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**OTHAs AND ENVIRONMENT IN ANIMAL ETHICS AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY: ONTOLOGY AND  
ETHICAL MOTIVATION BEYOND THE DICHOTOMIES  
OF ANTHROPOCENTRISM**

**Samantha Jane Holland**

**March 2013**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of MA Nature  
University of Wales, Trinity Saint David



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## CONTENTS

Abstract and Acknowledgements	iv
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1: INDIFFERENCE/IDENTITY/DIFFERENCE: LOCATING OTHAs AND ENVIRONMENT IN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY... AND BEYOND</b>	<b>6</b>
I. Environmental Philosophy and Dead Animals	6
II. The Mountain and the Wolf	9
III. Animal Ethics and Identity Politics	14
IV. Philosophies of Difference	18
V. Indistinction: Imagining Non-anthropocentrism	21
VI. Ethics as First Philosophy	24
<b>Chapter 2: PHILOSOPHY, THE ANTHROPOCENTRISM OF 'SCIENCE', AND THE 'PROBLEM' OF ANTHROPOMORPHISM</b>	<b>29</b>
I. Knowing about Bambi	29
II. The 'Problem' of Anthropomorphism	32
III. Science, Feminism, Merleau-Ponty	37
IV. Egomorphism and (Inter)subjectivity	44
V. Merleau-Ponty, OTHAs, Flesh	48
VI. Towards Nonanthropocentrism	54
<b>Chapter 3: ONTOLOGY AND ETHICS, FLESH AND AIR: BEING AND MOTIVATION BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM</b>	<b>57</b>
I. The Promise of Merleau-Ponty's Ontology	58
II. Motivating Nonanthropocentric Ethical Behaviour	60
<i>II(a). Kinship and Altruism</i>	61
<i>II(b). The Face</i>	65
<i>II(c). Loving Nature</i>	68
III. Care Ethics	71
IV. Ethics, 'Philosophy', Epistemophilia	78
V. Revisiting 'Ethics'	81
VI. Of Flesh and Air	83
<b>Conclusions: ELEMENTAL COMPORIMENT: AN ETIQUETTE OF ONE FLESH?</b>	<b>86</b>
Bibliography	88

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation first elucidates some central problems with contemporary environmental and animal ethics, arguing that most arise from a reliance on heavily anthropocentric concepts such as reason, sentience, and rights. Second, it investigates the possibility of ontology and ethics *beyond* anthropocentrism, in which relationships between beings are based on neither identity nor difference alone, but rather on 'indistinction'. There is a particular focus on how mainstream western philosophy and science suffer from a failure to recognize and overcome two particularly insidious founding dichotomies of western thought and culture: those that oppose humans to (other-than-human) animals, and animals to the environment.

The argument that the *primacy* of ethics must be acknowledged is central, as is the notion that bodily comportment must be engaged in ethical behaviour. Drawing parallels between Merleau-Ponty and other thinkers, especially feminists, the dissertation also interrogates the role science plays in philosophy, especially in respect of its contributions to shaping and promulgating Cartesian notions of the self, and to widespread treatment of both other-than-human animals and other 'natural' entities as 'other' to and separable from human beings, as objects rather than subjects.

A central argument is that Merleau-Ponty's later ontology offers the most promising prospect in establishing a non-anthropocentric ethics. Drawing on other thinkers' ideas to 'flesh out' Merleau-Ponty's unfinished work, the issue of how ethical behaviour might be *motivated* in a less anthropocentric culture is discussed, as is the issue of western philosophy's epistemophilia. The conclusion is that environmental ethics must embrace an ontology of the flesh in which human/animal and animal/environment dichotomies are overcome, the embodied and intersubjective nature of being is acknowledged, and 'environment' is recognized as something that we all *live* rather than live *in*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank Carl Jones and Alan Tye for their inspiration. It was their enthusiasm about meeting a 'philosopher' at a science-focused conference that brought home to me the importance of discussing ethics and ontology in the context of conservation, however far such discussions sometimes seem from the daily concerns of scientists.

Many thanks to my supervisor, Rebekah Humphreys, for her support and for her feedback on early drafts; to Sam Hurn for the ideas her anthrozoology and anthropology courses introduced me to; and to Maya Warriar for supervising an independent study that helped me think about the emergence of neo-Darwinism – amongst many other things.

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## Introduction:

### THE HUMAN/ANIMAL AND ANIMAL/ENVIRONMENT DIVIDE

Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land. (Aldo Leopold, 1953)<sup>1</sup>

There is simply no reason to maintain that any differences that may exist between human minds and animal minds mean that animals have no interest in continuing to exist or that the sentient experiences of nonhuman animals have a lesser weight than do those of humans ... The only thing that is required is that nonhumans be sentient; that is, that they be perceptually aware. Sentience is necessary to have interests at all. (Gary Francione, 2010)<sup>2</sup>

The first quotation above, from Leopold's *Round River*, highlights presumptions of not just the two dichotomies of this Introduction's title, but also a third. First, it reveals by exclusion the presumption of the human/animal dichotomy, as it is concerned only with harmony between human beings and the environment: OTHAs (OTHA stands for other-than-human-animal) are notable only by their absence from this definition of conservation. Second, the animal/environment dichotomy is evident in the presumption that 'the land' and animal life are separable 'things', between which some kind of harmony is desirable – because, the implication is, both our (separate-but-interrelated) futures depend on it. Third, the word 'men' is, arguably, far from insignificant: it not only evokes the male/female dichotomy, but goes further by underscoring an apparent association between 'man' and 'human' and, relatedly, 'woman' and 'nature' or 'the land'.

The second, longer quotation from a recent article by Francione, most obviously asserts an animal/environment distinction, as it identifies sentience as *the* crucial element in moral considerability – clearly stating that in order to have interests (and so, rights), sentience is required. Less overtly, the

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<sup>1</sup> Aldo Leopold in Luna B. Leopold, ed., *Round river: From the journals of Aldo Leopold* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 145.

<sup>2</sup> Gary L. Francione, 'Animal welfare and the moral value of nonhuman animals', *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, 6, 1 (2010), 24–36 (p.31).

quotation asserts a human/animal dichotomy. In essence, Francione – like Tom Regan and other animal rights philosophers – is arguing that OTHAs have rights on the basis of a fundamental similarity to humans, that is, their sentience. While Francione’s particular version of animal rights philosophy differs significantly from Regan’s, they do, essentially, share the same identity politics:

the really crucial, the basic similarity is simply this: we are each of us the experiencing subject of a life, a conscious creature having an individual welfare that has importance to us whatever our usefulness to others.<sup>3</sup>

The ethically pertinent result of this is, for all animal rightists, precisely that OTHAs have ‘rights’.

The hegemonic human/animal and animal/environment dichotomies are deeply anthropocentric. Along with that of man/woman and related dichotomies, in a culture that tends to think both atomistically and oppositionally, they underpin and sustain a western worldview reflected in its predominantly anthropocentric philosophy.

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My first aim in this dissertation is to elucidate some of the most pressing difficulties with contemporary environmental and animal ethics, arguing that most arise from their continued if varied focus on heavily anthropocentric concepts such as reason, sentience, and rights as foundational. I focus in particular on ways in which environmental philosophers and animal ethicists – with their seemingly quite different approaches to giving moral status and weight to non-human others (whether animal or ‘inanimate’)<sup>4</sup> – both suffer from a failure to fully recognize and overcome two particularly insidious

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<sup>3</sup> Tom Regan, *The case for animal rights: Updated with a new preface* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), Preface, p.xx.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I use the acronym ‘OTHA’ to refer to other-than-human animals, and the phrases ‘non-human others’ and ‘other-than-humans’ when I refer to both OTHAs and inanimate entities of environment.



founding dichotomies of western thought and culture: those that oppose humans to (other-than-human) animals, and animals to the environment.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, my second key aim is to investigate the possibility of ethics beyond these divides, in which ethical relationships are based on neither identity nor difference, nor on anthropocentric concepts such as rights and reason. To do this, I draw on arguments that an effective ethics can be based on ‘neither sameness nor otherness alone’, and that the *primacy* of ethics must be acknowledged.<sup>6</sup>

Considering recent opposition to anthropocentrism, I suggest that ultimately, a truly environmental ethics must embrace a different ontology from that which underpins contemporary animal ethics and environmental philosophies – an ontology in which human/animal and animal/environment dichotomies hold no sway, because human-OTHA kinship is embraced, and environment is understood as something that we *live* rather than live *in*; as part of us and us of it – that it ‘is not something that begins where our skins end’.<sup>7</sup>

In proposing this, I draw on the work of philosophers including Kelly Oliver, Luce Irigaray, and Matthew Calarco, arguing that Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the flesh provides the most promising way forward in terms of both understanding and establishing a non-anthropocentric ethics.

Considering how he undermines utterly the Cartesian subject by insisting that

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<sup>5</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, the term ‘animals’ in the latter dichotomy includes humans (sometimes exclusively) – and perhaps/sometimes excludes smaller animals (e.g. insects) who are somehow identified more with ‘environment’ than ‘animality’. This points to precisely the confusion, contradictions and over-simplifications that surround these terms when used as exclusionary.

<sup>6</sup> The quotation’s from Kelly Oliver, *Animal lessons: How they teach us to be human* (Columbia UP, 2009), 304. My mention of the primacy of ethics here refers primarily to the position proposed by Jim Cheney and Anthony Weston in ‘Environmental ethics as environmental etiquette: Toward an ethics-based epistemology’, *Environmental Ethics*, 21 (1999), 115–34, but also alludes to Levinas and others (see below).

<sup>7</sup> Don E. Marietta, Jr., ‘Back to earth with reflection and ecology’, in *Eco-phenomenology: Back to the Earth itself*, ed. by Brown and Toadvine (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003), pp. 121–35 (p.124). For this reason, too – influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s concept of ‘flesh’, discussed below – I refer not to ‘the environment’ but to ‘environment’ (except when referencing specific philosophies and ideas about, specifically, ‘the environment’). This is to foreground the idea that we are *of* environment, rather than living *in* ‘the’ environment. I’m aware this deletion of ‘the’ sometimes sounds/reads awkwardly – but to some extent, that is the point (to ‘make strange’ the term ‘environment’).

'all consciousness is thoroughly corporeal'<sup>8</sup> and that 'relationships among beings are possible not just for man but also for animals',<sup>9</sup> I focus on how Merleau-Ponty's ontology helps respond to Marti Kheel's call to fellow ecofeminists to develop alternative understandings of nature philosophy 'that incorporate ... care and respect for individual beings as well as larger ecological processes'.<sup>10</sup> It is Kheel's call to which this dissertation responds.

Accordingly, I devote more time to discussing OTHAs than 'the environment'. Given my – and, more importantly, Merleau-Ponty's – position that animals and environment are 'intertwined', this does not mean I'm less interested, ethically, in environment than in OTHAs. It reflects, though, that while there's already a substantial body of work around Merleau-Ponty and environmental philosophy, he is comparatively 'rarely mentioned by most participants in the recent spate of critical animal studies'.<sup>11</sup>

Foregrounding my focus on individual OTHAs, I start by in Chapter 1 analysing how some of them have been presented in philosophical writing about environment and ethics. The examples illustrate how ecocentric environmental philosophies that consider 'the environment', 'the biotic community' and 'the ecological whole' are not only problematic in failing to overcome human/animal and animal/environment dichotomies, but are mired especially deeply in an anthropocentric Cartesian notion of personhood – one which asserts an isolated and disembodied self – despite claims that humans are just another species amongst many, in an ecosystem more important than its individual parts. I also illustrate how mainstream animal ethics – whether from an animal rights or welfarist perspective – shares this basic attachment to human/animal and animal/environment dichotomies, and to accordingly anthropocentric notions of reason and the self that underpin the concept of 'rights'.

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<sup>8</sup> Monika Langer, 'Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty: Some of their contributions and limitations for "environmentalism"', in *Eco-phenomenology*, ed. by Brown and Toadvine, pp. 103–20 (p.116).

<sup>9</sup> Oliver, *Animal lessons*, p.217.

<sup>10</sup> Marti Kheel, *Nature ethics: An ecofeminist perspective* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), p.207.

<sup>11</sup> Louise Westling, 'Merleau-Ponty's human-animality intertwining and the animal question', *Configurations*, 18 (2010), 161–80 (p.163).

In Chapter 2, I interrogate the role science plays in philosophies of environment and animal ethics, especially in respect of the contributions of mainstream western science to shaping and promulgating Cartesian notions of the self, and anthropocentric bias in how both OTHAs and environment are treated as radically 'other' to and separable from human beings. I investigate issues around anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism in and beyond 'science', outline some of Merleau-Ponty's ideas concerning both selfhood and science, and – throughout – consider the parallels between Merleau-Ponty and (eco)feminist arguments.

Chapter 3 focuses primarily on elucidating elements of Merleau-Ponty's thought that challenge anthropocentrism, on starting to address the tricky issue of how ethical behaviour might be *motivated*, and on the overarching 'problem' of western philosophy's epistemophilia and its contribution to the anthropocentrism of the west.

# Chapter 1:

## INDIFFERENCE/IDENTITY/DIFFERENCE:

### LOCATING OTHAS AND ENVIRONMENT IN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY... AND BEYOND

The Renaissance and the Reformation did not simply actualize some preexisting or easily anticipated notion of persons, but rather played a part in the larger co-evolution of respect for persons. What would emerge could only be imagined in advance in the dimmest of ways, or not imagined at all. Similarly, we are only now embarking on an attempt to move beyond anthropocentrism, and we simply cannot predict in advance where even another century of moral change will take us. (Anthony Weston, 1992)<sup>12</sup>

#### I. Environmental Philosophy and Dead Animals

In 1948,<sup>13</sup> Aldo Leopold ruminated on how he'd felt some years previously as he watched a wolf he and his fellow hunters had shot die in front of them – seeing 'a fierce green fire dying in her eyes'.<sup>14</sup> More recently, in 1995, Holmes Rolston III described coming across the body of an elk killed by wolves, whilst he was out hunting. Reflecting on this experience, he writes that

I was witness to an ecology of predator and prey, to population dynamics, to heterotrophs feeding on autotrophs. The carcass, beginning to decay, was already being recycled by microorganisms.<sup>15</sup>

As Kheel has argued at some length,<sup>16</sup> Leopold identifies not with the individual wolf who was dying (nor with her pups, who were with her), but

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<sup>12</sup> Anthony Weston, 'Before environmental ethics', *Environmental Ethics*, 14 (1992), 321–38 (p.331).

<sup>13</sup> Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County almanac, and sketches here and there* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987 [1948]); as Kheel notes (*Nature ethics*, p.113), Leopold continued hunting for some 30 years after the experience he describes with the wolf; this points to the extent to which he was not moved to change his behaviour, and how it was perhaps only retrospectively that he even saw this experience as significant.

<sup>14</sup> Leopold, *A Sand County almanac*, 1948/1987, p.130.

<sup>15</sup> Holmes Rolston III, 'Does aesthetic appreciation of landscapes need to be science-based?', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 35, 4 (1995), 374–86 (p.384).

<sup>16</sup> Kheel, *Nature ethics*, 112–15; more generally, Ch. 4, 'Thinking like a mountain, or thinking like a "man"?'.

rather with the mountain that overlooked the scene. Similarly, Rolston identifies with the 'ecology of predator and prey' and not with the elk who'd suffered and died. Since both Rolston and Leopold were out hunting, it's perhaps something of a forgone conclusion that the two men would, despite the different historical and philosophical contexts of their experiences, identify less with an individual dead or dying animal, and more with the ecological context in which they styled themselves participants. Arguably, humans who hunt have decided *a priori* that individual OTHAs' lives are far less important than their own – an assumption of vast philosophical and ethical significance. This tendency for so-called ecocentric environmental philosophers to identify with ecological systems or the environment at large, rather than with individual OTHAs who like us move about in and as part of the environment, is one of the central philosophical positions that this dissertation critiques and hopes to move beyond.

The other area of pertinence and concern might be termed 'animal ethics' – the field concerning animal rights and/or welfare. The field is frequently presented as being in opposition to ecocentric 'holist' environmental philosophies, largely because in its various forms, its emphasis is on the ethical status of individual OTHAs rather than on that of 'the environment' as a whole. While arguments have diversified in recent years, the basic contrast is laid bare in key texts such as J. Baird Callicott's influential 1980 article, 'Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair', wherein he argues vehemently that 'inanimate entities such as oceans and lakes, mountains, forests, and wetlands are assigned a greater value than individual animals' by the (ecocentric) environmental ethic he favours,<sup>17</sup> and that the concerns of 'animal liberation' ethics are too close to those of traditional anthropocentric ethics to constitute environmental ethics at all. In essence, while I disagree that inanimate entities have a 'greater value' than OTHAs, I agree that the lack of distinctiveness from anthropocentric ethics displayed by most animal ethics is

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<sup>17</sup> J. Baird Callicott, 'Animal liberation: A triangular affair', *Environmental Ethics*, 2 (1980), reprinted in J. Baird Callicott, *In defense of the land ethic: Essays in environmental philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 58.

deeply problematic. However, since this dissertation argues that not only animal ethics but also most forms of ecocentric environmental philosophy share an anthropocentric bias, this criticism is not one I agree can be targeted only at animal ethics.

