> There is another, greater shame, *the shame of the world*. In a memorable line, much quoted, in this regard and others, John Donne wrote that "No man is an island", and that every death bell tolls for us all. Yet there are those who turn their backs on their own transgressions and those of others, to avoid seeing or being touched by them. This is how most Germans behaved in the twelve years of Hitler, in the illusion that not seeing was not knowing, and that not knowing relieved them of their own share of complicity or connivance. But we were denied the shield of willful ignorance, T. S. Eliot's "partial shelter": we

[24] Lapoujade, *Deleuze, les mouvements aberrants*, chap. III.
[25] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, p. 2436.
[26] Ibidem, p. 2439. On the Manzonian theme of «contagion of evil» in Levi see Gian Paolo Biasin, *Contagio*, in *Primo Levi*, pp. 256-265, and Rondini, *Manzoni e Primo Levi*, pp. 72-78.

> could not not see. We were surrounded by the sea of suffering, past and present, and its level rose each year until it almost drowned us. There was no use closing our eyes or turning our backs, because it was all around us, in every direction, as far as the horizon. We could not or would not be islands: the righteous among us, whose number was neither higher nor lower than in any other human group, felt remorse, shame, and sorrow for the wrongs that were committed by others, not by them, but in which they felt implicated, because they felt that what had happened around them, in their presence, and in them was irrevocable. It could never be washed away. It would prove that man, the human race - we, in other words - was capable of building an infinite mass of suffering; and that suffering is the only force created from the void, with neither expense nor effort. All it takes is a refusal to see, to hear, and to act.[27]

Levi does not talk of «shame of being a man», as Deleuze rather suggests, but of «shame of the world.» In these conclusive passages, Levi radicalizes further his discourse on collaboration – which, as Levi himself admitted, resembles Arendt's theory of «banality of evil»[28] -, from a wider perspective, going event to question the very foundations of ethics: evil is everywhere, it is a constitutive feature of the world, of our experience. As we noticed, in Levi, Auschwitz does not represent an extraordinary event, but rather the political extremization of some precise latent ambiguities and tendencies within the everyday life made effective in plain sight, without correctives. This is a very complex aspect of Levi's reflection on Auschwitz. Indeed, Levi establishes a certain continuity between the political evil of Auschwitz and the natural evil produced by natural selection. Nevertheless, in the process that leads civil society towards Auschwitz, that is towards uncivilization, Levi pinpoints a breaking point: the ideological, juridical and moral apparatus of Fascism. Fascism aims to "re-naturalize" civilisation, to bring human society back to its true natural hierarchical order, but it ends up creating instead something "unnatural", something utterly artificial wherein the natural data is completely denied. Hence, for Levi, both fascism and nature foster inequality, even though the fundamental difference between the two consists in the absence in the first of those reversive forces that, in the second, allow a chance for equality. An equality that for Levi, unlike Deleuze, is given not by what we can express in terms of vital power. On the contrary, for Levi, here is where the spectre of inequality lies. For Levi, equality is given by «our basic fragility», by the only feature that all living beings have in common: their finitude, their being *suffering animal*. Levi would have been very skeptical towards *powerful animal*'s ode to life; he would have probably seen in it the typical arrogance of the lucky ones who have not face the fierce law of life yet. From this point of view, the conclusion of *The Gray Zone* probably represents the best expression of Levi's existential view:

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[27] Ibidem, pp. 2469-2470. Emphasis mine.

[28] Giorgio Segré, *Interview with Primo Levi (1979)*, in *The Voice of Memory*, pp. 269-270: «Things are complex at every stage. I would like to put together what I'd call a sociological analysis. Of course, I'm no sociologist or I'm an amateur at best. But I am a witness, I know and lived through the experience. I'd like to reestablish that experience as it was in its own terms. And in this context, the victim-torturer pair needs examining. We need to understand how the torturer becomes what he becomes. By what means. If he was really always a torturer or not. Perhaps he was simply someone who carried out all the tasks, gestures and acts of a torturer, but who in all other respects was just like us. In all probability that is how it was, and if so, it could not be more significant nor more sad. It is Hannah Arendt's thesis on the "banality of evil". Her idea is very close to what I'm saying, that the environment was much more important than intrinsic human nature. These were not monsters. I didn't see a single monster in my time in the camp. Instead I saw people like you and I who were acting in that way because there was Fascism, Nazism in Germany. Were some form of Fascism or Nazism to return, there would be people, like us, who would act in the same way, everywhere. And the same goes for the victims, for the particular behaviour of the victims about which so much has been said, most typically by young Israelis who object "but we would never act that way". They're right. They would not act that way. But if they had been born forty years earlier, they would have. They would have behaved exactly as the deported Jews - and, it's worth adding, the deported Russians and Italians and the rest.»

