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Abstract

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In *Animality in Contemporary Italian Philosophy*, Felice Cimatti and Carlo Salzani have assembled a number of superb essays that articulate a distinctively Italian philosophical approach to animal issues and animal studies. For those readers who come to animal philosophy primarily through Anglo-American analytic philosophy (for example, in the work of Peter Singer, Tom Regan, and Gary Francione) or through Continental-style animal studies (for example, in the writings of Jacques Derrida, Donna Haraway, and Cary Wolfe), this volume should be of serious interest – for not only does the Italian tradition explored here anticipate and intersect with major themes in both traditions, it also introduces novel themes and concepts that are important for considering the future of animal studies. My aim in this review is twofold: first, I provide a brief snapshot of what I take to be the main themes from each chapter that I think will be of most interest to readers of this journal; second, I consider the stakes and implications of the effort to establish a distinctively Italian approach to animal studies in view of other contemporary trends in the field.

Following a comprehensive and illuminating introduction from the editors, Felice Cimatti's opening chapter, 'Animality and Immanence in Italian Thought', sounds the keynote of the volume by laying out a bold vision for an alternative history of animal philosophy grounded in a distinctive Italian tradition. Cimatti argues that almost all animal philosophy takes Cartesianism as its starting point, by which he means the viewpoint promulgated by Descartes

that there is a strict binary opposition between human and animal based on the mind/body split central to his metaphysics. Although many contemporary animal philosophers oppose Cartesianism, Cimatti argues that their thinking still remains tributary to his insofar as anti-Cartesians try to disprove the Cartesian thesis by showing how animals do, in fact, have ‘mind’ in various ways (for example, in the form of consciousness, language, or agency) and to varying degrees. This approach unwittingly allows the Cartesian schema to continue to set the terms of the discussion and fails to open the space needed to envision alternative ontological formulations. Against both approaches, Cimatti elaborates and defends a minor, alternative Italian tradition that takes leave of the Cartesian climate for a fundamentally non-binary view of human beings and animals, one that he finds operative in figures ranging from St. Francis of Assisi and Dante Alighieri to Giacomo Leopardi and Giorgio Agamben. What binds together this Italian counter-history of philosophy is its commitment and attention to the rich diversity of animal life, which on Cimatti’s reading is the most effective way of moving beyond the Cartesian legacy and rethinking what human and animal life in common might be.

Luisella Battaglia’s ‘Aldo Capitini, Animal Ethics, and Nonviolence: The Expanding Circle’ examines the animal philosophy and advocacy of Aldo Capitini, a figure who certainly deserves more attention from Anglo-American audiences. Battaglia’s wide-ranging essay explores Capitini’s religious commitments, which issue in an ethic of sentience that applies to both human beings and animals alike. Capitini’s ‘open religion’ is no passive religion but one that encourages taking an active responsibility for the situation of others, contesting others’ unnecessary suffering, and recognizing that social reality is contingent and can be changed through resistance to the established order. Although Capitini’s approach might appear to have its secular counterpart in Singer’s utilitarian animal ethic, Battaglia rightly notes that Capitini’s work is much closer in spirit to the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas and to the care ethics approach of theorists like Josephine Donovan and Carol Adams. Battaglia also shows how Capitini’s focus on pain and suffering serves as the motor that generates his notion of an expanding normative circle, one that seeks to broaden the social circle to encompass oppressed human beings as well as sentient creatures beyond the species barrier.