The chasm between environmental ethics and animal ethics grew in the 1980s, but, as Dale Jamieson illustrates,<sup>18</sup> by the end of that decade, bridges had been built; indeed, 'Callicott ... expressed regret for the rhetoric of his 1980 essay'.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, many adopted Jamieson's view that 'any plausible ethic must address concerns about both animals and the environment'<sup>20</sup> – a view I share.

Despite this, in mainstream western philosophy there remains quite a gap between philosophers concerned more with 'the environment' and those more concerned with OTHAs. There still remains some tension – perhaps especially, as Ned Hettinger and Jennifer Everett have elucidated,<sup>21</sup> vis-à-vis attitudes towards hunting and predation.<sup>22</sup>

It's in this context that I opened with reminders of ecocentric philosophers' clear privileging of inanimate entities and the ecosystem, and concomitant lack of regard for individual OTHAs – despite the fact that human animals, OTHAs and less animate<sup>23</sup> entities combine in and share a life-world

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<sup>18</sup> See Dale Jamieson, 'Animal liberation is an environmental ethic', *Environmental Values*, 1997, online pre-publication pdf, last accessed 31 December 2012

<sup>19</sup> Jamieson, 'Animal liberation is an environmental ethic', 5; see J. Baird Callicott, 'Animal liberation and environmental ethics: Back together again', *Between the Species*, 4, 3 (1988), 163–9.

<sup>20</sup> Jamieson, 'Animal liberation is an environmental ethic', 5.

<sup>21</sup> See Ned Hettinger, 'Bambi lovers versus tree huggers', in *Food for thought: The debate over eating meat*, ed. by Steve F. Sapontzis (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2004), 294–301; Jennifer Everett, 'Environmental ethics, animal welfarism, and the problem of predation: A Bambi lover's respect for nature', *Ethics and the Environment*, 6, 1 (Spring 2001), 42–67. Note, too, that arguments privileging 'the environment' over OTHAs are prevalent in the realm where philosophy and the biological sciences meet: see e.g. Stephen Vantassel, 'Animal suffering should not trump environmental stewardship', *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 53, 3 (2010), 458–70.

<sup>22</sup> As Everett notes (but argues against), 'Because of its emphasis on the prevention of animal suffering, some environmental philosophers criticize animal welfarism as, at best, falling short of the appreciation of predation that any adequate environmental ethic must exhibit': Everett, 'Environmental ethics, animal welfarism, and the problem of predation', 43.

<sup>23</sup> I find the term 'inanimate entities' quite peculiar – since not just plants, trees, flowers and bodies of water are quite obviously *animate(d)*, but so too is 'the land' (if often over distinctly longer, geological periods of time!). This is not a point I have the space to elaborate on, but it's the reason I coin the term 'less animate entities' when speaking in my own voice, rather than citing/referencing those who use 'inanimate'. To call them inanimate seems inaccurate, distancing them from the elemental 'flesh' that I discuss below.

(as Merleau-Ponty emphasizes). This reveals the extent to which ecocentric and animal ethicists alike remain caught up in not just the human/animal dichotomy about which so much has been written in recent years, but also in the animal/environment dichotomy which, I argue, is part of the same underlying anthropocentric bias in western philosophy – a bias that not just assumes and perpetuates but also encourages division amongst and between ethicists, and which must therefore be subject to interrogation and critique for progress to be made toward a worldview beyond such dichotomies, and ethics to accompany it.

## **II. The Mountain and the Wolf**

Leopold's concern in writing about the individual wolf's slow and painful death from multiple bullets, is not to express that the death was wrong – or that he was saddened by it – but to tell us he was wrong in thinking that 'because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean a hunters' paradise'. His concern is that he was wrong because killing wolves gives deer free rein to over-graze – and, as he writes:

I have watched the face of many a newly wolfless mountain, and seen the south-facing slopes wrinkle with a maze of new deer trails. I have seen every edible bush and seedling browsed, first to anaemic desuetude, and then to death. I have seen every edible tree defoliated to the height of a saddlehorn.<sup>24</sup>

Marcia Muelder Eaton shares Leopold's concern about the destructive force of deer. In a 1998 article asserting the value of scientific knowledge versus imagination and fiction in appreciating nature, she typified the attitudes of many environment-focused philosophers by arguing that anthropomorphism (especially 'bambi-ization')<sup>25</sup> is highly problematic for

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<sup>24</sup> Leopold, *A Sand County almanac*, p.132

<sup>25</sup> Eaton doesn't use the term 'bambi-ization', nor does she refer to the 'Disneyfication' of nature. However, her choice of *Bambi* to compare to real deer suggests she's well aware of such characterizations of anthropomorphism, and is evoking them and their specific version of what 'anthropomorphism' entails.

ecology because such 'imaginative fancies' are 'often directed by fictional creations' and – where her specific example is *Bambi*<sup>26</sup> – make it

incredibly difficult to look at a deer in terms that are true to it *as an object* on its own and even more difficult to respond to it in terms appropriate to the ecological role that it increasingly plays in the ecological systems it has come to dominate.<sup>27</sup>

In particular, Eaton's concerned with the 'ecologically' problematic role deer play in relation to (human) planning issues and concepts of deer as 'vermin'.<sup>28</sup> Eaton's answer to this 'problem' is similar to that proposed by many environmental philosophers: she looks to scientific knowledge as the basis for 'sustainable' ecological practices.<sup>29</sup>

Significantly, there is considerable overlap between Leopold's 1948 and Rolston's and Eaton's more recent attitudes to OTHAs. Leopold's story serves to argue for the importance of predators to the 'natural' balance of an environment that, stripped of too many predators, is left to the mercy of grazing species. For Leopold as for Eaton, the individual OTHA is regarded as merely one member of a species – not as an individual living being who has relationships with others, let alone 'rights'. Neither philosopher is concerned with individual deer, but only with what they characterize *all* deer (plural) as doing: i.e., defoliating the environment.<sup>30</sup> This attitude reveals much about ecocentric philosophies' tendency to prioritize abstract wholes like species and ecological wholes including 'the environment' over individual OTHAs and less animate entities. Leopold's is the kind of thinking that founds this approach – and that of his fellow hunters, as illustrated at Figure 1.

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<sup>26</sup> She refers in her article to both the book and the film version of the story: Felix Salten, *Bambi*, trans. Whittaker Chambers (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1928); the film of the same name was famously produced by the USA's Walt Disney Productions in 1942 (supervising director, David D. Hand).

<sup>27</sup> Marcia Muelder Eaton, 'Fact and fiction in the aesthetic appreciation of nature', in *The aesthetics of natural environments*, ed. by Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant (Mississauga, Canada: Broadview Press, 2004), pp. 170–81 (p.175, my emphasis).

<sup>28</sup> Eaton, 'Fact and fiction', p.175.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, pp.177–9.

<sup>30</sup> While Leopold shows some awareness of the responsibility of humans in this ecological situation coming about, this is something Eaton inexplicably and sorely lacks.



It's in this context that Kheel argues convincingly that '[t]oday's collective moral orientation toward nature and other-than-humans' is the 'legacy' of the views of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century sport hunters<sup>31</sup> including Theodore D. Roosevelt and Leopold. In particular, she identifies and explains how the origins of the conservation movement (in the west) lie with ideas including that hunting was essential to conserve natural 'resources' including the 'aesthetic' value of nature, and on the worldview that 'nature' should be advocated for as a 'biotic community', rather than as a community of individuals.<sup>32</sup> Reassessing views about Leopold as the 'father' of modern-day conservation, Kheel shows that on Leopold's view, 'a major motive for the preservation of ... reserves was to create well-stocked hunting-grounds', and – crucially – that even after his views evolved to consider the value of predators to conservation, he and the conservationist philosophy he espouses still take the perspective of 'the mountain, not that of the wolf'.<sup>33</sup>

Kheel's analyses of Roosevelt and Leopold, alongside more recent ecocentric holists, Rolston and Warwick Fox,<sup>34</sup> illustrate and support her position that many of the attitudes and approaches of western moral philosophy to OTHAs and environment are heavily informed by a hunting 'ethos' that rests on a sharp distinction between 'man' (sic) and 'nature', and the (ethical) privilege of the 'whole' over individuals. Critiquing Rolston's privileging of humans as the only animals capable of a transcendent (point-of-)view, and his position that 'reverence, empathy, and feelings of compassion spring from a scientific understanding of ecology and metaphysics', Kheel asks:

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<sup>31</sup> Kheel, *Nature ethics*, p.96.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 71, 80, 82; see also Ronnie Zoe Hawkins, 'Ecofeminism and nonhumans: Continuity, difference, dualism, and domination', *Hypatia*, 13, 1 (1998), 158–97, esp. p.170, where she develops her argument that 'the dualistically distorted view of the individual/member-of-a-group relation, a view that recognizes humans only as individuals and nonhumans only as members of populations or species, serves as a major impediment to conceiving of ecological relationships in such a way that we can begin to solve some of our most critical environmental problems'.

<sup>33</sup> Kheel, *Nature ethics*, pp.112, 115.

<sup>34</sup> Fox in particular represents the views of many 'deep ecologists', who are as a group decidedly holistic in their approach to 'the environment': see e.g. Warwick Fox, *A theory of general ethics: Human relationships, nature, and the built environment* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006). I don't focus on deep ecology in this dissertation, because: (i) I lack the space to engage with it properly as a specific variant of 'holism', and (ii) I considered it quite extensively in an essay for this degree, so cannot anyway replicate that material here. (The same is true of ecofeminism, which I considered in some detail in the same essay).

'But does this scientifically inspired, God-like view include care for individual other-than-human animals?'<sup>35</sup>

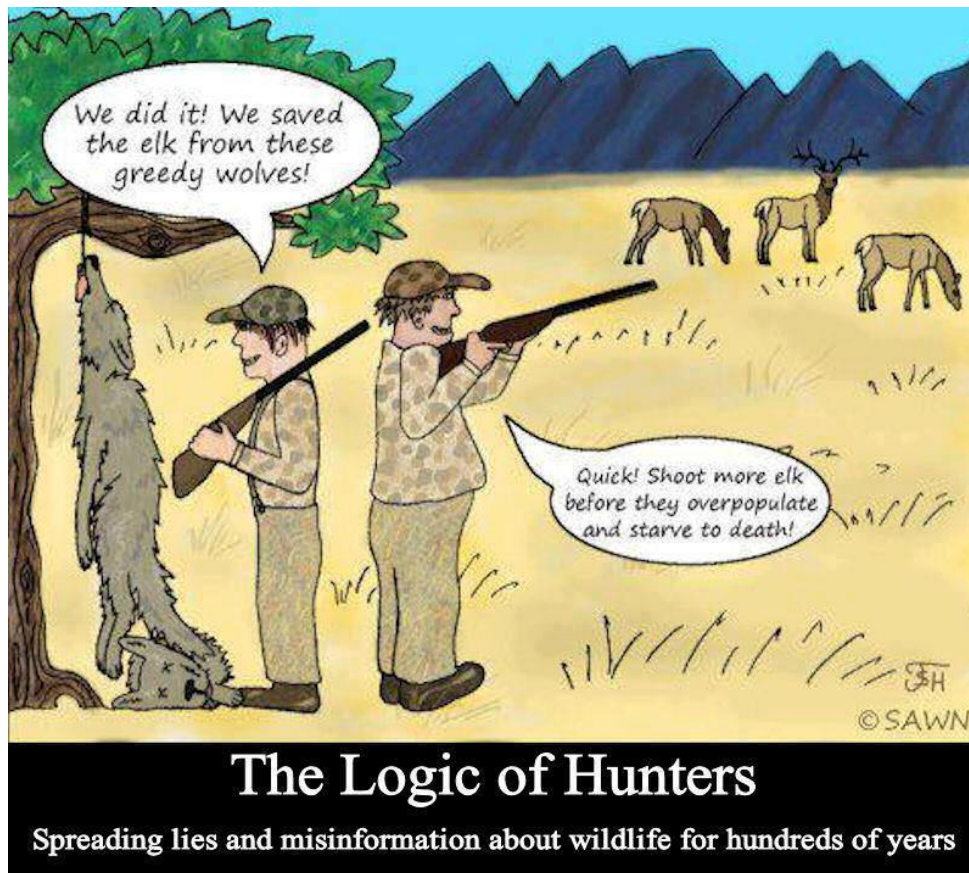


Figure 1: Cartoon by SAWN, displaying a summary and remarkably pithy critique of arguments put forward by Leopold and others.<sup>36</sup>

Attitudes such as Rolston's – valuing the 'whole' over individuals, and asserting the 'value' in OTHAs and 'the environment' stems from humans – are prevalent in contemporary environmental ethics, including the aesthetics of 'nature' and even some versions of 'animal ethics' (especially those that privilege species). In both aesthetics and environmental ethics, the dominant view regards 'science' as *the* guiding discourse enabling human beings to most fully appreciate and understand non-human others. Certainly Allen Carlson's

<sup>35</sup> Kheel, *Nature ethics*, p.147.

<sup>36</sup> It's hard to access information about the texts read (or not read) by the cartoonist, but it remains interesting that the predators here slain are wolves (as per Leopold), that it is elk (per Rolston) who are under threat, and that the whole scene is overlooked by mountains in the distance. (There is, however, no indication of deer aggressively defoliating the environment.)

model of aesthetic appreciation rests explicitly on scientific knowledge as a necessary condition,<sup>37</sup> and philosophers including Rolston and Eaton espouse a similar view.

Rolston's philosophical work straddles environmental ethics and philosophical aesthetics, especially aesthetics of 'nature'. He, along with thinkers including Emily Brady, Yuriko Saito, and Arnold Berleant in varying ways and to differing extents, foreground the interrelated nature of aesthetics and ethics, showing how our conceptions and understandings of 'nature' as 'other' underlie different programs of aesthetic appreciation.<sup>38</sup>

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Ecocentric holist philosophers, then, tend to focus on non-individual elements of 'the environment'. The focus on the biotic community, or the wider ecosystem, so prevalent in environmental ethics is mirrored in other areas of philosophy concerned with 'nature': the tendency is very much to focus on so-called inanimate entities. So even if some 'animals' are considered, it's usually only those too small or too un-human-like to be the subjects of animal ethics,<sup>39</sup> with a focus on them exclusively as components of the wider ecosystem. This privileging of less animate, abstracted aspects of nature and/as 'the environment', and also of human beings, concerns philosophers interested in asserting the ethical status and significance of OTHAs. Ultimately, ecocentric holists exclude *only* OTHAs from ethics – from the biotic community. At very best, they consider OTHAs last, and as species not individuals. Hence, OTHAs

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<sup>37</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the natural environment* (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama Press, 2003), p.91; see Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the natural environment: The appreciation of nature, art, and architecture* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>38</sup> Brady argues that 'preserving the autonomy of the aesthetic does not lead to the conclusion that the edges between aesthetic and other environmental values are clear and sharp', hence the pertinence of ethics: Brady, *Aesthetics of the natural environment*, pp.87, 115. She concludes, though, that while '[o]ur ability to exercise aesthetic sensitivity and our ability to make right choices both draw on our capacities of perceptual sensitivity, imagination and feeling...' (p.258), '[a] developed aesthetic sensibility is not in itself sufficient to support an environmental ethic' (p.259).

<sup>39</sup> On the significance of size to environmental ethics, see Charles S. Cockell, 'Environmental ethics and size', *Ethics & the Environment*, 13, 1 (Spring 2008), 23–39.

are always deemed secondary to both 'the ecosystem' and to humans; always treated as instrumental for others.<sup>40</sup>

Environmental philosophy's complete neglect of domesticated OTHAs (whether 'pets' or farm animals) further evidences this. As Kheel argues, ecocentric holists typically consider domestic OTHAs as 'irrelevant or detrimental to the ecological arena and hence of no direct moral concern'.<sup>41</sup> Rolston's views are typically extreme: he argues that because 'they are bred to be eaten', domestic OTHAs 'are only partly natural'.<sup>42</sup> The degree to which this elides not just OTHA individuality, but human responsibility for the situation of especially farm animals is quite shocking – echoing Leopold and Eaton's glossing over of *why* it is that deer have come to be an environmental 'hazard'. As Ronnie Zoe Hawkins argues, holist philosophers of this type,

who refuse to relinquish their own essentialism and human/nature or mind/nature dualism, as expressed through such attitudes, have a considerable distance to travel before they can claim an adequate grasp of the nonhuman life that, together with human life, makes up the 'whole' of nature.<sup>43</sup>

### **III. Animal Ethics and Identity Politics**

In contrast – and, often, in response – to environmental philosophy's tendency to consider the biotic community and human beings as ethically and aesthetically significant, but to downplay the status of OTHAs (or to exclude them entirely), the two main strands of animal ethics<sup>44</sup> – rights and welfarism – rely heavily on establishing 'a relevantly similar moral identity between human

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<sup>40</sup> Bob Jickling and Paul C. Paquet's article, 'Wolf stories: Reflections on science, ethics, and epistemology' (*Environmental Ethics*, 27 [Summer 2005], 115–34) provides an excellent discussion of this issue, as well as an enlightening case study of wolf 'management' in the Yukon.

<sup>41</sup> Kheel, *Nature ethics*, p.19.