> Like Rumkowski, we, too, are so blinded by power and prestige that we forget our basic fragility. We make our deals with power, willingly or not, forgetting that we are all in the ghetto, that the ghetto is walled in, that outside the wall are the lords of death, and that not far away the train is waiting.[29]

When Levi talks of the political evil of Auschwitz, his discourse always entails a fundamental connection with the "natural evil within we human-animal" as natural beings. Because, for Levi, assuming the Darwinian view of the «human-animal» as an animal among animals means accepting a harsh but essential truth: that evil is part of us right because living beings. We make evil, we harm others (fellow humans or fellow animals), not because we are evil, but because evil is "in" our living matter. When Deleuze talks of *shame of being a man*, he surely sees this, but his understanding of evil still lies upon the idea of an ontological innocence. In Deleuze, life is a source of "good", of "joy", and evil is "simply" a bad encounter which we are to avoid or, in case we cannot (as death), to accept stoically.[30] Therefore, when Deleuze alludes to the delicate theme of the "shame of the survivor"[31] - «there is a certain shame in having survived in the place of certain friends who did not survive» -, he cannot see (or accept) that, on his side, Levi is rather talking of an ethical question which surely pertains to a certain moral-political order (that of fascism and that of capitalist societies as well), but which, in its anthropological and ontological foundations, pertains to live as such. As Levi write in *Shame*:

> Do you feel shame because you are alive in the place of someone else? A person more generous, sensitive, wise, useful, and worthy of living than you? You cannot exclude the possibility: you reexamine yourself, comb through your memories, hoping that you will find them all and that none have been camouflaged or disguised. You find no obvious transgressions. You did not take anyone's place, you did not beat anyone (but would you have had the strength?), you did not accept appointments (but none were offered), you did not steal anyone's bread. *Yet you cannot exclude the possibility. It's just a supposition, or, rather, the shadow of a doubt: that each is a Cain to his brother, that each of us (here I say "us" in a very broad—indeed, universal—sense) has betrayed his neighbor and is living in his place. It's a supposition, but it gnaws at you; it's nesting deep inside, like a worm. You cannot see it from the outside, but it gnaws, and it shrieks*.[32]

This is what makes Deleuze's use of Levi's concept of shame not convincing: *each is a Cain to his brother, each of us has betrayed his neighbor and is living in his place.* Levi's understanding of shame is strongly anchored to an utterly different understanding of life than Deleuze's. A Darwinian understanding of life which conceives ethics in opposition to the structural injustice of life. Not by chance, the question of atheism comes immediately after:

> After my return from the camps, I received a visit from an older friend, a mild-mannered and intransigent man, a follower of his own personal religion, which struck me, however, as severe and serious. He was happy to find me alive and, for the most part, unharmed, more mature and stronger, perhaps, and definitely more experienced. He told me that my survival could not be the result of chance, of an accumulation of lucky breaks (as I maintained then and still do), but was, rather, the work of Providence. I was one of the elect, the chosen: I, the nonbeliever, and even less of a believer after my time in Auschwitz, had been saved, touched by Grace. Why me, of all people? There is no way to know, he replied. Perhaps so that you would write, and through your writing bear witness: was I not in fact writing a book about my imprisonment right then, in 1946? This opinion struck me as monstrous. It hit a raw nerve and revived the doubts I described above: maybe I was alive in someone else's place, at someone

[29] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, p. 2456. Not by chance, the anaphoric repetition of the conjunction «that» resembles the conclusion of the third chapter of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* on «struggle for existence»: «When we reflect on this struggle, we may console ourselves with the full belief, that the war of nature is not incessant, that no fear is felt, that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply.» Cf. Darwin, *Origin of Species*, p. 6.
[30] Cf. Ryan J. Johnson, *Deleuze, A Stoic*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, pp. 227ff.
[31] Smith, *Deleuze's Ethics of Reading*, pp. 44-45.
[32] Levi, *Complete Works*, III, p. 2466. Emphasis mine.