‘What Is Italian Antispeciesism? An Overview of Recent Tendencies in Animal Advocacy’ by Giorgio Losi and Niccolò Bertuzzi examines the mainstream politics that emerge from this expanding circle vision of ethical consideration as well as more recent (and more radical) political movements that challenge the idea that there is any humanist or sentient centre to ethics and politics. Among the former movement, Losi and Bertuzzi showcase a number of thinkers who seek a place for pro-animal activism in the established neoliberal paradigm. This strategy amounts, in effect, to accepting that neoliberal capitalism is the only game in town (to borrow Richard Rorty’s characterization) and finding ways to ameliorate the worst effects of these structural forces on the lives of animals. The underlying strategy of this approach is largely reformist and involves such tactics as advocating for the adoption of vegan foods and so-called cruelty-free items in restaurants and stores. In addition to this sort of mainstream activism, Losi and Bertuzzi also note the increasing presence of a more radical approach to animal politics that is grounded in a different set of philosophical commitments. Rather than expanding the humanist paradigm to include animals, this more radical group of activists tends to see the human/animal distinction as a performative machine that brings into existence a boundary between human and animal that is by no means inevitable or permanent. The way beyond this machine, they argue, is not to expand its scope but to abandon altogether the search for human uniqueness. This perspective, Losi and Bertuzzi note, is consonant with the more radical politics of direct-action activists and has also created novel linkages among a variety of minoritarian struggles against anthropocentrism.

Carlo Salzani’s masterful chapter, ‘Beyond Human and Animal: Giorgio Agamben and Life as Potential’, develops a careful reading of Agamben’s *The Open*, one of the most influential pieces of Italian philosophy in animal studies. While Salzani acknowledges the force of many of the objections raised against Agamben’s work (his apparent anthropocentrism has been criticized at length by various authors), Salzani insists that Agamben’s project has important ramifications for animal studies and that we should be wary of dismissing his philosophy *tout court*. On Salzani’s reading, the rift between human and animal is not simply the concern of a single book by Agamben (namely, *The Open*) but in fact underpins his entire oeuvre, especially the explicitly biopolitical works. And insofar as Agamben seeks above all else to define a space for life beyond

the division of human and animal, one could suggest that concerns about animals and animality persist across the entire range of Agamben's inquiries. Read generously, as Salzani encourages us to do, Agamben's philosophy should be understood as seeking to return human life to a shared, immanent space with animals and our other earthly kin, characterized by Agamben in terms of living in and among the grass: 'Grass, grass is God. In grass – in God – are all those I have loved. For the grass and in grass and like grass I have lived and I will live' (Agamben, qtd in Salzani 109).

In 'Deconstructing the Dispositif of the Person: Animality and the Politics of Life in the Philosophy of Roberto Esposito', Matías Saidel and Diego Rossello argue that, although animality cannot be said to be the central concern of Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito's work, there are nonetheless important reasons for reading his work with animal issues in mind. In a rigorous analysis of Esposito's oeuvre, Saidel and Rossello demonstrate that Esposito's critique of immunitary politics ties the quest for immunity to the marginalization and destruction of animality with impunity; in this sense, Esposito's post-immunitary, affirmative biopolitics can be read as an effort to re-integrate animality with humanity and to heal the longstanding biopolitical fracture. Saidel and Rossello illustrate this general thesis through a reading of Esposito's use of two mythical figures in political philosophy: Machiavelli's Centaur and Hobbes's Leviathan. Saidel and Rossello note that, for Esposito, Machiavelli's philosophy draws no definitive line between humanity and animality, incorporating the two domains into a complex relational orbit; Hobbes, by contrast, characterizes the political domain as a site in which animality and the state of nature are to be left behind in favour of the constitution of a community of full (and fully human) persons. Esposito's work on the impersonal – a realm of existence that extends beyond and before persons and is thoroughly implicated in animality – can thus be understood as an outgrowth of a specifically Italian tradition running from Machiavelli to the present.

Giovanni Leghissa's contribution, 'Animality Between Italian Theory and Posthumanism', takes up the question of the relevance of posthumanism to questions concerning animals. For Leghissa, posthumanism's focus on the intersection of living being and machine has, despite its transformative potential, allowed the question of human propriety to persist and

occupy the centre of theoretical reflection. By contrast, with recent work in ethology from figures like Roberto Marchesini (whose work will be examined in more detail below), which demonstrates the profound overlap and immanence of animality to human existence, there arises the possibility of a thorough decentring of the human. Leghissa pursues this post-anthropocentric line of thought through the work of philosophers like Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben in order to suggest that the ultimate philosophical question concerning animals is not simply that of suspending the difference between human and animal (à la Agamben) but the more ethologically inspired question of whether it is possible ‘to hold on [to] this difference’ (153) at all.