<sup>42</sup> Holmes Rolston III, *Environmental ethics: Duties to and values in the natural world* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), p.80.

<sup>43</sup> Hawkins, 'Ecofeminism and nonhumans', p.170.

<sup>44</sup> Arguably, feminist care ethics by now constitute a fairly major third strand of animal ethics. However, the approach is not yet as established as the two I discuss here, and I do discuss it below.

beings and animals'.<sup>45</sup> This approach is problematic, as its often unacknowledged anthropocentrism reinscribes the human/animal dichotomy it purports to reject,<sup>46</sup> especially in its reliance upon an atomistic, all-too-(defined-as-)human rational subject. As Calarco argues, the kind of 'anthropocentric extensionism' inherent in these approaches grants 'ethical priority to animals that resemble human beings in morally relevant ways, while denigrating or giving subordinate status to those animals who do not'.<sup>47</sup>

Oliver highlights that the type of line-drawing therefore involved in animal ethics – whether Francione's and Regan's animal rights, or Peter Singer's welfarist approach –

creates two sides: the have and the have-nots, those who have what it takes to be inherently valuable [sentience] and those who do not. Conceptually, this is the same kind of oppositional and exclusionary thinking inherent in the man–animal or human–animal dichotomy.

This leads her to ask, 'How can we apply the rights of persons to animals if the very distinction between animals and persons is inherent in the notion of rights?'<sup>48</sup> – and,

Just as feminists have asked why women have to be like men in order to be equal, we can ask, Why do animals have to be like us to have inherent value? The notion that man is the measure of all things is precisely the kind of thinking that justifies exploiting animals, along with women and the earth, for his purposes.<sup>49</sup>

Oliver's analysis is based on the realization that while animal ethicists attempt to found a positive ethics by establishing morally pertinent similarities between humans and other animals, identity politics cannot provide a non-anthropocentric ethic because its logic is inherently anthropocentric. On its

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<sup>45</sup> Matthew Calarco, 'Identity, difference, indistinction', *The New Centennial Review*, 11, 2 (Fall 2012), 41–60 (p.42)

<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Calarco (*ibid.*, 47) notes that 'whereas animal ethicists may in fact be contesting a certain kind of speciesism, the fundamental logic and structure of the problem they are battling is operating in an altogether different, anthropocentric register that they not only fail to notice but actually reinforce and expand'.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, pp.45–6.

<sup>48</sup> Oliver, 'What is wrong with (animal) rights?', p.216.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p.217.

logic, man (sic) is the measure of all things, with moral value measured in relation to how 'like' humans individual OTHAs and species are. This is compounded by androcentrism: western philosophy's exclusionary, patriarchal nature has characterized humans as defined by autonomy and rationality – where numerous philosophers have shown these characteristics to be defined as human not just in opposition to 'the animal' and less animate nature, but to women and other humans who have, in various historical and geographical locations, been defined as 'other'.<sup>50</sup> This is why – importantly, since I'm concerned with ethics – I concur with Oliver that because the human/animal dichotomy is the opposition 'used most often to justify violence, not only man's violence to animals, but also man's violence to other people deemed to be like animals', behaviours including sexism and racism as well as slavery and torture are 'historically inseparable from the question of the animal'.<sup>51</sup> As ecofeminists including Carol Adams and Val Plumwood have long argued,<sup>52</sup> the human/animal dichotomy plays an ongoing and central role in oppositions styled similarly as between 'civilized', 'rational' man and 'barbaric', non-rational 'nature'. In challenging the human/animal dichotomy, then, lies hope for not just 'animal' ethics or even 'environmental' ethics as those terms are usually coined, but an ethos that overcomes both anthropocentrism and androcentrism.

Critiquing the ongoing valorization of reason in animal ethics that persists despite feminist work that has problematized the concept so thoroughly,<sup>53</sup> Cathryn Bailey argues that both Singer and Regan fail to

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<sup>50</sup> See e.g., Genevieve Lloyd, *The man of reason: 'male' and 'female' in western philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1984); Michèle Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's choice: An essay concerning women, philosophy, etc.*, trans. Trista Selous (Oxford, UK & Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991); *The sex of knowing*, trans. Kathryn Hamer and Lorraine Code (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>51</sup> Oliver, *Animal lessons*, 303.

<sup>52</sup> See Carol Adams, *The sexual politics of meat* (New York: Continuum, 1990); Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the mastery of nature* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993); 'Nature, self, and gender: Feminism, environmental philosophy, and the critique of rationalism', in *Environmental ethics*, ed. by Robert Elliott, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 155–64; *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>53</sup> See e.g. sources cited at footnote 50, herein above.

recognize the thrust of ecofeminist criticism<sup>54</sup> – mistakenly ‘understanding the problem to be one of an absence of emotion rather than a recognition of the continuity between reason and emotion’.<sup>55</sup> Bailey’s analysis elucidates a particular blind spot shared by Singer, Regan, Francione, and other animal ethicists: they fail to take into account the feminist argument that

Reason did not first come into existence and then look for a venue to exhibit itself, rather, what much of philosophy came to define as reason only came into being as result of denying and quashing those attributes regarded as feminine or bodily.<sup>56</sup>

Instead, animal ethicists continue to use notions of reason, humanity and selfhood defined and delimited by a Cartesian privileging of disembodied reason. This results in ethics that promote ‘rights’ for OTHAs, but fail utterly to address the issues inherent in the (hu)man/animal binary and its privileging of reason and sentience as definitive of the (always-implicitly-*human*) ‘subject’ that creates the context in which OTHAs – the ‘objects’ in this particular binary – are deprived of not just rights, but any genuine ethical consideration.

Fundamentally, then, I believe animal ethics – ‘even’ Francione’s radical version – has reached an impasse. So long as it fails to learn feminism’s lesson that an oppressed group or individual’s position cannot be effectively advanced on the basis of their being acknowledged as ‘the same’ as those who oppress them, it seems doomed to be forever caught up with the questions of line-drawing outlined above – failing to realize the philosophical weight of the exclusionary basis of claims based on identity; using strategies that ‘inevitably end up justifying rights or equality for some and not others, many times for an elite few’.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> In particular, Bailey references Regan and Singer’s responses to Josephine Donovan’s, ‘Animal rights and feminist theory’ [1990], in *Beyond animal rights: A feminist caring ethic for the treatment of animals*, ed. by Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams (New York: Continuum, 1996), pp.34–59 (see esp. p.35); Cathryn Bailey, ‘On the backs of animals: The valorization of reason in contemporary animal ethics’, *Ethics and the Environment* 10, 1 (Spring 2005), 1–17.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>57</sup> Oliver, ‘What is wrong with (animal) rights?’, p.219.

It's unfair to suggest that philosophers who've battled against the traditional human/animal boundary have achieved nothing.<sup>58</sup> Legal rights for OTHAs fail to address the causes of oppression and denigration,<sup>59</sup> but have done much to help individual OTHAs and draw attention to the more complex *causes* of their situation – as have arguments around how far OTHAs are 'like' humans, and sentient.<sup>60</sup> However, the insistence of these philosophers that ethical transformation lies in 'a certain rational, reflective understanding of ethics',<sup>61</sup> *motivated* primarily by reason rather than by emotion or genuine kinship with OTHAs, remains.<sup>62</sup> 'This approach moves the ethical encounter with animals themselves out of the realm of bodily or affective relation and into the space of neutral rationality'<sup>63</sup> – which radically restricts the development of ethics beyond a privileging of reason and beyond anthropocentric dichotomies. Critiquing this separation-out of 'bodily' and 'rational' realms in western thought is central to this dissertation, as is presenting alternatives.

#### **IV. Philosophies of Difference**

Just as feminists who, recognizing the limitations of basing arguments on claiming identity/equality with men, moved to embrace difference,<sup>64</sup> some philosophers look to difference to benefit OTHAs. Unsurprisingly, such

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<sup>58</sup> Calarco explicates this in 'Identity, difference, indistinction', p.45; see also Kheel, *Nature ethics*, pp.249–50.

<sup>59</sup> Oliver, 'What is wrong with (animal) rights?', p.218.

<sup>60</sup> Francione's work has been especially vehement in this regard. His insistence on challenging the status of OTHAs as property goes well beyond what so-called animal welfarist positions even aspire to achieve (see Francione, *Animals as persons: Essays on the abolition of animal exploitation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); 'Animal welfare and the moral value of nonhuman animals', esp. p. 34).

<sup>61</sup> Calarco, 'Identity, difference, indistinction', p.45.

<sup>62</sup> See Donovan, 'Animal rights and feminist theory', *Signs*, 15, 2 (1990), 350–75, for an especially astute criticism of Regan and Singer's attitudes towards 'emotion' as playing a *legitimate*, constitutive role – as opposed to reason – in ethics. As Bailey's more recent article, 'On the backs of animals', identifies, the extent of these theorists' inability to countenance the relevance of 'emotion' to ethical theory is evidenced by their misunderstanding even of Donovan's critique.

<sup>63</sup> Calarco, 'Identity, difference, indistinction', p.45.

<sup>64</sup> See e.g., Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the other woman*, trans Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: New York University Press, 1985), and her key text, *An ethics of sexual difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).



philosophies have often emerged precisely to counter animal ethics that emphasize identity. As Elisa Aaltola notes:

it has been claimed that the search for similarity is itself part of anthropocentric morality, since only those like us are valuable. It also has been claimed that true respect for animals comes from recognising their difference and 'otherness', not from seeing similarities.<sup>65</sup>

Aaltola finds philosophies of animal difference wanting, arguing that while they are 'right in demanding respect' for differences, they remain problematic, and too vague. Oliver's main concern is the significant problem that 'if recent philosophies of difference are any indication, we can acknowledge difference without acknowledging our dependence on animals, or without including animals in ethical considerations'.<sup>66</sup> This begs the question of how desirable a philosophy is that doesn't positively change the lived treatment and experiences of OTHAS.

Notoriously, when ostensibly considering his cat as an other,<sup>67</sup> the best-known philosopher of difference, Jacques Derrida, omits '[a]ctually to respond to the cat's response to his presence'.<sup>68</sup> To Haraway's frustration (since she notes the positive things Derrida *does* do), 'he did not seriously consider an alternative form of engagement [to speech]... one that risked knowing something more about cats and *how to look back*...'.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Elisa Aaltola, "'Other animal ethics' and the demand for difference", *Environmental Values*, 11, 2 (2002), 193–209 (p.193).

<sup>66</sup> Kelly Oliver, 'Animal ethics: Toward an ethics of responsiveness', *Research in Phenomenology*, 40, 2 (2010), 267–80 (p.267).

<sup>67</sup> See Jacques Derrida, 'The animal that therefore I am (more to follow)', trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry*, 28, 2 (2002), 369–418. Note that Deleuze and Guatarri are similarly problematic, when, despite their radically anti-Cartesian concept of 'becoming-animal', 'show little concern for actual animals' – something compounded by their use of the concept to reconceive the *human* subject: see Oliver, *Animal lessons*, 4. In contrast, see Janet M. Alger and Steven F. Alger, *Cat culture: The social world of a cat shelter* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003); the Algiers do what Derrida fails to: it investigates how cats communicate, thereby making up part of 'the developing knowledge of both cat-cat and cat-human behavioral semiotics' to which Haraway refers in criticizing Derrida: Donna Haraway, *When species meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p.22.

<sup>68</sup> Donna Haraway, *When species meet*, p.22.

<sup>69</sup> Donna Haraway, 'Encounters with companion species: Entangling dogs, baboons, philosophers, and biologists', *Configurations*, 14, 1-2 (2006), 97–114 (p.103); see also Traci Warkentin, 'Interspecies etiquette: An ethics of paying attention to animals', *Ethics & the Environment*, 15, 1 (2010), 101–21 (p.102).

Another problem with difference philosophies is their failure to recognize differences *between* OTHAs – tending to lump them all together, thereby replicating the very dichotomy they seek to reject.<sup>70</sup> This arises perhaps from these philosophies’ roots in feminist concerns with sexual difference, which revolves around a masculine/feminine binary. Merleau-Ponty provides a potential way past this dichotomous view of difference: just as his philosophy allows for ‘expanding the asymmetry between the sexes to various gender identities’,<sup>71</sup> so I’d argue it offers ways to expand the ‘animal’ side of the human/animal dichotomy.

‘Philosophies of difference’ are, though – in isolation – arguably inadequate to overcome anthropocentrism. I concur with Oliver that so-called animal ethics ‘requires rethinking both identity and difference’, and that this might be best done ‘by focusing on relationships and responsivity’; the aim is not to suggest an ‘animal ethics’, but to show that ethics is transformed by considering OTHAs.<sup>72</sup>

However, I don’t think the concept of ‘difference’ is redundant: Luce Irigaray, whilst well aware of the problems, still argues that embracing difference can be liberatory. In *The Way of Love*, for instance, she locates difference as the ‘decisive instrument’ via which (human) identity might ‘giv[e] up its artificial and authoritarian unity’ and ‘find itself compelled to a cultivation of the relation with the other that it had neglected’.<sup>73</sup> Significantly, both Emmanuel Levinas and Merleau-Ponty agree with Irigaray that self-other relations are asymmetrical (‘because they assume a lived relation to the other that can never become symmetrical’),<sup>74</sup> hence there are always differences between self and other.<sup>75</sup> So, despite the limitations of philosophies of

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<sup>70</sup> Oliver, *Animal lessons*, p.4.

<sup>71</sup> Silvia Stoller, ‘Asymmetrical genders: Phenomenological reflections on sexual difference’, *Hypatia*, 20, 2 (2005), 7–26 (n.p. as I’m quoting from an html version of the article).

<sup>72</sup> Oliver, ‘Animal ethics’, p.267.

<sup>73</sup> Luce Irigaray, *The way of love*, trans. Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček (London and NY: Continuum, 2002), p.10.

<sup>74</sup> Stoller, ‘Asymmetrical genders’, n.p.

<sup>75</sup> While Irigaray asserts that ontological asymmetry arises from sexual difference, Merleau-Ponty and Levinas assume a *general* self-other asymmetry. Nonetheless, differences between selves and others are important to all three philosophers. See Stoller, ‘Asymmetrical genders’, for a discussion of this complex

difference, the concept arguably still has an important role to play in moving beyond androcentric anthropocentrism.

## **V. Indistinction: Imagining Non-anthropocentrism**

Indistinction refers to ‘new modes of thought and practice beyond the human/animal distinction’, and beyond philosophies of sameness and difference.<sup>76</sup> On Calarco’s account, to genuinely embrace indistinction is both ontologically and existentially radical: ultimately, it’s a thought and practice that – to succeed – must ‘reorient us along lines that enable alternative modes of living, relating, and being with others of all sorts (human and nonhuman)’;<sup>77</sup> ways that are perhaps at present hard to conceptualize, let alone actualize.

However, even a cursory look at the ways in which humans and various other animals *do* live alongside each other suggests indistinction’s not an impossible aim: from the relationships between reindeer and ‘reindeer nomads’ in Siberia<sup>78</sup> and between Jane Goodall and the chimpanzees she lived alongside,<sup>79</sup> to the rare but enlightening cases of humans raised by wolves and gazelles,<sup>80</sup> there is abundant evidence that OTHAs and humans not only can communicate effectively, but can live in ‘mixed communities’ well beyond those Mary Midgley describes<sup>81</sup> – given conditions in which rigid human/animal and animal/environment boundaries are not enforced.

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issue. (It’s worth noting that M-P has been criticized for androcentrism: see e.g., Judith Butler, ‘Sexual ideology and phenomenological description: A feminist critique of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception’, in *The thinking muse: Feminism and modern French philosophy*, ed. by Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989); Iris Marion Young, *Throwing like a girl and other essays in feminist philosophy and social theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>76</sup> Calarco, ‘Identity, difference, indistinction’, p.54.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> See R. Willerslev. 2004. ‘Not animal, not not-animal: Hunting, imitation and empathetic knowledge among the Siberian Yukaghirs’, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 10 (2004), 629–52; Piers Vitebsky, *Reindeer people: Living with animals and with spirits in Siberia* (London: HarperPerennial, 2005).

<sup>79</sup> Jane Goodall, *Through a window: My thirty years with the chimpanzees of Gombe* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1990).

<sup>80</sup> See, e.g., Charles Maclean, *The wolf children* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978); Jean-Claude Armen, *Gazelle-boy*, trans. Stephen Hardman (New York: Universe Books, 1974) (see chapter 12 for a brief discussion of other ‘wild children’, including the only other (at that time) known gazelle adoptee, whose ‘Achilles tendons were mutilated to prevent him making further attempts to escape’ (99) following his ‘rescue’ by humans; in this case, it seems the human in question had a better life alongside his OTHA family than with humans).

<sup>81</sup> See Midgley, *Animals and why they matter: A journey around the species barrier* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), Ch. 10, ‘The Mixed Community’.