else's expense. I might have supplanted him, in effect killed him. Those who were "saved" in the camps were not the best of us, the ones predestined to do good, the bearers of a message. What I had seen and experienced proved the exact opposite. Generally, those who survived were the worst: the egotists, the violent, the insensitive, the collaborators of the "gray zone", the informers. It was not a fixed rule (there were no fixed rules, nor are there in human affairs), but it was still a rule. I felt innocent, to be sure, but herded among the saved and thus in permanent search of a justification, in my own eyes and in the eyes of others. Those who survived were the worst, that is to say, the fittest. The best all died […]. My religious friend told me I had survived so that I could bear witness. And I did, to the best of my abilities, nor could I have done otherwise. And I still do, every time the occasion arises. But I am disturbed by the thought that bearing witness should have earned me the privilege of surviving and of living for many years without major problems, because I see no comparison between the privilege and the result.[33]

This is Levi's atheist image of the *inegalitarian God* which, as we noticed, provides the ontological ground for the *drowned-saved* binomial. The latter represents the keystone of Levi's thought, both the starting point and the landing place. Through the dynamics of drowning and of salvation, Levi depicts the fundamental injustice of history and of life: *To he who has, it will be given; from he who has not, it will be taken away*. Here is where the encounter between Levi and Deleuze, which at first suggested the possibility of a fruitful dialogue, eventually proves the existence of an irreconcilable disagreement. The category of power itself is at stake in Levi's view: *we do not come into world in the same way; there are the powerful ones and the weak ones*. A fundamental inequality, a «flaw of form», as Levi would name it, on which the mechanism of life rests. Finally, Levi assigns to this cosmic injustice an abyssal character questioning the possibility of life to provide a model of justice we might comply with. Indeed, as a committed Darwinian, Levi establishes the «fierce law» of life on chance: there is no motive, no hidden meaning, capable of accounting for such an injustice. This the abyssal character of life that Levi embraces to outline his ethical perspective: it is only a matter of «luck»; the distribution of power among living beings is a matter of luck. In few words, *there are the lucky ones and the unlucky ones*. This is why, in Levi's eyes – who, not by chance, could not stand Nietzsche's language -, the notion of power is ethically unreliable exactly because it is grounded on a "fault" which would entail the realist, not to say cynical, acceptance of such a fundamental inequality. Hence, Deleuze is right when he pinpoints in the "shame of being human" the core of Levi's ethics, but he leaves out – and this blindness is caused by Nietzsche – that such a shame rises from the awareness of the fact that one's «shameless luck» always corresponds to others' «constant misfortune.»[34] To be powerful, i.e., to be endowed with the vitality and the joy of life, is a privilege that only few are able to boast and perform. There is no room for everyone within the power of life.

The core of Levi's ethics is the face of the *drowned*, the individuals who are randomly excluded from the circuit of power. The *suffering animal* is the face calling for ethics, the face who constantly disturbs our «civilized consciousness.» As Levi writes in the 1984 poem *The Survivor*:

Since then, at an uncertain hour,/ That agony returns:/ And till his ghastly tale is told,/ His heart within him burns./ He sees his comrades' faces/ livid at first light,/ gray with cement dust,/ Vague in the mist,/ Dyed by death in their restless sleep:/ At night they grind their jaws/ Under the heavy burden of their dreams/ Chewing a nonexistent turnip./ "Back, away from here, drowned people,/ Go. I haven't stolen anyone's place,/ I haven't usurped the bread of anyone,/ No one died for me. No one./ Go back to your haze./ It's not my fault if I live and breathe/ And eat and drink and sleep and put on clothes.[35]

[33] Ibidem, pp. 2466-2467.
[34] Ibidem, I, p. 35.
[35] Ibidem, III, pp. 1966-1967. Emphasis mine.

The faces of the *drowned* anguishing our consciousness. For Levi, this is the central moment of ethics. An impersonal face whose only residual feature is suffering. Would Deleuze maintain that we should rather avoid such a bad encounter in the name of joy? Would it not be the same as the «refusal to see, to hear, and to act» which makes us be ashamed of being human?

In conclusion, I would like to ask: are the reactive passions that Deleuze's ethics of joy invites to run from what eventually provides the «moral backbone»[36] keeping us connected with life and its injustices? Perhaps, they are not "re-active" passions and, if they are, they seem so only for those who, deep inside of them, are actually afraid of suffering. Because, the *powerful animal* surely represents the best face of life, that for which is worth living. Yet, we might rightly suspect that their will to silence the *suffering animal* not only hides more fears towards life than what they would admit. It also suspiciously hides the will to unburden themselves from the incessant ethical demands coming from below. In my opinion, this is Nietzsche's and his past and present disciple's greatest mistake: when the moment of truth comes, compassion for other's suffering can be the only ethical resource capable of giving us the courage to act. The courage of being weak, as weak as all the living beings are in this fragile little planet where life painfully happened to evolve by chance.

[36] Ibidem, p. 2455.

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