Marco Maurizi takes up the vexed question of the relation between animal studies and Marxism in ‘For the Critique of Political Anthropocentrism: Italian Marxism and the Animal Question’. As Maurizi notes, the status of animals and animality in Marxist theory has always been ambiguous, with Marx himself occupying a variety of positions about the relative importance of animal life within his writings. These ambiguities are reflected in the development of Italian Marxism, with certain versions emphasizing the material/economic and normative importance of animals and others downplaying or ignoring altogether the linkages between human and animal life. In the final two sections of Maurizi’s essay (which will likely be of most interest to readers of this review), he expertly surveys the Italian post-Workerist tradition and Italian Adornoism and demonstrates the ways in which animals can be and have been successfully incorporated into post-Marxist and radical anti-capitalist politics; further, as Maurizi demonstrates, these two traditions offer essential resources for thinking about the ways in which human beings simultaneously belong to and also transform the realm of animal and natural existence.

Federica Giardini’s contribution, ‘Experiencing Oneself in One’s Constitutive Relation: Unfolding Italian Sexual Difference’, examines possible intersections between animality and sexual difference. Giardini employs a variety of Italian feminist readings of Clarice Lispector’s *The Passion According to G. H.* (a book that famously portrays a close-up encounter with a cockroach) that characterize woman-nonhuman differences in productive and dynamic terms. She suggests that, whereas the dominant culture tends to think of animals and animality as irreducibly different and other, these Italian feminists (she engages with Luisa Muraro, Adriana

Cavarero, and Rosi Braidotti in particular) offer us the opportunity to think this outside in co-constitutive terms – which is to say, as a site for encounters and relations of various sorts. Sexual difference and animality are thus reconceived beyond essentialism as naming varied aspects of that space of differential relations. On this topological reading, man and woman, and human and animal, are not fixed modes of being but subject positions that are co-constituted by ‘a plurality of positions where the inside and outside, proximity and distance, and similarity and alterity/strangeness are ... dynamic outcomes’ (198). Giardini then examines how this topological approach can help us rethink the politics involved in human-animal interactions in the practice of eating and the transmission of zoonotic diseases. In both instances, Giardini argues that the sexual difference paradigm and its co-constitutive logic preserve the radical difference and autonomy of animal life.

Alma Massaro explores the themes of natural evil and theodicy in ‘Paolo De Benedetti: For an Animal Theology’. As Massaro explains, De Benedetti places the more-than-human world at the centre of his theology and argues that the evil and suffering affecting humans, animals, and plants alike pose the most important and pressing questions for theological reflection. The effect of De Benedetti’s approach, Massaro argues, is that it decentres human beings from the theological story and makes them plain members of creation as a whole, with God’s efforts at redemption and restoration being extended to the whole of creation. Although there are numerous sources for this kind of non-anthropocentric Judeo-Christian theological perspective in the tradition (as several recent animal theologians have demonstrated), De Benedetti’s thoroughgoing commitment to considering the problem of natural evil and the redemption of all creation makes him an invaluable resource for contemporary theology. His work also serves as an interesting theological complement to the philosophical approach arrived at by Giorgio Agamben with his work on messianism.

Massimo Filippi’s powerful essay, “*Il Faut Bien Tuer*”, or the Calculation of the Abattoir’ takes as its point of departure Derrida’s suggestion that the classical notion of subjectivity is predicated on the noncriminal (or ‘sacrificial’) killing of animals. Filippi argues that this logic of sacrifice also entails the concomitant othering and devaluation of a wide swath of beings who are considered to be lacking subjectivity to some degree: ‘the Woman, the Homosexual, the

Abnormal, the Migrant, the Criminal' (225). Filippi stresses that the production of subjectivity does not occur through ideal means or concepts alone (although, to be sure, it does take place in this ideal register); it is also enacted, sustained, and reinforced in a variety of institutions – the most horrific of which is the slaughterhouse. Filippi argues that the slaughterhouse functions by 'subtracting life', by taking it away, not just from animals but from slaughterhouse workers as well, who labour under precarious physical and economic conditions. For the slaughterhouse to continue its operations, it must continuously regenerate life only subsequently to kill it; and it must create ever-new ideologies and marketing schemes to encourage consumers to continue purchasing and consuming its products. In view of the slaughterhouse's impact on human and animal life alike, Filippi argues that animals should be seen as part of the class struggle, and that this struggle should be recast as a shared, embodied struggle among human beings and animals. Beyond this politics of resistance, Filippi's affirmative vision of human-animal relations involves surrendering the traditional quest for mastery and dominion and instead exposing ourselves to the risk of love and play, thereby allowing Man and his Others to slide into a space of indiscernibility where relations can be reconfigured anew.