To develop thought and practice genuinely 'beyond' the human/animal distinction is a quite different approach from embracing human-OTHA identity or difference:

The chief task of such work is neither to extend moral consideration to animals based on the sharing of classical human capacities and abilities nor to underscore endlessly the reductionism of traditional discourse on the difference between humans and animals. Instead, this alternative approach proceeds from a space in which supposedly insuperable distinctions between human beings and animals fall into a radical indistinction and where the human/animal distinction (in both its classical and more complicated deconstructive form) no longer serves as a guardrail for thought and practice.<sup>82</sup>

Indistinction perhaps best describes the kind of ethics and ontology this dissertation proposes. It also suggests, to me, the *uselessness* of dichotomizing 'identity' and 'difference' – suggesting that instead, the two experiences those terms attempt to evoke are always-already, in lived experience, constantly interrelated and interweaving, as we embodied beings are constantly experiencing others of all sorts as simultaneously 'the same as' *and* 'different from' us. The philosophical – and ethical – significance of this is something I discuss later, especially in examining (i) Milton's concept of egomorphism, and (ii) Merleau-Ponty's later ontology, which develops from the realization that humans and OTHAs share one 'flesh', the indivisibility of which entails human-animal 'intertwining'.<sup>83</sup>

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The quotation displayed at the start of this chapter reminds us that 'we are only now embarking on an attempt to move beyond anthropocentrism', and at this time it remains difficult to imagine what lies ahead. Remembering there was a (long) time when 'respect for persons, and persons themselves, were far less secure – not fixed, secure, or "natural" as they now seem',<sup>84</sup> draws attention to the historical specificity of such concepts that animal rights

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<sup>82</sup> Calarco, 'Identity, difference, indistinction', 54.

<sup>83</sup> See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 'The intertwining – The Chiasm'; see also Ted Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of nature* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2009), 87–95.

<sup>84</sup> Weston, 'Before environmental ethics', 329.

philosophers, in particular, rely on for their approach. It also indicates why ecocentric holist philosophers have been able to challenge notions like ‘person’, and how, in turn, contemporary thinkers can challenge that notion and others from a different perspective – one that privileges neither humans nor the ecosystem at the expense of other-than-human individuals. The significance of this in hoping to move ‘beyond’ anthropocentrism cannot be overemphasized given that contemporary western thought is inevitably shaped and limited by its emergence in and from a markedly anthropocentric context dating from at least the so-called Enlightenment, and arguably far earlier.<sup>85</sup> (As Chapter 2 acknowledges, though, the hegemony of anthropocentrism was far from inevitable, and there has frequently been resistance to it.<sup>86</sup>)

I agree that currently ‘even the best nonanthropocentric theories ... are still profoundly shaped by and indebted to the anthropocentrism that they officially oppose’;<sup>87</sup> hence my concern to interrogate philosophies that assert their non-anthropocentrism but which under closer scrutiny are revealed as more or less anthropocentric. To move ‘beyond’ anthropocentrism, it’s essential to grasp what must be let go. This is important to highlight here, given the emphasis I’ve placed on the ‘failings’ of the environmental and animal ethics discussed thus far.

But I also agree that ‘nonanthropocentric speculation’ is important;<sup>88</sup> therefore, I focus below less on critiquing anthropocentric aspects of the ideas under investigation, and increasingly on drawing out their positive, non-anthropocentric potential.

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<sup>85</sup> See Richard Sorabji, *Animal minds & human morals: The origins of the western debate* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1993). Sorabji’s convincing argument is that ‘a crisis was provoked when Aristotle denied reason to animals’ – and that the issues raised then are still being debated today’ (p.7). His final chapter acknowledges that his research led him ‘to appreciate that there was a real, live moral problem by the badness of the arguments for a major difference between animals and man’, and raises a range of pertinent questions having established that ‘none of the main moral theories available’ seem up to the task (p.216).

<sup>86</sup> See just for instance Nathaniel Wolloch, ‘William Smellie and Enlightenment anti-anthropocentrism’, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 33, 2 (2009), pp.45–63.

<sup>87</sup> Weston, ‘Before environmental ethics’, p.321.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, p.322.

## VI. Ethics as First Philosophy

In referring to ethics as ‘first philosophy’, I deliberately evoke Levinas, who argues that our never-ending obligation to ‘the Other’ renders ethics foundational to philosophy, and whose ethics some argue include OTHAs,<sup>89</sup> despite Levinas’s personal ambivalence about ‘animals’.<sup>90</sup> However, especially as others already provide impressive insight about his potential for animal and environmental ethics,<sup>91</sup> I don’t focus on Levinas here. Instead, I focus on the wider notion that ethics is *primary*.

Amongst others, Iris Murdoch stands out as sharing Levinas’s belief in the primacy of ethics, and that ‘the self is the enemy not only of the other, but of authentic existence’.<sup>92</sup> More recently, in the field of environmental philosophy, Jim Cheney and Anthony Weston proposed an approach to philosophy that puts ethics first – emphasizing that ethics comes *before* knowledge.<sup>93</sup> Setting out to re-write western ethics, they conclude that ‘it may after all be our comportment that is the single most crucial thing’.<sup>94</sup> This suggests that it’s precisely how we return the Other’s look (Levinas); how we see an other justly, honestly, and compassionately, in the process moving ‘away

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<sup>89</sup> In his chapter on Levinas in *Zoographies*, Calarco argues that despite Levinas’s evident anthropocentrism, ‘the underlying logic of his thought permits no such anthropocentrism’ (p.55). Others also argue that Levinas’s ethics can be extended to apply to other-than-human entities, whether other animals (Plant) or non-sentient phenomena (Davy, who also considers OTHAs): see Bob Plant, ‘Welcoming dogs: Levinas and “the animal” question’, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 37 (2011), 49–71; Barbara Jane Davy, ‘An other face of ethics in Levinas’, *Ethics & the Environment*, 12, 1 (2007), 39–65. A discussion of contemporary arguments that re-consider Levinas’s ethics from a perspective that challenges the human/animal boundary would be valuable. However, it’s more important here to focus on the wider notion of ethics as primary rather than on a lengthy discussion of Levinas’s problematic views about OTHAs.

<sup>90</sup> Despite some fudging of the issue, Levinas’s answer to this question is fundamentally that no, OTHAs are not included: see e.g., Emmanuel Levinas, ‘The paradox of morality’, [portions reprinted] in *Animal philosophy: Essential readings in continental thought*, ed. by Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton (New York: Continuum, 2004), 49, cited by Calarco, in *Zoographies*; ‘The name of dog, or natural rights’, in *Difficult freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (London: Athlone Press, 1990), pp. 151–3. Levinas’s adherence to a fundamental human/animal divide is quite evident, and even those who ‘reinterpret’ his thought non-anthropocentrically agree on this point: see Calarco, *Zoographies*; Davy, ‘An other face of ethics in Levinas’; Plan, ‘Welcoming dogs’.

<sup>91</sup> I agree with Davy that some of Levinas’s ideas – those that can be critically ‘de-anthropocentrized’ – might help achieve an ethics with strengths ‘in recognizing one’s responsibilities for and to specific others’ (Davy, ‘An other face of ethics in Levinas’, p.40); I consider her reading of the Levinasian ‘face’ in Chapter 3.

<sup>92</sup> Murdoch’s strategies of ‘unselfing’ work to overcome ‘the subjection of the other to my categories and my experience’, which resonates with Levinas’s aim to overcome ‘totality’: see C. Fred Alford, ‘Emmanuel Levinas and Iris Murdoch: Ethics as exit?’, *Philosophy and Literature*, 26, 1 (2002), 24–42 (p.24).

<sup>93</sup> Cheney and Weston, ‘Environmental ethics as environmental etiquette’.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*, p.128.

from universality'<sup>95</sup>(Murdoch), that constitutes ethics. This involves a radical rethinking of dominant views of ethics in western philosophy and culture.<sup>96</sup> To do this claim some justice, but without the space to engage in a thorough explication of all these philosophies, I focus here on outlining Cheney and Weston's thought.

Cheney and Weston set out their proposal by focusing on four underlying assumptions they identify as central, and offering alternatives to each. In summary, they propose that:

- (1) 'Ethical action is first and foremost an attempt to open up possibilities, to enrich the world' *rather than* 'a response to our knowledge of the world';<sup>97</sup>
- (2) 'Hidden possibilities surround us at all times' because 'the world has barely unfolded for us'; this in contrast to assumptions that world is 'readily knowable ... to the extent required for ethical response';<sup>98</sup>
- (3) 'Ethics is pluralistic, dissonant, discontinuous', rather than 'inherently an incremental and extensionist business'; hence 'ethical *discovery* is always possible';<sup>99</sup> and
- (4) 'The task of ethics is to explore and enrich the world'; 'Rather than sorting relatively fixed-natured things into relatively well-established categories of considerability... what is asked of us, insofar as we can manage it, is an open-ended, nonexclusive consideration of everything: people, bacteria, rocks, animals, everything, insofar as we can' (what Tom Birch calls universal considerability).<sup>100</sup>

This results in ethics that emphasize both that the life-world is not entirely 'knowable', and that *all* knowledge is ethics-based, is value-laden. It's clear even from this four-point outline the extent to which Cheney and Weston's

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<sup>95</sup> Alford, 'Emmanuel Levinas and Iris Murdoch', p.35.

<sup>96</sup> Murdoch, too, has long argued that the solution to 'the fundamental moral problem' of our tending 'to erase the reality of others' is *love* (Alford, 'Emmanuel Levinas and Iris Murdoch', p.35); this resonates with Irigaray, and with my discussion of epistemophilia, in Chapter 3, below.

<sup>97</sup> Cheney and Weston, 'Environmental ethics as environmental etiquette', pp.117, 116.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, p.118.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, pp.118, 117, 119.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, pp.119, 119–20; see Thomas Birch, 'Moral considerability and universal consideration', *Environmental Ethics*, 15 (1993), 313–32.

model refutes the assumptions and strategies of the ecocentric and animal ethics considered above.

Illustrating how some ‘non-western’ peoples understand ethics, and investigating the role of ‘[t]he written word’ in conspiring ‘with the visual metaphor to turn the world into a passive object for human knowledge’, Cheney and Weston ultimately argue that the primary, embodied nature of ethics means that practice is not ‘applied’ ethics, but ‘constitutive of ethics itself, our very mode of access to the world’s possibilities’.<sup>101</sup> Hence they conclude that etiquette and comportment are ‘genuine means of discovery’<sup>102</sup> – arguing that it’s only via actual, practical etiquette – returning an OTHA’s look (which Derrida failed to do); using the Other’s name; embracing instinctive, shared bodily responses – that we can develop a non-anthropocentric ethics. Hence, they:

oppose the usual view that puts knowledge of animals, for instance, before any possible (serious, intellectually respectable) ethical response to them. On our view, we can have no idea of what other animals are actually capable until we approach them ethically.<sup>103</sup>

They ultimately suggest that this kind of *courtesy* – bodily etiquette and respectful comportment – might be ‘the environmental-philosophical challenge of the future’.<sup>104</sup> This view is echoed by others, for instance Kennan Ferguson who writes that ‘we can learn from those who love their pets [and other OTHAs] that communication is not limited to abstract thoughts or human speech, but can and does happen in startling places and across surprising boundaries’ – and that people’s love for

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<sup>101</sup> Cheney and Weston, ‘Environmental ethics as environmental etiquette’, pp.121, 125.

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, p.125.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, pp.128, 125.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, p.129. Warkentin, in ‘Interspecies etiquette’, argues that we can ‘understand some basic qualities of gestures and behaviors to the extent that attentiveness to nonverbal communication can inform an ethical response’, and discusses ‘practical phenomenologists’ working on bodily etiquette: see e.g., Elizabeth Behnke, ‘Ghost gestures: Phenomenological investigations of bodily micromovements and their intercorporeal implications’, *Human Studies*, 20 (1997), 181–201; ‘From Merleau-Ponty’s concept of nature to an interspecies practice of peace’, in *Animal others: On ethics, ontology, and animal life*, ed. by H. Peter Steeves (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp.93-116; Thomas J. Csordas, ‘Somatic modes of attention’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 8 (1993), 135–56. See also Lori Gruen, ‘Attending to nature: Empathetic engagement with the more than human world’, *Ethics & the Environment*, 14, 2 (2009), 23–38.



OTHAs requires ‘new formulations of the roles of ethics and philosophy’.<sup>105</sup>

While Calarco cites Cheney and Weston in making his case for reading Levinasian ethics as ‘committed to a notion of *universal ethical consideration*, that is, an agnostic form of ethical consideration that has no a priori constraints or boundaries’,<sup>106</sup> I remain sceptical that Levinas’s ethics *require* non-anthropocentrism, given his position that ‘[e]thics is ... *against nature*’.<sup>107</sup> Cheney and Weston’s emphasis on the ethical importance of our *comportment* nonetheless resonates with Murdoch’s and Levinas’s ethics. It’s also echoed in ideas proposed by Merleau-Ponty and others, as discussed below.

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Calarco suggests that western philosophy is now starting to acknowledge and address what Levinas – and western philosophy more generally – ‘tried desperately but unsuccessfully to block or dissimulate’; that is, ‘the simple fact that we know neither what animals can do nor what they might become’.<sup>108</sup> This is crucially important to moving ‘beyond’ anthropocentrism.

The insistence that we must ask similar questions about OTHAs and environment to those we ask about humans is foundational to the discussion in Chapter 2. To do this, a genuine effacement of human/animal and animal/environment dichotomies is necessary: only via such a decentring of humans, can anthropocentric philosophy be succeeded by non-anthropocentric thought and practice. A major obstacle here is the pervasiveness of beliefs in precisely ‘the order of biology’, in ‘biological drives’, as separate and separable

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<sup>105</sup> Kennan Ferguson, ‘I ♥ my dog’, *Political Theory*, 32, 3 (2004), 373–95 (pp.374, 373). Ferguson’s article focuses on dogs, but his general points are intended to apply more widely to OTHAs including ‘pets’.

<sup>106</sup> Calarco, *Zoographies*, p.55.

<sup>107</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Ethics of the infinite’, in *Dialogues with contemporary continental thinkers* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984), pp.60–61. Calarco’s argument ‘for’ Levinas’s value for non-anthropocentric ethics is attractive (see *Zoographies*, pp. 62–77), I’d argue its ‘anthropomorphic prejudices’, render it *as a whole* as incapable of embracing not just OTHAs but environment, too. The key problem with reading Levinas’s philosophy as potentially embracing OTHAs is that, as Plant argues, in Levinas, the ethical is precisely an ‘antidote’ to the ‘murderousness’ of nature/natural disposition, placing ‘the animal’ as ‘the condition that must be overcome’ (Plant, ‘Welcoming dogs’, p.53, citing David Wood, *The step back: Ethics and politics after deconstruction* [New York: SUNY, 2005], p.60).

<sup>108</sup> Calarco, *Zoographies*, p.63.

from being human, and from being ethical. This is why, arguably, 'even' philosophies as radical as Francione's and Levinas's are, ultimately, beholden to quite historically-specific and particular forms of scientific belief – not least those promulgated by neo-Darwinists and sociobiologists; the kinds of belief that Merleau-Ponty, amongst others, rejects, and which I challenge in the following chapter.

## Chapter 2:

# PHILOSOPHY, THE ANTHROPOCENTRISM OF ‘SCIENCE’, AND THE ‘PROBLEM’ OF ANTHROPOMORPHISM

Anthropocentrism queries: Why do animals cross the road we build?  
Rather than Why do we build the roads where animals cross? (Hwa Yol  
Jung, 2007)<sup>109</sup>

This chapter addresses how a problematically anthropocentric worldview is promulgated not just by philosophers, but by ‘science’ and, importantly, ways in which a ‘scientific’ worldview is represented and reified in western philosophy and wider culture. I outline how my earlier examples illustrate this, consider the role of particularly sociobiology in perpetuating an anthropocentric worldview, and investigate alternative views.

### I. Knowing about Bambi

What the philosopher can note – what provokes his thought – is that precisely those ... who maintain a Cartesian representation of the world admit their ‘preferences,’ just as a musician or a painter would speak of his preferences for a style. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968)<sup>110</sup>

Eaton’s essential argument, as set out in her criticism of *Bambi*, is that if we want to know what a deer (for instance) is *really* like, then we must look not to experience, emotion, imagination and fiction, but *only* to western science; in particular, to ecology. She holds that only scientific knowledge enables us to see through the fiction that *Bambi* presents when it tells us that deer ‘never fight for food [the fiction she says arises from Bambi’s mother telling him, ‘we never kill anything’], because there is enough for all’. Eaton’s claim is that this

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<sup>109</sup> Hwa Yol Jung, ‘Merleau-Ponty’s transversal geophilosophy and sinic aesthetics of nature’, in *Merleau-Ponty and environmental philosophy: Dwelling on the landscapes of thought*, ed. by Suzanne L. Cataldi and William S. Hamrick (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007), pp. 235–55 (p.251).

<sup>110</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, p.17.

is 'totally false' and, in contrast, only knowledge obtained through ecology can 'teach children about the actual effect of over-population of deer in the forest'.<sup>111</sup>

Eaton ignores that a story might be written – indeed, probably has been, by now – which tells children about the issue and effect of over-population (even if *Bambi* is not that story). More significant, though, is *her* glossing over the 'whole story' – that is, as implicit in Leopold's story, that despite her use of the passive voice in telling us the ecological 'truth' that deer (the species) 'has come to dominate' certain ecological systems in the US, this results from humans' domination of those systems (by building on the land, mining and farming it, poisoning the water, etc.) – specifically by hunting and killing off numerous predators, and by further encouraging growth in deer numbers so that hunters have targets for their sport (see Figure 1). Given that Eaton actually mentions this latter point earlier in her article,<sup>112</sup> it seems remarkable that she elides it in her scathing critique of what *Bambi's* mother says and its 'scientific' veracity.

My point here is that Eaton's anthropocentrism entails a wilful blindness to the partial nature of the 'story' she chooses to tell in the name of the science that she, along with other proponents of a science-led approach to nature, and to ethics, claim to be 'objective' – untainted by the partiality they lay exclusively at the door of imagination, fiction, emotion and other approaches that don't prioritize, precisely, a 'scientific' worldview.<sup>113</sup> This reveals that the 'knowledge' afforded by western science – ecology, here – is as open to interpretation as fiction and imagination. This is a point made quite emphatically by philosopher Donna Haraway, amongst others – where Haraway has argued persuasively that the so-called objective facts of science

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<sup>111</sup> Eaton, 'Fact and fiction', p.153.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*, p.152.

<sup>113</sup> This is all the more surprising given the measured approach she takes to her analysis – allowing, for instance, that 'rich imagination is just what is needed if we are to develop new metaphors for designing sustainable landscapes', even while simultaneously asserting that ecological knowledge alone should 'direct' experiences provided by fiction and imagination: see Eaton, 'Fact and fiction', pp.151, 152.

depend on the interpretive framework of theory,<sup>114</sup> and, more specifically, that knowledge, data and evidence are produced by the perceptions, methodologies and languages of those asserting them.<sup>115</sup>

The ecocentric holist perspective (re)presented by Eaton does not allow that science is, far from being objective, one form of storytelling amongst many.<sup>116</sup> Resistance to this by those who reify science illustrates the widespread acceptance of the assumption of western ethics that ethics (must or should) come after and ‘from’ knowledge, rather than being always already shaped by ethics. It also indicates the perceptiveness of Thomas Heyd’s point that ‘[t]he illusion that science is not driven by values ... can only be upheld by being so deeply involved in its world picture that one lacks the capacity for critical scrutiny of what science is’.<sup>117</sup>

Rolston recognizes that ecology is not the only significant discourse. Nevertheless, he reifies it in his response to the dead elk. Perhaps more obvious in Rolston’s description of a corpse than in Eaton’s exasperation at the ‘misinformation’ promulgated by *Bambi*, however – although evident in both texts – is the decidedly sharp boundary between how they choose to apply ‘science’ to OTHAs and to humans: Rolston nowhere, for instance, meditates on the ‘ecological beauty’ of a *human* corpse – revealing that, as Kheel ably demonstrates, he draws a sharp distinction between human beings and (all)

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<sup>114</sup> Donna Haraway, ‘In the beginning was the word: The genesis of biological theory’, *Signs* 6, 3 (1981), 469–81.

<sup>115</sup> See *ibid.*, and also Donna Haraway, ‘Primateology is politics by other means’, in *Feminist approaches to science*, ed. by Ruth Bleir (New York: Pergamon Press, 1986), pp.77–118 (esp. p.79). See also Lynda Birke, ‘Structuring relationships: On science, feminism and non-human animals’, *Feminism & Psychology*, 20 (2010), 337–49; and the collection of articles co-edited by Birke that asks how practices of biology might change were OTHAs considered as subjects: Lynda Birke and Ruth Hubbard, eds, *Reinventing biology: Respect for life and the creation of knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

<sup>116</sup> Some scientific cognitivists and holist environmentalists do allow this, to a limited extent: Saito, e.g., allows that stories besides the scientific one – e.g. folklore and myth – should be considered as contributing to treating ‘nature as nature’ by ‘recognizing its own reality apart from us’: Yuriko Saito, ‘Appreciating nature on its own terms’, in *The aesthetics of natural environments*, ed. by Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant (Mississauga, Canada: Broadview Press, 2004), pp. 141–55 (p.145); see also Rolston, ‘Does aesthetic appreciation of landscapes need to be science-based?’.

<sup>117</sup> Thomas Heyd, ‘Aesthetic appreciation and the many stories about nature’, in *The aesthetics of natural environments*, ed. by Carlson and Berleant (Mississauga, Canada: Broadview Press, 2004), pp.269–82 (p.278).

OTHAs.<sup>118</sup> Eaton assumes a similarly clear human/animal boundary – unsurprisingly, given these thinkers’ reliance on western science for their beliefs about OTHAs; beliefs that reveal such science’s commitment to maintaining precisely that boundary (in the formation of which, that same science played a key role). Below, I investigate further this boundary-making and maintaining – often implemented via a vehement resistance to ‘anthropomorphism’ – considering both its philosophical significance (especially to ethics), and its prevalence despite science’s own ever-increasing evidence of human-OTHA continuity.<sup>119</sup>

## II. The ‘Problem’ of Anthropomorphism

how should we interpret the apparently similar signs of consciousness, care, and empathy observed in animals without falling into “heresies” of either anthropomorphism or anthropocentrism? In its eagerness to avoid the former, contemporary biology has often been drawn into the dogmatism of the latter. (Jickling and Paquet, 2005)<sup>120</sup>

As Jickling and Paquet’s comment suggests, the fear of ‘committing’ anthropomorphism – i.e., of attributing ‘human’ characteristics to animals on the *other side* of the human/animal dichotomy – is deeply entrenched in contemporary biology. Hence, anthropomorphism is defined as something to be avoided. This remains the case despite evidence of human-OTHA continuity, as mentioned above: key to this apparent discrepancy is that even while areas of biology such as ethology provide such evidence, and ‘thinking about animal minds does begin to accord them some respect’, some ethologists veer towards reductivist, mechanistic explanations, and ethology ‘remains embedded in the

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<sup>118</sup> See Kheel, *Nature ethics*, Ch. 5, ‘The ecophilosophy of Holmes Rolston III’, esp. pp.142–3.

<sup>119</sup> As Westling notes: ‘Evolutionary biology, recent archeological finds, and empirical animal studies have erased much of the distance between *Homo sapiens* and our coevolved animal relatives, such as the great apes, dolphins, elephants, and even parrots’: ‘Merleau-Ponty’s human-animality intertwining’, p.162.

<sup>120</sup> Jickling and Paquet, ‘Wolf stories’, p.129.

rhetoric and practice of science'.<sup>121</sup> Therefore, such evidence alone cannot undo the human/animal dichotomy.

Considered, currently,<sup>122</sup> to be the attribution to other-than-human entities of any human characteristic, this definition of 'anthropomorphism' is problematic when invoked as a criticism – precisely because such attribution 'is only a mistake if those animals *lack* those characteristics'.<sup>123</sup> A more accurate definition of anthropomorphism (as generally used by those who denigrate it), might be the attribution to other-than-humans of characteristics that belong *exclusively* to humans.<sup>124</sup>

The scientific characterization of anthropomorphism as bambi-ization, as sentimental, and as uncritical – as 'projecting' exclusively human characteristics onto OTHAs that bear no relation to scientific 'reality' – is inherently demeaning to OTHAs, and privileging to humans. When the term is coined, the assumption is generally not that OTHAs' characteristics are simply 'different' to humans', but that they are *lesser than* humans' – because OTHAs are mechanistic, devoid of emotions or other characteristics equivalent to those of humans. Such an attitude is clearly articulated by J.S. Kennedy, a key proponent of this view.

In *The New Anthropomorphism*, Kennedy opens with the startling assertion that he wouldn't wish us to *entirely* de-anthropomorphize OTHAs;

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<sup>121</sup> Lynda Birke, 'On keeping a respectful distance', in *Reinventing biology: Respect for life and the creation of knowledge*, ed. by Lynda Birke and Ruth Hubbard (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp.75–87 (p.81).

<sup>122</sup> My discussion concerns contemporary uses of the term 'anthropomorphism', and is mostly confined to its usage in the post-Enlightenment 'west'. Adrian Franklin's (*Animals and modern cultures: A sociology of human-animal relations in modernity* [London: Sage, 1999], p.61) work discusses the historical specificity both of the definition and usage of 'anthropomorphism' I'm discussing and contemporary responses to it, contextualizing such usage and attitudes in the modern and postmodern age, and making 'a connection between some general conditions of postmodern sensibility and the general direction of change in human-animal relations since the early 1970s'. It's also worth noting Mithen's contention that so-called anthropomorphism 'has become natural only very recently, probably in the last 100,000 years and possibly only in the last 40,000 years': S. Mithen and P. Boyer, 'Comment: Anthropomorphism and the evolution of cognition', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2, 4 (1996): 717–21 (pp.718–19).

<sup>123</sup> D. Hilbert, 'Comments on "anthropomorphism"', *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 69, 2/3 (1993): Papers presented at the American Philosophical Association Pacific Division Meeting 1992: 123–7 (p.123, my emphasis).

<sup>124</sup> See e.g. Tom Regan, *The case for animal rights*, 1988, p.6, cited in Kay Milton, 'Anthropomorphism or egomorphism? The perception of non-human persons by human ones', ed. John Knight, *Animals in person: Cultural perspectives on human-animal intimacies* (King's Lynn: Berg, 2005), pp. 255–70 (p.259), for a discussion of the problems around 'defining' anthropomorphism.

however, this is only because he believes a certain level of anthropomorphizing is 'built into us' culturally and genetically – for adaptive purposes, he claims.<sup>125</sup> His main concern remains to 'liberate' humans – especially scientists – from anthropomorphizing that doesn't serve a culturally or genetically adaptive purpose. He thus laments that

our penchant for anthropomorphic interpretations of animals is a drag on the scientific study of the causal mechanisms of it. There is an inescapable ambiguity and inner conflict in the students of animal behaviour to anthropomorphism ... If the study of animal behaviour is to mature as a science, the process of liberation from the delusions of anthropomorphism must go on.<sup>126</sup>

Hence, scientists are taught to avoid anthropomorphism at all costs; to 'keep a constant vigil against anthropomorphic thinking and interpretation when performing animal research'.<sup>127</sup> They are not – despite their shared 'inner conflict' – encouraged to consider whether anthropomorphism is (always) delusional; they are simply told that it is!

Assumptions of anthropomorphism's complete lack of validity, and an evident wariness of 'committing' it, are abundant in scientific literature, especially about altruism.<sup>128</sup> The extent to which scientists (especially sociobiologists) concerned with OTHAs both conceive of and try to explain 'altruism' in OTHAs in ways that bear little or no resemblance to what is meant by the word<sup>129</sup> is extremely revealing of how stringently they wish to draw the line between OTHAs and humans. Tellingly, Jorg Massen and Elisabeth Sterck, when investigating why 'friendship' is, similarly, defined very differently by biologists and social scientists, suggest it is because 'a by-product of different

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<sup>125</sup> J.S. Kennedy, *The new anthropomorphism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), p.5.

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.* In fact, Kennedy goes on to warn against a swing back towards anthropocentrism, writing: 'Those who would have us go all the way back to traditional explicit anthropomorphism are still a minority but they show us the way things could go if they are not careful' – as they are 'as full of crusading zeal as the radical behaviourists before them' (p.5).

<sup>127</sup> H. Davies and D. Balfour, eds, *The inevitable bond* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 23, cited in Jeffrey Masson and Susan McCarthy, *When elephants weep: The emotional lives of animals* (London: Vintage, 1996), p.44.

<sup>128</sup> Frans de Waal notes this in his work on morality in humans and animals, e.g. in Frans de Waal, *Good natured: The origins of right and wrong in humans and other animals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) [kindle edition, n.p.], see e.g. loc. 2943.

<sup>129</sup> Noske also notes this: *Beyond boundaries*, p.97.



research approaches: namely social scientists focussing on proximate and biologists on ultimate explanations'.<sup>130</sup>

Some scientists *do* ask some similar questions about OTHAs as are asked about humans – or at least seem to. Frans de Waal, for one, rejects simplistic, sociobiological explanations of altruism amongst OTHAs,<sup>131</sup> arguing that altruism in *all* animals can be 'explained' only by reference to *multiple* biological and psychological layers.<sup>132</sup> Other ethologists call for 'critical' anthropomorphism, arguing that it is useful in understanding OTHAs.<sup>133</sup> However, scientists tend still to delimit the questions they ask about OTHAs to issues of altruism and related notions. Additionally, this 'critical' (use of) anthropomorphism is reserved – *by* scientists – for scientists alone; non-scientists are considered too 'sentimental',<sup>134</sup> inclined to 'gratuitous anthropomorphism that projects human emotions and intentions onto animals without justification'.<sup>135</sup>

Despite the 'prohibition', a growing number of ethologists study OTHA emotions in what many colleagues regard as an anthropomorphic manner. And some – such as Marc Bekoff – argue that it's inevitable, as well as legitimate:

If we decide against using anthropomorphic language, we might as well pack up and go home because we have no alternatives. Should we talk about animals as a bunch of hormones, neurons, and muscles absent from any context...?<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Jorg J.M. Massen and Elisabeth H.M. Sterck, 'Close social associations in animals and humans: Functions and mechanisms of friendship', *Behaviour*, 147, 11 (2010), 1379–1412 (p.1379). The authors – both behavioural biologists – start by noting that 'while biologists describe friends as social tools to enhance fitness, social scientists describe human friendship as unconditional' (*ibid.*).

<sup>131</sup> He rejects simplistic theories such as kin selection and reciprocal altruism (see de Waal, *Good natured*, loc. 159), as well as Richard Dawkins's infamous selfish-gene theory.

<sup>132</sup> He also displays awareness of the unfairness of using an ideally rational and moral human as the 'standard', noting pointedly that while OTHAs 'are no moral philosophers', nor are most humans: de Waal, *Good natured*, loc. 2943.

<sup>133</sup> See e.g. de Waal, *Good natured*, where he writes that 'anthropocentrism as a means at get to the truth, rather than as an end in itself... sets its use in science apart from use by the layperson' (loc. 887). He cites several scientists who call for 'critical anthropocentrism', including Gordon Burghardt, 'Animal awareness: Current perceptions and historical perspective', *American Psychologist*, 40 (1985), 905–19.

<sup>134</sup> Leslie Irvine, *If you tame me: Understanding our connection with animals* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), p.73.

<sup>135</sup> De Waal, *Good natured*, loc. 3190.

<sup>136</sup> Marc Bekoff, *The emotional lives of animals: A leading scientist explores animal joy, sorrow and empathy – and why they matter*, foreword by Jane Goodall (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2007), p.124. His rhetorical question evidently implies scientists who do study OTHAs in such reductivist ways are misguided.

These ethologists' findings suggest that far from being the wild imaginings of those not versed in strict scientific method, the widespread tendency for humans to perceive and refer to OTHAs as having thoughts and feelings akin to humans is well supported by evidence.<sup>137</sup> This raises again the issue of why this evidence has so little impact on exploding the human/animal dichotomy within science and its sphere of cultural influence. One answer is that reserving 'critical' anthropomorphism for scientists is unproductive at best – that, as both Lynda Birke and Vandana Shiva discuss, a key problem is that biology (and 'scientific knowledge' more generally, I'd suggest) needs 'democratizing'.<sup>138</sup> This would allow for more diverse ways of 'knowing' about OTHAs and other non-human entities.<sup>139</sup>

Because the term anthropomorphism always operates from a worldview that assumes a human/animal dichotomy, there is I think a problem with using it at all. Always already implying that characteristics it 'attributes to' OTHAs are definitively and exclusively human, this in turn implies *more* than just that there *are* characteristics that are exclusively human (which might well be so): it implies that whether or not a characteristic is human, human-like, not-human-like or not-human is what is important in identifying and responding to OTHAs – that is, the term is definitively anthropocentric, with 'human-ness' the standard by which all animals are measured. Again the argument might be made that it's impossible for humans to be anything other than anthropocentric – that we simply cannot see things differently. However, I insist that this is not necessarily the case.

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<sup>137</sup> See e.g., Marc Bekoff, 'Wild justice and fair play: Cooperation, forgiveness, and morality in animals', in *The animals reader: The essential classic and contemporary writings*, ed. by L. Kalof and A. Fitzgerald (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2007), pp.72–90; *The emotional lives of animals*; M. Candea, "'I fell in love with Carlos the meerkat': Engagement and detachment in human–animal relations', *American Ethnologist*, 37, 2 (2010), 241–58; Jeffrey Masson and Susan McCarthy, *When elephants weep: The emotional lives of animals* (Reading: Vintage, 1996), esp. pp.43–6; 48–55 (and they cite Julian Huxley, 1961, at p.44).

<sup>138</sup> See Vandana Shiva, 'Democratizing biology: Reinventing biology from a feminist, ecological, and third world perspective', in *Reinventing biology*, ed. by Birke and Hubbard, pp.50–71.

<sup>139</sup> See Birke, 'On keeping a respectful distance', pp.86–7. In a footnote, she clarifies this would involve taking into account the knowledge of pet keepers, farmers and others in western culture, as well as non-western peoples' knowledge(s) of OTHAs. Shiva, in 'Democratizing biology', writes about this in more detail.