Ethologist Roberto Marchesini argues in his chapter 'Philosophical Ethology and Animal Subjectivity' for a redefinition of animality. Like most ethologists, Marchesini does not see an insuperable boundary between human and animal but rather overlappings and complex differential relations. But how to configure this more complex relation between animality and humanity remains a tricky question, even for ethologists. To provide a way forward, Marchesini suggests that human life should be seen as a 'declination of animality' and that the implications of this shift can best be seen following a threefold movement. First, animality must be understood in terms of being sentient, having the tendency to project desires toward an outside, and a developing a responsive relationship to oneself and the world. Second, humans should be seen as declinations of this animality in the sense that they belong to the long history of evolution that produces various kinds of animal assemblages, groupings, and clads; in this sense, declination names the reiterative and productive processes of evolution. Third, it is necessary to recast the division typically drawn between innate and learned behaviours, recognizing that the interplay of these two is basic to both human and animal life. Ultimately, then, Marchesini offers a picture of

human beings and animals as existing in a shared space characterized by a complex inheritance that also involves a great deal of receptivity and responsiveness to novelty.

Laura Bazzicalupo's chapter, 'From Renaissance Ferinity to the Biopolitics of the Animal-Man: Animality as Political Battlefield in the Anthropocene', explores alternatives to contemporary discourses on the Anthropocene (most of which betray an anthropocentric and managerial bias) through ontologies of plurality and immanence, versions of which she finds in the classical Italian tradition and in minor, radical philosophers stretching from Spinoza up through Deleuze and Foucault. In this counter-tradition, Bazzicalupo argues, animality is not thought of as the negative obverse of the human but as 'power and resource' (265). She goes on to link this alternative ontology with the late Foucault's interest in Cynicism and a life lived *kata physin*, where dogs, mice, and other animals serve as the exemplars of a life well lived. For Foucault's Cynic, one effective means of challenging the capture of animal life is to find 'one's own power and freedom to say no to those who pretend to rule you for your own wellbeing' (278). This is not a simple return to 'wild' or pre-cultural life but is instead the result of a deliberate practice developed in view of twisting free of governmentality – an especially urgent and imperative task in the contemporary context of ecological degradation and the ongoing biopolitics of epidemics.

Valentina Sonzogni's contribution, 'The Animal Is Present: Non-human Animal Bodies in Recent Italian Art', canvasses contemporary developments and trends in Italian art that showcase the complex issues surrounding aesthetic representations of animals. One particularly thorny question that arises in this context, as Sonzogni notes, is the use of animal bodies (both live and dead, whole and part, flesh and by-products) in the production of art works. The discussion around such uses of animals has tended to devolve into two positions, which Sonzogni characterizes as: "one shall never use the body of an animal in any form in art" versus "one shall never set limits to the freedom of art" (284). In line with the more sophisticated aesthetic frameworks that have emerged among animal studies theorists in the past two decades (for example, in the work of Giovanni Aloï, with whom Sonzogni's chapter is in frequent dialogue), Sonzogni seeks to move beyond this binary choice to articulate a more nuanced position in which 'the act of "acknowledging" [the importance of a work of art] and the act of "praising" [that

work] should be kept separate, in order to understand the theoretical knowledge that certain artworks can provide on animals' (299).