For one, this position is akin to suggesting that women cannot help but see things from ‘a woman’s’ perspective. That too may well be the case, but it’s identifying and pinpointing the ‘woman’ part of an individual’s identity that becomes problematic when it is privileged above all other aspects of that identity – since other factors (apart from being a woman) might well be more significant in particular experiences and encounters. For instance, being a European human might be more pertinent in meeting an African human for the first time, and age more pertinent than gender to finding common ground with that other. Being a forest-dweller may be more significant in first encountering another forest-dweller, irrespective of ‘species’, and of gender.<sup>140</sup> Just because these latter aspects of being are so thoroughly familiar to us as categories of experience through acculturation, this doesn’t mean they’re necessarily the most pertinent aspects of all the ‘others’ we perceive. The particulars – and complexities – of any given encounter vary, underscoring the dubious status of claims that a human must necessarily be anthropocentric: quite apart from anything else, this appears not to be the case in the lived experience of many.

Below, I consider why science makes is so vehemently resistant to anthropomorphism, and what the response to that, and alternatives, might be.

### **III. Science, Feminism, Merleau-Ponty**

There are two ways to consider the animal ... we can either analyse the process of the animal under a microscope, or see a totality in the animal. (Merleau-Ponty, 1957-8)<sup>141</sup>

Despite citing ecology as primary – a science associated closely with ‘pro nature’ environmentalism, and which ecocentric holists in particular reify as crucial to our understanding the interlinked nature of ‘the biotic community’ – what’s evident in Eaton’s and Roston’s philosophies and in western thought more generally is the central role played by OTHA-focused sciences such as

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<sup>140</sup> This is a point made too by Merleau-Ponty, e.g., in his example of the stickleback, discussed below.

<sup>141</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Nature: Course notes from the College de France*, trans Robert Vallier (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003), p.187.

biology, zoology and sociobiology in forming and informing concepts of ‘the (always impliedly non-human) animal’. These sciences are – as feminist philosopher-scientists Haraway, Noske, and Birke have argued – not only problematic in themselves, but shape attitudes towards OTHAs across the sciences and in other spheres of thought, including social sciences and philosophy. Like Merleau-Ponty, though, these philosopher-scientists don’t wish to reject science altogether, recognizing that since ‘meaning is biologically based ... not a product of mentality’, science is one way in which philosophers might legitimately learn more about the life-world.<sup>142</sup> But they *do* challenge its restricted worldview, and especially its foundations in materialism and anthropocentrism.

In *Beyond Boundaries*,<sup>143</sup> Noske presents ‘a critique of animal objectification and a quest for their “resubjectification”’,<sup>144</sup> focusing on human-OTHA relations in history, and especially the role science has played. Her discussion is wide-ranging, but I’m interested here in her critique of contemporary sociobiology as an offshoot of neo-Darwinism, and its role in promulgating and widening the human/animal and animal/environment divides that Darwin had arguably narrowed.<sup>145</sup> This echoes one of Merleau-Ponty’s explicit concerns: how neo-Darwinism ‘profoundly modified’ Darwin’s model, in the process radically altering ‘the conception of selection’ and delimiting its approach to ‘the problem of Being’.<sup>146</sup>

Taking up points made by Haraway, Noske argues that what modern science calls ‘nature’ includes only parts of ‘natural reality’ – the parts that scientists ‘think they can be objective about’, thereby relegating other aspects

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<sup>142</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, p.87; see also p.85.

<sup>143</sup> Barbara Noske, *Beyond boundaries: Humans and animals* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1998).

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*, p.169.

<sup>145</sup> Darwin’s evolutionary theory did indeed narrow the human-OTHA ‘gap’. However, living at a time when, as Hilary Rose has argued, ‘the balance of cultural politics favored the antivivisectionists’, Darwin was a powerful figure in ensuring that legislation permitting vivisection was eventually passed: Hilary Rose, ‘Learning from the new priesthood and the shrieking sisterhood: Debating the life sciences in Victorian England’, in *Reinventing biology*, ed. by Birke and Hubbard (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp.3–20 (pp.12–13).

<sup>146</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, pp.244, 209.

of nature as ‘subjective’ and ‘unscientific’.<sup>147</sup> As she argues, the key problem here is that for most scientists – and hence a culture that privileges scientific discourse – this restricted, partial understanding of what constitutes nature comes to represent *all* of nature.<sup>148</sup> This resonates with Merleau-Ponty’s description of ‘classical science’ as ‘a form of perception which loses sight of its origins and believes itself complete’.<sup>149</sup> His view, like Noske’s, is that there is much more to life than that identified ‘under a microscope’.

Critiquing sociobiology in particular – given its central role in studying OTHAs and popularizing ideas about them – Noske attacks its highly reductionist approach, treating as it does, ‘all animal behaviour as connected with adaptation and gene transmission’,<sup>150</sup> and presenting a biological determinism that resists – often, elides utterly – the workings of sociality and culture. Noske also illustrates the ways in which sociobiologists and their biological paradigm<sup>151</sup> treat OTHAs as objects (as *opposed* to human-subjects), defining actions as ‘mechanisms of living matter governed by natural laws’. Centrally, she shows how social scientists mostly *also* treat OTHAs like this – criticizing ‘the biobehavioural sciences for their reductionist approach, but *only if applied to humans*’.<sup>152</sup>

Her view of this situation – like mine – is that it’s untenable as well as unethical: as she asks,<sup>153</sup> why accept the reductionist caricatures of OTHAs when we reject such caricatures of humans? At the same time, noting that sociobiologists such as E.O. Wilson have called explicitly for the ‘biologization of ethics’,<sup>154</sup> Noske explains why it might be: since OTHAs have become associated with purely biological explanations, ‘[i]n order to safeguard humans

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<sup>147</sup> Noske, *Beyond boundaries*, p.54.

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*, p.55.

<sup>149</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The phenomenology of perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1992), p.57.

<sup>150</sup> Noske, *Beyond boundaries*, p.92.

<sup>151</sup> Which, parenthetically, Noske notes ‘is just not designed to handle things that are socially and culturally created and which in turn shape their creators...’ (Noske, *Beyond boundaries*, p.86).

<sup>152</sup> Noske, *Beyond boundaries*, p.83, my emphasis.

<sup>153</sup> See e.g. *ibid.*, p.88.

<sup>154</sup> See *ibid.*, p.98.

from another onslaught of biological determinism social scientists tend to be quite defensive about the non-animalness of humans'.<sup>155</sup>

Noske argues that the threat of ethics as biological tends to cause 'even' *anti*-sociobiologists to use the human/animal boundary to defend human exclusivity – in an attempt to refute the sociobiological claim that 'moral beliefs' are 'mere expressions of the underlying biological state of the hypothalamic-limbic system'.<sup>156</sup> That is, resistance to 'de-humanization' and/as 'biologization' of *human* sociality 'has expressed itself in protest against any form of human-animal comparison' and continuity.<sup>157</sup> Thus, sociobiology, in threatening humans with the same reductivism it forces onto OTHAs, mobilizes a masterful rhetorical device: it divides and conquers. This is something Birke hones in on when she mentions that in addition to 'much sociobiological work... still tending towards reductionism, even ... biological determinism', the problem is wider than that, since 'popularized accounts persist in picking up underlying messages about genes and determinism'.<sup>158</sup> Further, and more generally, biologists and their populizers continue to believe that scientists 'objectively' observe nature, when this is arguably an impossibility, given the mediation of our knowledge of the world through contemporary and historically anthropocentric (and androcentric) social and cultural understandings.<sup>159</sup> Once more, Merleau-Ponty shares this concern, frustrated that 'the biologists remain more materialist than the physicists',<sup>160</sup> refusing to see the 'totality' of animals.

It's important to note the historical and cultural specificity of the sorts of claims made here, to avoid any simplistic understanding of suggestions that scientific knowledge is inevitably anthropocentric and androcentric. While humans have an always anthropocentric view in that we are human and therefore inevitably see from a human perspective, this *need* not – even if in

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<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*, p.88, Her examples of this are enforced sterilization in the USA, and the extermination of groups by the Nazi regime.

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*, p.93.

<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>158</sup> Lynda Birke, 'Sociobiology, ideology, and feminism', *Politics and the Life Sciences* (1995), 165–6 (p.165).

<sup>159</sup> See e.g. Birke, 'Sociobiology, ideology, and feminism'; Haraway, 'In the beginning was the word'.

<sup>160</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, p.26.

practice it definitely *tends* to, in contemporary culture – mean that we cannot (i) recognize the bias that arises from anthropocentrism and (ii) work to resist such bias, even managing to ‘see’ things from other-than-human perspectives insofar as this is possible.<sup>161</sup> Hence, when Haraway and others argue that it’s impossible to observe nature ‘objectively’ because of anthropocentrism’s tainting of science and other knowledge forms, their claim is an historical one – akin to feminist claims that knowledge cannot be ‘objective’ due largely to its intrinsically masculinist bias. This relates back to Cheney and Weston’s insistence that all knowledge is coloured by ethics; science’s ‘knowledge’ is based on anthropocentric and androcentric worldviews, so it has inevitable biases. The argument is not that ‘objectivity’ is not possible because of anthropocentrism and androcentrism, but that it’s not possible *at all* as contemporary scientists style it; rather, all that’s *ever* possible is an intersubjectivity that eradicates as far as possible foundational biases.

In this context, citing Haraway Noske notes that many who oppose sociobiology

use value-laden theoretical constructs for human and animal realities; they do not substitute true versions for false accounts, nor unmask ideologies. In their sociobiological(!) interpretation of animal behaviour and their anti-sociobiological interpretation of human behaviour, their own perception of animals as objects and of humans as persons plays a crucial role.<sup>162</sup>

It’s therefore perhaps moot how far philosophers like Rolston and Eaton cite ecology or another science to support their attitudes to OTHAs: as Noske argues, it’s fundamentally ‘their own perception of animals as objects and of humans as persons’ that is crucial: their attitudes already reject the possibility

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<sup>161</sup> Bekoff argues in *The emotional lives of animals* that anthropomorphism must be carried out ‘carefully, consciously, empathetically, and biocentrically’ because ‘[w]e must make every attempt to maintain the animal’s point of view’ (p.125); because ‘when I try to figure out what’s happening in a dog’s head, I have to be anthropomorphic, but I try to do it from a dog centered point of view’ (p.123).

<sup>162</sup> Noske, *Beyond boundaries*, p.101. It’s worth noting here that the practice of a number of ‘even’ scientists who work with OTHAs (neither Leopold nor Eaton is a scientist, of course) do *not* hold such views, but treat OTHAs as having selves, and put ethics before epistemology. (One example is Carl Jones: his tactic to save endangered species first, and only then – once imminent danger is past – to ‘study’ them, goes against the received wisdom of the mainstream scientific community, placing ethical firmly ahead of epistemological concerns.)

not just of treating OTHAs as subjective individuals, but of even the outside *possibility* of their being subjects. Leopold, Rolston, and Eaton – as well as Singer, Regan, and Francione – fail, certainly, to even attempt the phenomenological project of ‘returning to the things themselves’ – always eliding the anthropocentric bias founding the ‘scientific’ worldview through which they interpret the world.

As indicated above, this feminist critique of ‘science’ resonates with Merleau-Ponty’s thought. In particular, Merleau-Ponty shared the idea that science can only ever offer a partial view of the life-world;<sup>163</sup> rejected the use of human reason as a standard by which to assess OTHAs;<sup>164</sup> and held that we should ‘live alongside the world of animals instead of rashly denying it any kind of interiority’.<sup>165</sup>

However, keener than other phenomenologists to incorporate science’s insights,<sup>166</sup> Merleau-Ponty ‘attempt[ed] a reanimation and reinterpretation of science by continually navigating between vitalism and mechanism without giving up on the meaningfulness of science’.<sup>167</sup> Hence, as per the quotation that heads this section, while Merleau-Ponty allows that we can analyse a body – an animal – as process, ‘under a microscope’, he insists on the philosophical appropriateness of the latter approach – of seeing the totality; that ‘[t]he unity of the organism does not rest on the central nervous system; it must rest on activity’.<sup>168</sup>

Only by reawakening immediate contact with the life-world in which we all participate, can we even access the ‘philosophical problem’ posed by activity, by behaviour – that ‘the totality is no longer describable in

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<sup>163</sup> Merleau-Ponty also focuses on the biological sciences – no doubt in part because they are most directly concerned with OTHAs, but also because he held that ‘the biologists remain more materialist than the physicists’ (*The visible and the invisible*, p.26).

<sup>164</sup> Merleau-Ponty did this in a 1948 radio lecture (see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The world of perception*, trans. Oliver Davis [London: Routledge, 2004]), in which, as Kelly Oliver notes, he ‘implicitly criticize[d] his earlier use of animal studies ... to show that animals are incapable of projecting themselves into the future and therefore are incapable of higher thought processes...’ (Oliver, *Animal lessons*, p.221).

<sup>165</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The world of perception*, p.75.

<sup>166</sup> Louise Westling has argued that, as a result, ‘his lifelong engagement with science took him well beyond the positions of other phenomenologists’: Westling, ‘Merleau-Ponty’s human-animality intertwining’, p.164.

<sup>167</sup> Oliver, *Animal lessons*, p.241

<sup>168</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, p.170.



physiological terms; it appears as emergent'.<sup>169</sup> This is why, for Merleau-Ponty, considering an OTHA as its totality is far more philosophically pertinent than any experience we might obtain of it mediated by science alone. As he sets out in his Preface to *The Phenomenology of Perception*:

To return to things themselves is to return to that world which *precedes knowledge*, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which *every scientific schematisation is an abstract and derivative sign-language*, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is...<sup>170</sup>

Not only is the 'totality' of each animal important, but, taking this notion further in his later work, Merleau-Ponty suggests that anyway '[w]hat exists are not separated animals, but an inter-animality'.<sup>171</sup> This is deeply significant for philosophies of 'indistinction', with significant repercussions for 'science'. Significant here is Merleau-Ponty's vehemently anti-Cartesian stance, his rejection of the notion held dear by both western science and philosophy, that 'reason' defines hu(man)s and separates us from OTHAs. In the *Nature* lectures, Merleau-Ponty argues explicitly that 'human being is not animality + reason', and that 'this is why we are concerned with the body: before being reason, humanity is another corporeity'.<sup>172</sup>

To embrace Merleau-Ponty's ontology, then – and a feminist critique of science – is not to reject utterly the science so valued by many environmentalists and philosophers. But it *is* to reject the reified position their philosophies bestow upon science, and to challenge the damage – the violence, to subject-bodies – done as a result of such reification.

Part of what must be addressed in and by science, then, is its failure (i) to grant subjectivity to non-humans (Noske), and (ii) to recognize the merely partial grasp it has of the life-world and the bodies and entities that constitute it (Merleau-Ponty). Science must therefore address its own resistance to what it terms anthropomorphism, since inherent in the prohibition of

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<sup>169</sup> *ibid.*, p.145.

<sup>170</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The phenomenology of perception*, ix, emphases (except of the word 'speaks') are mine.

<sup>171</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, p.189.

<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*, p.208. I discuss this further below.

anthropomorphizing is precisely the denial that OTHAs or any non-human entity can be a subject.

#### IV. Egomorphism and (Inter)subjectality

Milton argues that the term anthropomorphism is problematic primarily because it (i) assumes human-ness as its reference point, and (ii) implies that ‘people understand things by *attributing* characteristics *to*’ rather than ‘*perceiving* characteristics *in* them’.<sup>173</sup> She argues the term is therefore best rejected, proposing ‘egomorphism’ as an alternative concept to understand and analyse what humans (and OTHAs) do when they encounter not just OTHAs, but ‘others’ of all sorts.

Centrally, Milton posits that it’s not *human-ness* at all, but personal experience (of the self and other selves) that humans recognize and respond to when perceiving an other’s embodied ‘selfhood’ – their Levinasian ‘face’. So, when I perceive emotions, feelings, expressions, moods and other characteristics in an OTHA, I perceive that OTHA as ‘like me’, and ‘like other selves’, rather than ‘human-like’.<sup>174</sup> Egomorphism allows, then, that other-than-human characteristics might be recognized as constitutive of selfhood. This immediately suggests our interactions with and understandings of OTHAs are not as tainted with anthropocentric bias as we so commonly assume, which already helps imagine a less anthropocentric worldview.<sup>175</sup> The concept of egomorphism might perhaps be criticized for its focus on the ‘ego’ – especially from Levinasian and Murdochian perspectives, which see the self’s tendency to erase the reality of others as *the* fundamental ethical problem.<sup>176</sup> I disagree: the ‘self’ on which egomorphism focuses is non-anthropocentric, arising from an intersubjectivity that genuinely encompasses more than just

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<sup>173</sup> Milton, ‘Anthropomorphism or egomorphism?’, pp.255–6, my emphasis.

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*, pp.260–61.

<sup>175</sup> This worldview recognizes and addresses the flaw in what Midgley’s termed ‘the dogma of anthropocentrism’; i.e., that ‘we can know how other humans feel yet can know nothing of other-than-human animals’ experiences’, when ‘the barrier to sharing [an individual’s experience] is already a complete one with human beings, so it cannot be made any more complete by adding the species-barrier to it’ (Midgley, *Animals and why they matter*, pp.142, 130).

<sup>176</sup> Alford, ‘Emmanuel Levinas and Iris Murdoch’, p.35.

human interrelations. As such, it doesn't erase the reality of others, but rather builds not just a notion of selfhood, but actual selves via intersubjectivity.

Considering Merleau-Ponty's insistence on the intercorporeal, embodied status of all animals, I propose the term 'intersubjectivity' as more appropriate than 'intersubjectivity' in descriptions of selfhood. Drawing on Li Zehou's neologism of 'subjectality' (*zhu/ti/xing*), this term underscores the 'embodied' nature of selfhood as distinct from the 'idealization' implied by the term 'subjectivity'.<sup>177</sup>

Egomorphism's understanding of selfhood is, far from being 'egotistical', decidedly dependent on inter-animal intersubjectivity in arriving at any concept of the self at all. This resonates with Merleau-Pontyan (and Levinasian) notions of our being *essentially* dependent on others – and especially with Merleau-Ponty's ontology of shared embodiment, which means that we 'as sensing/sensed beings, are *relational* beings'.<sup>178</sup> Indeed, for Merleau-Ponty we *start out* in life linked with others, as 'we', only developing a sense of our individual self, as 'I', later, *via* relationships with others.<sup>179</sup>

Milton's phenomenological position that beings *discover* meaning *in* their environment, that cultural constructions of meaning are based upon 'raw material' supplied by such direct perception,<sup>180</sup> gives priority to immediate experience as do Levinas and Merleau-Ponty. Arguably, then, the concept of egomorphism describes a non-anthropocentric basis that might underpin the kind of embodied, 'etiquette'-based ethics proposed by Cheney and Weston – and a way to make non-anthropocentric sense of neo-Levinasian notions of

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<sup>177</sup> Li Zehou, 'Subjectivity and 'subjectality': A response', *Philosophy East and West*, 49 (1999), 174–83 (p.174); see also Jung, 'Merleau-Ponty's transversal geophilosophy and sinic aesthetics of nature', 248.

<sup>178</sup> Molly Hadley Jensen, "'Fleshing" out an ethic of diversity', in *Merleau-Ponty and environmental philosophy: Dwelling on the landscapes of thought*, ed. by Suzanne L. Cataldi and William S. Hamrick (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007), pp.191–201 (p.200).

<sup>179</sup> See Kelly A. Burns, 'Warren's ecofeminist ethics and Merleau-Ponty's body-subject: intersections', *Ethics & the Environment*, 13, 2 (2008), 101–18 (p.114); J.M. Howarth, 'Nature's moods', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 35, 2 (2005), 108–20 (p.119).

<sup>180</sup> Milton, 'Anthropomorphism or egomorphism?', pp.265–7. As Milton outlines, this position *isn't* that individuals understand the world via 'direct perception *instead of* through cultural construction, but that cultural construction cannot take place without direct perception' (p.267); see also Tim Ingold, 'Culture and the perception of the environment', in *Bush base: Forest farm*, ed. by E. Croll and D. Parkin (London: Routledge, 1992).

face-to-face interactions. This is because it operates at the level of the specific, direct experience – not the level of abstraction that dictates that a being experiences and perceives others as either a ‘human’ or an ‘other-than-human’. To summarize, egomorphism recognizes that what we experience in an encounter with an individual OTHA is not a sense that OTHAs in general are like humans in general (although this might well emerge on reflection), ‘but a feeling of being understood, here and now’, by the particular OTHA.<sup>181</sup>

Unlike anthropomorphism’s construction of self as exclusively human, then, egomorphism involves OTHAs in intersubjectivity, and engages a more *relational* sense of personhood and the ‘self’. Crucially, I suggest the term *intertwines* the ‘ego’ with ‘morphing’: it suggests that the ego constantly engages with and/as responds to others, by recognizing (aspects of) itself-and-others *in* others. Hence others are *not* ‘an objectivity posited before a subject’.<sup>182</sup> This both resonates with Levinas’s concept of ethics as an interruption of the ego via the face of the other, *and* places egomorphism’s worldview on all fours with Merleau-Ponty’s, emphasizing the continuous sense-sensing that constitutes each embodied being, and supporting his contention that ‘sense experience refutes the understanding of self-unity as a sole consciousness’.<sup>183</sup>

Referencing U. Neisser’s position that intersubjectivity is crucial in coming to know our ‘self’,<sup>184</sup> and Antonio Damasio on the importance of feeling and emotions (in tandem with ‘reason’) to our sense of self,<sup>185</sup> Milton discusses how we, as we do with other humans, infer feelings – and personhood – from external signs in OTHAs, too.<sup>186</sup> We may not always get it *right* – we might

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<sup>181</sup> Milton, ‘Anthropomorphism or egomorphism?’, p.266.

<sup>182</sup> Alphonso Lingis, ‘Translator’s preface’, in Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, pp.xl–lvi (p.lv).

<sup>183</sup> Hadley Jensen, “‘Fleshing’ out an ethic of diversity”, p.195.

<sup>184</sup> Milton, ‘Anthropomorphism or egomorphism?’, pp.262–3. Echoing the critique that the term anthropomorphism is itself always-already unavoidably anthropocentric, Milton proposes that nothing – other than anthropocentrism, that is – stops Neisser’s theory, and similar ones about the human self, from being applicable beyond the species boundary: that is, his theory seems also to work in the interspecies realm wherein humans and OTHAs meet and interact.

<sup>185</sup> Milton, ‘Anthropomorphism or egomorphism?’, pp.264–5.

<sup>186</sup> Neisser’s model allows only for intra-species intersubjectivity in the formation of self. But it’s easy to see how it can be extended, as Milton argues it should be, to include inter-species interactions. Arguing that perceptions – understandings – of OTHAs as ‘persons’ arise in and through our interactions with them and

misinterpret, for instance, a cat's growl or her tensed body – but this is true not just for our interpretation of OTHAs, but of *all* others.<sup>187</sup>

In essence, the concept of egomorphism promotes a non-anthropocentric sense of selfhood that is rooted in direct perception and inter-animal intersubjectivity.

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The concept of 'anthropomorphism' in the social and biological sciences, then, and in much western philosophy, seems 'best understood as a distancing concept intended to obscure the real intersubjectivity that exists between humans and non-human animals';<sup>188</sup> a concept that operates to sustain the myth that OTHAs don't have 'selves' and can therefore be used as 'resources' and excluded from ethical consideration and treated as objects.

In contrast, egomorphism accords with Merleau-Ponty's later ontology, for which 'all relationships necessarily begin with the intercorporeality or interweaving of lived bodies both human and nonhuman'.<sup>189</sup> Merleau-Ponty posits intersubjectivity as preceding the subjectivity of self, and includes all embodied beings as (potentially) constitutive of intersubjectivity. I therefore argue that understanding inter- as well as intra-species encounters via the concept of egomorphism (i) works against the anthropocentrism of a western philosophy that, via 'inflating the human self', 'destroys the transversal

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are essentially 'no different... from our perceptions of our fellow human beings as persons, which also depend... on information about intersubjectivity' ('Anthropomorphism or egomorphism?', p.263), Milton further develops her model – and, with it, her argument for egomorphism – by drawing on Damasio's work to point up the crucial role of emotions and feelings in the emergence of self-consciousness. Dividing 'emotion' in two – a physical process and a subjective experience – Milton follows Damasio in reversing the usual conceptualization of subjective experiences (feelings) preceding and giving rise to emotions (physical change). Milton explains how this reversal makes sense, especially of our apparent understanding of OTHAs as having emotions, even if we are less sure that all species (also) have self-awareness (and thus, on Damasio's understanding, related feelings). For Damasio, 'emotions' are observable by others, while 'feelings', as subjective states, are 'entirely private'; he hypothesizes that while 'most, if not all, animals have emotions, only some are equipped to perceive their emotions – on other words, to have feelings' (Milton, 'Anthropomorphism or egomorphism?', p.264).

<sup>187</sup> As Midgley notes, even if we make mistakes about others' experiences – humans or other-than-humans – this does not equate to our not knowing anything about them. Only a solipsist would make that claim – and solipsism is not just widely regarded as untenable, but hardly a position espoused by the majority of those who make accusations of anthropomorphism: see Midgley, *Animals and why they matter*, p.130.

<sup>188</sup> Alger, J., and S. Alger (1999) 'Cat culture, human culture: An ethnographic study of a cat shelter', *Society and Animals*, 7 (3), 199–218 (p.203).

<sup>189</sup> Jung, 'Merleau-Ponty's transversal geophilosophy and sinic aesthetics of nature', p.251.

“circulation” of all beings’,<sup>190</sup> and (ii) assists in grasping Merleau-Ponty’s proposal that ‘the presence and awareness of diverse bodies is a building block for the awareness of self’.<sup>191</sup>

The call, then, is not to deny biology, but for simplistic, reductionist and determinist arguments to be rejected; for the recognition that while such arguments ‘do not do justice to the behaviour of humans’,<sup>192</sup> neither do they do justice to the behaviour of OTHAs. This call most certainly needs to be extended to philosophers who fail to move beyond a sociobiologically-influenced view of OTHAs even when they reject such views of humans – which is precisely what philosophers including Leopold, Eaton, and Rolston do – as well as to animal rightists and welfarists such as Regan and Singer who remain caught up in a human/animal dichotomy that anthropocentrically measures the value of OTHAs in terms of a hierarchy of sentience according to which OTHAs are all and always ‘lesser’ than humans.

## **V. Merleau-Ponty, OTHAs, Flesh**

Concepts such as those of selfhood and inter-animality outlined above, are radically opposed to western scientific views which shape and are shaped by their insistence on a human/animal boundary, and a sharp animal/environment distinction. Merleau-Ponty develops these ideas still further in considering OTHAs.

In elaborating his anti-Cartesian assertion that humans are *not* ‘animality + reason’, mentioned above, Merleau-Ponty focuses on the importance of movement and perceiving to bodies, holding that the ‘touch-touching, seeing-seen’-ness of the body ‘has nothing in common with a consciousness that would descend into a body-object. It is, on the contrary, the wrapping of a body-object around itself... in a circuit with the world’.<sup>193</sup> As such, Merleau-Ponty rejects the human/animal divide, asserting inter-

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<sup>190</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> Hadley Jensen, “‘Fleshing’ out an ethic of diversity”, p.193.

<sup>192</sup> Birke, ‘Sociobiology, ideology, and feminism’, p.166.

<sup>193</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, pp.208, 209.

animality and, further, that ‘the relation of the human and animality is not a hierarchical relation, but lateral, an overcoming that does not abolish kinship’.<sup>194</sup>

Merleau-Ponty supports his seemingly strange position that we are all – humans, OTHAs, and less animate entities – ‘one flesh’, despite our obvious and numerous differences, at least in part with his theory of behaviour. Crucially, he argues both that ‘[b]ehavior is sunk into corporeity’ and that ‘life is not uniquely submitted to the principle of utility’.<sup>195</sup> In these two ideas, developed even just in his lecture notes, is a powerful rejection of sociobiological and other claims that (i) OTHAs do not have ‘language’ so are lesser than humans, and that (ii) they are driven by straightforward ‘instincts’ without the socio-cultural complexities of humans.

First, Merleau-Ponty’s theory of behaviour locates in *movement*, in particular, demonstrative and communicative aspects of existence. This means even those OTHAs apparently without ‘language’ are able to, via embodied movement (as do humans) to interrogate, to respond, to participate in ‘a tacit language’ immanent in environment, body and others.<sup>196</sup> (This reflects my lived experience, certainly – and presumably that of many others.<sup>197</sup>)

Second, Merleau-Ponty argues that ‘[l]ife is not only an organization for survival; there is in life a prodigious flourishing of forms, the utility of which is only rarely attested to and that sometimes even constitutes a danger for the animal’, illustrating this with several examples.<sup>198</sup> His central point here – essential to embracing the one-ness of flesh – rails against a sociobiological, mechanistic view of *all* animals: it is that ‘We must criticize the assimilation of the notion of life to the notion of the pursuit of utility, or of an intentional

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<sup>194</sup> *ibid.*, p.268.

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*, pp.183, 184.

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*, pp.211, 219. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty poses the rhetorical question, ‘What difference is there between the *ready-made* or *natural* symbolism of the body and that of language?’ (p.211); see also the work of practical phenomenology in Behnke, ‘Ghost gestures’; ‘From Merleau-Ponty’s concept of nature to an interspecies practice of peace’; Csordas, ‘Somatic modes of attention’.

<sup>197</sup> I think here, too, of the numerous studies of (human) body language, as well as the oft-cited ‘fact’ that variously high percentages of human communication take place non-verbally. This is a widely accepted view, so it seems peculiar to resist it in respect of other-than-humans, especially OTHAs.

<sup>198</sup> *ibid.*, 186; for examples see the stickleback on p.196, and the Branave Islands crabs on p.188.

purpose', because 'What the animal shows is not utility; rather, its appearance manifests something that resembles our oneiric life' – in which sexual ceremony, for instance, is 'useful', yes, but its infinite variety of expression belies this as its sole meaning.<sup>199</sup>

Again there are parallels with feminist philosophers' ideas. Merleau-Ponty for instance makes the point that relationships between a male and female are not necessarily governed by 'sexual behaviour' (utility), but are also about far *more*: two sticklebacks in an example he uses interact as 'fellow creatures', he says, not exclusively in terms of 'sexual behaviour' as the scientists Merleau-Ponty is critiquing narrowly define the situation.<sup>200</sup> Birke develops similar points, arguing that 'how we see gender' in OTHAs is an 'extrapolation from our own cultural mores' and also partly produced 'by the material practices of laboratories' – when we should, she insists, be focusing instead on getting to know OTHAs *as* animals, relationally, not as reflections of ourselves and our assumptions about gender.<sup>201</sup>

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Merleau-Ponty's notion of human-OTHA kinship is central to the attraction of his ontology to philosophers in our search for ways to overcome the anthropocentrism of western thought, to develop alternative ways of thinking. The notion that we are 'kin' with OTHAs – and with *all* humans, not just those in our family – is quite radical. As Oliver argues, Merleau-Ponty's notion of strange kinship 'allows for an intimate relation based on shared embodiment without denying differences between lifestyles or styles of being'; and, coupled with his theory of stylistic differences, it's able to acknowledge differences 'without allowing [them] to become the grounds for ethical or epistemological hierarchies of being'.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> *ibid.*, p.188.

<sup>200</sup> *ibid.*, p.196.

<sup>201</sup> See Birke, 'Structuring relationships', p.337, *et passim*.

<sup>202</sup> Oliver, *Animal lessons*, p.222.



Ultimately, Merleau-Ponty brings together his ideas about ‘strange kinship’ and inter-animality in his notion of elemental ‘flesh’ to which the title of Chapter 3 alludes. Observing that our ‘environment of brute existence and essence is not something mysterious: we never quit it, we have no other environment’ – that ‘it is, whatever we may say, this world, this Being that our life, our science, and our philosophy inhabit’,<sup>203</sup> Merleau-Ponty insists that

all we must do is situate ourselves within the being we are dealing with, instead of looking at it from the outside ... what we have to do is put it back into the fabric of our life, attend from within to the dehiscence ... which opens it to itself and opens us upon it...<sup>204</sup>

From here, Merleau-Ponty posits that we are all ‘*flesh*’ – not conceived as object, but as synergetic, emphasizing that we exist *of* the life-world, rather than *in* it. Importantly, flesh is *not* a combination of mind and matter, nor some kind of hybrid; it ‘is not substance’;<sup>205</sup> [w]e must not think the flesh starting from substances, from body and spirit – for then it would be the union of contradictories’.<sup>206</sup> Instead, Merleau-Ponty proposes, “To designate it, we should need the old term “element””, suggesting that flesh is akin to air, earth, fire, water –

midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle... The flesh is in this sense an “element” of Being.<sup>207</sup>

Flesh is, then, *elemental* – it is the ‘thickening’ of the life-world. This ‘thickness’ means we’re never cut off from others, because bodies – flesh and skin – are synergetic, and synergy exists *between* as well as within organisms;<sup>208</sup> yet ‘at the same time, we are separated from [others, from things] by all the thickness of the look and the body’.<sup>209</sup> It’s because of this that we are distinct individuals – differences are embraced, as styles of being – yet simultaneously are one

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<sup>203</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, p.117.

<sup>204</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> *ibid.*, p.139.

<sup>206</sup> *ibid.*, p.147.

<sup>207</sup> *ibid.*, p.139.

<sup>208</sup> *ibid.*, p.142.

<sup>209</sup> *ibid.*, p.135.

flesh, all kin, essentially constituted by intersubjectivity. Merleau-Ponty refers to the body-world relationship as an 'embrace';<sup>210</sup> I agree with Isis Brook that this characterization prevents the relationship it from becoming overwhelming, avoiding any idea 'of losing oneself in the world to the point of extinction of difference'.<sup>211</sup> Merleau-Ponty rejects both the atomistic, Cartesian self, cut off from 'the environment', and also anthropocentric holist notions including the 'Transpersonal Self' of deep ecology.<sup>212</sup>

Like Oliver, I'm interested in how this notion of flesh – which develops from but also makes coherent, I think, his notions of inter-animality and animal kinship – might affect our notions of what she terms 'ethical obligations'.<sup>213</sup> Brook suggests that one 'ethical' result is, significantly, that the notion of flesh enables us to

resist both the intellectually indefensible notion that the world and us are an indistinguishable whole and the morally indefensible notion that the world is entirely separate from us and there for us to use...<sup>214</sup>

This is, of course, extremely important for eco-phenomenologists and others who wish to argue, as I do, that embracing Merleau-Ponty's ontology of flesh has positive ethical implications for OTHAs and less animate entities, as well as for humans.