The volume concludes with the chapter 'Animality Now' by Leonardo Caffo, a well-known figure in Italian animal studies. Caffo's essay opens with a stark acknowledgment: 'Meeting the gaze of an animal for the first time – not looking but being looked at – is the source of a disarming awareness: we are killers. Even now, right here, right at this moment... We create life to destroy it' (303). He goes on to note that 'what we do to non-human animals is the ultimate horror – the same that occurs when we discriminate against some human animals. When we talk about genocides, saying for example that Jews were killed "like rats" and Tutsis were massacred "like cockroaches", we are forgetting something crucial: we are comparing isolated historical events in the human sphere to the everyday fate of millions who die day after day, forever, murdered without a second thought' (304). In order to come to grips with and address what we as human beings are currently enacting and re-enacting, Caffo argues that we need to reconsider and re-affirm our animality. Bringing together a variety of Italian and non-Italian as well as non-Western thinkers around this theme, Caffo suggests that healing the caesura between humanity and animality is not to be accomplished in a single step by the present generation but is a task bequeathed to coming generations. Our task today is to prefigure, with our present practices, what form a more respectful way of life with animals and animality might assume.

I turn now to a general assessment of the volume in the context of contemporary animal studies. On the one hand, the contributions to this volume represent the cutting edge of animal philosophy, bringing recent developments in Italian philosophy to bear on pressing issues in animal studies. The writings of figures such as Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, Roberto Marchesini, Rosi Braidotti, and related thinkers are to some extent present in English-language animal studies scholarship, but the full impact of their work has yet to be absorbed. This volume will go a long way toward remedying that deficiency and should be welcomed and lauded for that reason. At the same time, by focusing exclusively on the Italian tradition, the volume might strike some readers – especially those who are interested in the intersection of animal studies with racism, colonialism, and similar themes – as representing a further entrenchment of

Eurocentric and Western-centric discourses and politics at a time when the locus of enunciation might better be shifted to other, minor figures and sites.

In view of this latter concern, two points might be made. First, although the volume is Italian and Eurocentric in focus, it does not simply reinforce hegemonic thought. The Italian tradition outlined in these chapters is, by and large, a counter-tradition, one aimed at challenging the dominant canon and its anthropocentric biases. The articulation of such counter-histories, even if they remain largely centred in European/Western contexts, remains an important task today, as it demonstrates that the dominant trends of Western culture are neither exclusive nor inevitable. Rather, as this volume helps us to appreciate, the established order of thought is the result of an ongoing but unstable struggle between forces and counterforces. To recall these counterforces and countertraditions and to explore their transformative potentials is an essential project for any minoritarian, revolutionary movement – a description that is surely fitting for the vision that underlies the approach to animal studies evident in this volume.

Yet, if the formation of such a counter-history limits itself to a dialectical struggle with the dominant tradition, the locus of enunciation shifts only slightly. The vocation of anti-racist, decolonial, and similar modes of thought and practice today – a vocation that animal studies is gradually taking more for its own – is to encourage a genuine shift in the locus of enunciation. Stated plainly, such a shift entails that the discourse about alternative ways of thought and life cannot be limited to the dominant culture and those who derive from but wish actively to dismantle that culture; it must also include and bring to the fore voices – both human and more-than-human – from the underside of the established order. This sort of change in the one(s) who speak(s) does not, it should be noted, mean that there is no work to be done in terms of the formation of a counter-history such as the one we find in this volume. Instead, what it means is that, in addition to such work, points of contact and cross-fertilization between counter-traditions and other sites must be cultivated – that is to say, the relation between counter-histories of the established order and those who have never been allowed to speak must become transversal and productive.

What is needed, then, is not so much the establishment of a facile *homioiosis* between these two outsides but rather a mutually informing and mutually challenging relation that allows them to work on and through each other in view of transforming our collective ways of thought and life in the direction of something that is more worthwhile. (It should be noted that Caffo's chapter, which engages with a variety of non-traditional frameworks and practices, certainly points in this direction.) Of course, no single volume can accomplish all of these things well and at once, so I am not faulting this volume for not achieving such a goal. Rather, my remarks here are intended as a plea for those readers who are interested in developing the sort of counter-history we find in the Italian tradition (and I would consider myself among this group) to consider how this counter-tradition might best be put to work alongside related fields that challenge the anthropocentric order from alternative loci.