Additionally, I think the notion of flesh as elemental is helpful in furthering philosophies such as Cheney and Weston's, in providing a coherent basis from which to think about bodily comportment as having genuinely ethical dimensions, or at least potential; as being a kind of communication ahead of language, and ahead of science and/as knowledge.

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<sup>210</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, p.271.

<sup>211</sup> Isis Brook, 'Can Merleau-Ponty's notion of "flesh" inform or even transform environmental thinking?', *Environmental Values*, 14 (2005), 353–62 (p.361).

<sup>212</sup> With Plumwood, I consider it 'ironic that a position claiming to be anti-anthropocentric' aims 'to reduce questions of the care and significance of nature to questions of the realisation of the human self (or Self)': *Feminism and the mastery of nature*, p.175.

<sup>213</sup> Oliver, *Animal lessons*, p.224.

<sup>214</sup> Brook, 'Can Merleau-Ponty's notion of "flesh"...?', pp.361–2. The notion that the world and us are an indistinguishable whole reflects the views of deep ecologists (see my footnotes 35, 212).

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All this, I think, means Merleau-Ponty shows not just that but potentially *how* we can move ‘beyond both a subject-centered ontology and a human centered one’<sup>215</sup> – to an intersubjectal one – something essential to conceptualizing and developing a non-anthropocentric worldview and ethos.

However, using Merleau-Ponty in this way is perhaps not without problems. For one, phenomenology doesn’t fully ‘avoid the problem of human exceptionalism’ in understanding OTHA behaviour as intentional – and this is true of much of Merleau-Ponty’s earlier work.<sup>216</sup> Even in his later work, some anthropocentrism is evident, as is a hierarchy amongst and between humans and OTHAs: in *The Visible and the Invisible*, for instance, when discussing the other’s look, he writes: ‘I am frozen by a look, and if it were for example an animal that looked at me, I would know only a feeble echo of this experience’,<sup>217</sup> and his later *Nature* lectures exhibit ‘a tinge of human exceptionalism’.<sup>218</sup>

Despite this, Merleau-Ponty’s ontology is full of promise. It’s clear his thought was continually evolving to incorporate his basic recognition of all embodied beings’ shared flesh. Indeed, his philosophy from the *Nature* lectures onwards – culminating in the unfinished *The Visible and the Invisible* – altered largely on this basis: centrally, as Toadvine argues, he recognized that ‘our intertwining with animality requires a new understanding of reflection... since treating the power of reflection as the distinguishing mark between humans and animals risks returning to a philosophy of consciousness that alienates humanity from life’.<sup>219</sup> Also, his concept of ‘the flesh’ arises from an attempt to make cogent the whole notion of inter-animal kinship.<sup>220</sup> Hence I’d argue that elements of anthropocentrism (and androcentrism) in his work are insufficient

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<sup>215</sup> Oliver, *Animal lessons*, p.217.

<sup>216</sup> Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of nature*, p.79; see also p.84. Also, Oliver, in *Animal lessons*, discusses the significant differences between Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists – specifically Heidegger – in her chapter focused on Heidegger, ‘The abyss between humans and animals’.

<sup>217</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, p.72.

<sup>218</sup> Westling, ‘Merleau-Ponty’s human-animality intertwining’, p.173 (citing Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, pp.213–14).

<sup>219</sup> Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of nature*, pp.95–6.

<sup>220</sup> *ibid.*, p.92.

to derail Merleau-Ponty's considerable contributions to non-anthropocentrism – primarily because they are neither essential to nor constitutive of his ontology.<sup>221</sup>

## VI. Towards Non-anthropocentrism

Globally, a great many individuals (some philosophers included) *do* resist a mainstream, 'scientific' interpretation of how other-than-humans are treated – especially where this view involves an evident lack of moral regard for OTHAs and environment. This is particularly visible in the UK at the moment, for instance, in widespread opposition to both the proposed badger cull and the re-legalization of fox hunting, and has just this month (March 2013) come to the fore in public outcry against a recently reported proposal that more than half the deer population in the UK 'needs' to be culled.<sup>222</sup> Contra Leopold, Rolston, Eaton and others – including a number of animal welfarists – views are frequently expressed that the 'science' behind such assertions should be challenged – ignored, even – in the face of such unethical proposed acts of what is increasingly being seen and described as murder, or at least 'killing', rather than 'culling'. This shows that such issues are at least being actively contested in contemporary society, and at most that a shift to non-anthropocentrism might be a realistic, if still distant, prospect. (I should add that the 'historical context' in which I place us is not restricted to recent decades, nor is it meant to suggest chronological 'progress' towards non-anthropocentrism. At various times and

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<sup>221</sup> This is because, in particular, (i) he is clearly working towards something that is difficult to express, as with the other Cartesian dichotomies he acknowledges; and (ii) there is evidence that he intended to further develop his work along non-anthropocentric lines – for instance in a March 1961 working note for *The Visible and the Invisible*, in which he 'indicates that the second part of the complete work would be devoted to Nature: "not Nature in itself, a philosophy of Nature, but a description of the man-animality intertwining"' (Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of nature*, pp.87-8, citing Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, p.274). Further – and in sharp contrast to Levinas in interview – Merleau-Ponty chose (as early as 1948) to talk on the radio about the importance of OTHA-human continuity, thereby indicating how central this was to him in developing his philosophy.

<sup>222</sup> In responses to the report, newspapers reported, mostly, either on threats to (human) people's jobs (e.g., Ross McKie, 'Deer cull would threaten thousands of jobs, say furious gamekeepers', *The Observer*, 9 March 2013), or that the cull should go ahead if scientists agree (e.g., Sara Maitland, 'We must kill Bambi: Why culling deer is a no-brainer', *The Guardian*, 10 March 2013: she argues, sounding rather like Eaton and Leopold, 'if we really care about woodland as much as we say, we can't cry over a proposed deer cull', and berates people who place morals before science). The public outcry was mostly evident via social media.

in various places, anthropocentrism has been less pervasive 'even' in the west. Further, despite and alongside Aristotle, Descartes, the Enlightenment, and contemporary sociobiology's influence, there has been and likely always will be resistance to such a worldview, as philosophers and cultural theorists have shown.<sup>223</sup>)

Weston also foregrounds that our attempts to grasp, articulate and achieve non-anthropocentric worldviews and ethics call for – indeed, *require* – the use of metaphor, exploration,<sup>224</sup> inventiveness, openness, and so forth. Thus he suggests that when we're asked to consider a snake, a tree, or a mountainside as having a 'face', or the planet as a 'person', these are 'suggestive and open-ended sorts of challenges ... rather than attempts to demonstrate particular conclusions on the basis of premises that are supposed to already be accepted'; they are 'creative more than summative' arguments.<sup>225</sup> Relatedly, he also proposes that we likely need to create and experience 'actual, physical spaces for the emergence of trans-human experience, places within which some return to the experience of and immersion in natural settings is possible' before we can develop our understanding of non-anthropocentrism.<sup>226</sup> This echoes Merleau-Ponty's notion, cited above, that we must 'situate ourselves within the being we are dealing with', putting it 'back into the fabric of our life'.<sup>227</sup>

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Finally, Weston's brief assessment of Callicott, below, provides a useful way to look 'back' at my earlier comments on contemporary conflicts between ecocentric holists and animal ethicists. It also reminds us of the sheer complexity of the issues faced by humans who have, for hundreds of years at

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<sup>223</sup> See e.g. Franklin, *Animals in modern cultures*; Rose, 'Learning from the new priesthood and the shrieking sisterhood'; Sorabji, *Animal minds & human morals*; Wolloch, 'William Smellie and Enlightenment anti-anthropocentrism'.

<sup>224</sup> Weston, 'Before environmental ethics', p.329.

<sup>225</sup> *ibid.*, p.332.

<sup>226</sup> *ibid.*, p.334; he notes, too, that noting, too, that such exploration should not be denied the label 'philosophy' just because it involves practice: see p.335.

<sup>227</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, p.117.

least, exploited, tortured and murdered OTHAs as well as many fellow humans, and wrecked havoc on our shared environment:

In environmental ethics, we arrive at exactly the opposite view from that of J. Baird Callicott, for example, who insists that we attempt to formulate, right now, a complete, unified, even 'closed' (his term) theory of environmental ethics.<sup>228</sup>

This move *away* from what Callicott and others in 'environmental ethics' and what Singer, Regan and others in 'animal ethics' have been doing, is fundamental to this dissertation.

Hence, having spent time 'refuting' anthropocentrism, I wish to heed Weston's warning that spending *too much* time so doing risks allowing it to 'dominate our energies'.<sup>229</sup> In the final chapter, then, my aim is to engage more fully in proposing – if only in outline form – positive alternatives for moving beyond anthropocentrism, towards an ontology of flesh.

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<sup>228</sup> Weston, 'Before environmental ethics', p.333; here, Weston is referencing J. Baird Callicott, 'The case against moral pluralism', *Environmental Ethics*, 12 (1990), 99–124.

<sup>229</sup> Weston, 'Before environmental ethics', 325; in particular, Weston is concerned that we do not allow this to delimit 'what is "realistic" because in many ways it determines what "reality" itself is' (p.325).

# Chapter 3:

## ONTOLOGY AND ETHICS, FLESH AND AIR: BEING AND MOTIVATION BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

[C]onsidering animals necessarily transforms how we consider ourselves.  
(Kelly Oliver, 2009)<sup>230</sup>

My focus in this chapter is on the promise of Merleau-Ponty's thought, and on developments of it, and other philosophies, that embrace nonanthropocentrism perhaps even more fully than he does. Since (i) his books contains not a method, but 'a caution against what is commonly called method',<sup>231</sup> (ii) his own thought developed quite clearly *towards* an ever-less-anthropocentric worldview, and, (iii) additionally, his untimely death means that the later ontology he started to articulate 'shall now come only from [his] readers',<sup>232</sup> approaching Merleau-Ponty in this flexible way is entirely appropriate – and less problematic than in the case of a more closed theory, such as that of Levinas.

In Chapter 2, I outlined Merleau-Ponty's ideas about selfhood, OTHAs, and 'flesh'. Below, I suggest ways of 'fleshing out' Merleau-Ponty's later ontology – noting his influence on a number of contemporary philosophers who style themselves 'eco-phenomenologists', and drawing on their work. I also investigate the pressing issues of epistemophilia and of how ethical behaviour might be *motivated* in and by an ontology of the flesh.

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<sup>230</sup> Oliver, *Animal lessons*, p.304.

<sup>231</sup> Claude Lefort, 'Editor's foreword', in Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, p.xxiv.

<sup>232</sup> Lingis, 'Translator's preface', p.xl.

## I. The Promise of Merleau-Ponty's Ontology

Only a reconceptualization of our place and role in nature can work against this tragic disconnection from ourselves and from the wellspring of our being. (Charles Brown and Ted Toadvine, 2003)<sup>233</sup>

Given the now fairly widespread view amongst philosophers that we humans have constituted ourselves directly in opposition to nature, and as a result behave in ways damaging to our environment, the view expressed, above, by Brown and Toadvine identifies what has motivated philosophers of environment, animals and ethics to look to Merleau-Ponty for assistance – because his later ontology offers precisely the reconceptualization many of them seek. It seems, then, that his 'ontology of the flesh has generated a heightened awareness of, and appreciation for, what his later texts say and imply about Nature and our place within it',<sup>234</sup> and what this means for eco-phenomenologists and their environmental concerns.

Central to Merleau-Ponty's ontology is a radical decentring of humans in the life-world. It locates humans as not just 'part of nature' in a superficial sense (in the Judaeo-Christian sense where we are simultaneously 'above' nature, as its 'caretakers', for instance, nor in the sense where we are part of nature *but for* the addition of 'reason'), but in an essential sense, whereby humans along with all beings 'live a natural environment more than we live in it',<sup>235</sup> intertwined and intertwining.

The problem of finding the language to adequately express this bound-up-ness, the one-flesh-ness of humans and/as environment is challenging.<sup>236</sup> But Merleau-Ponty's thought is attractive not despite but in some sense because of the difficulties articulating it presents – because the difficulties suggest just how radical is its potential for change, if we act on it. This last

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<sup>233</sup> Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine, 'Eco-phenomenology: An introduction', in *Eco-phenomenology: Back to the Earth itself*, ed. by Brown and Toadvine (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003), pp.ix–xx (p.xx).

<sup>234</sup> William S. Cataldi and Suzanne L. Hamrick, 'Introduction', *Merleau-Ponty and environmental philosophy: Dwelling on the landscapes of thought*, ed. by Cataldi and Hamrick (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007), pp.1–15 (p.5).

<sup>235</sup> Marietta, 'Back to earth with reflection and ecology', p.123.

<sup>236</sup> As Marietta notes, 'So much are we a part of the natural world that even our speaking of environment can enter a conceptual wedge into our thinking' (*ibid.*, p.124).



point has, though, causes several contemporary philosophers some concern: Monika Langer, for instance, celebrates Merleau-Ponty's genuinely nondualistic ontology, but ultimately notes that '[t]he question at hand is whether descriptive critiques and the development of new ontologies suffice, given the evident urgency of the environmental problems',<sup>237</sup> while Don Marietta writes: 'An environmental ethic will not be adequate if it is an abstraction that does not engage a person's thought and feeling and result in the adoption of a way of living'.<sup>238</sup>

To some extent, I address these concerns – or at least indicate how they might be addressed – in my discussion of motivating ethical behaviour, below. What's essential to note, though, is that embracing Merleau-Ponty's ontology arguably does not in and of itself require ethical consequences at all, as Toadvine has argued.<sup>239</sup> However, I propose that the ontology we embrace, how we think about *what is*, can and arguably does radically alter our conception of ethics, as it alters our very experience of our relationship to environment and the various 'others' who share and constitute the life-world with us.

My position draws on Kheel's argument that what is desirable is not so much a world in which no harm is done to OTHAs and 'nature' more widely, but a world in which it is unthinkable to do such harm.<sup>240</sup> This goal *requires* a radical ontological shift, since the 'underlying oppressive structures' of anthropocentrism and androcentrism arguably must be dismantled not by reason but by undermining the beliefs and practices (here, the depersonalising of OTHAs and less animate entities, and the treatment of them as object-resources) that support them. This is because, I argue, oppressive structures

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<sup>237</sup> Langer, 'Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty', p.117.

<sup>238</sup> Marietta, 'Back to earth with reflection and ecology', p.124.

<sup>239</sup> See e.g., Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of nature*, p.134.

<sup>240</sup> Kheel, *Nature ethics*, pp.16, 211. I draw here on Sarah Hoagland's argument, outlined in Kheel (*Nature ethics*, p.16), that 'it is not a matter of arguing why rape is wrong, but rather of creating a society where rape would be unthinkable'. Hoagland argues that underlying oppressive structures must be challenged not by rational argument but by challenging the underlying beliefs that found them. I develop this to argue that oppressive structures come from a pre-epistemological realm: see Sarah Lucia Hoagland, *Lesbian ethics; Toward new value* (Palo Alto, CA: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1989), cited by Kheel, *Nature ethics*, p.16.

arise not via reason but in the pre-epistemological realm – that of direct experience, including of others’ faces, and hence of ethics.

This may not offer an immediate ‘solution’ to problems that are the focus of environmental and animal ethics; but it is, I argue, essential to recognize if we’re to ever genuinely overcome our anthropocentrism, to orient ourselves towards nature ‘at the level of our bodily engagement with the perceived’<sup>241</sup> rather than forever distancing ourselves via reflection and reason.

Despite this, I consider below ways in which elements of Merleau-Ponty’s ontology might potentially motivate ethical behaviour towards OTHAs and environment, even in the contemporary milieu in which the dominant ontology is not conducive to such an ethos. I believe that such imaginings – as Cheney and Weston suggest – are essential to propose and promote, in order to encourage and enable any future ontological shift that sees human culture embracing the notion of one flesh as its norm.

## **II. Motivating Non-anthropocentric Ethical Behaviour**

The question is – echoing concerns cited above – how might a non-anthropocentric worldview help its inhabitants – its *constituents* – to *act* to better treat fellow animals and less animate entities in our shared life-world?

The issue of what motivates ethical *acts* (rather than beliefs or feelings) is a thorny issue in mainstream ethics, and I cannot attempt to even outline all the pertinent arguments here. The concept of altruism is often key, though – especially the relationship between altruistic feelings, and altruistic acts. This is especially pertinent when considering the place of OTHAs in philosophy and culture, since it’s frequently in and via studies of altruism that science – sociobiology, especially – relies upon and reiterates (but also exhibits great anxiety around) the human/animal dichotomy, as per Chapter 2.

Here, my approach to the question of altruistic acts and what motivates them effectively disregards sociobiological notions. Instead of entertaining the idea that altruistic acts can be identified and broken down into identifiable and

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<sup>241</sup> Todvine, *Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of nature*, p.134.

measurable 'biological' and 'psychological' parts (depending on species), I consider how non-anthropocentric – or, at least, less anthropocentric – ethical acts might be motivated. I also embrace Calarco's position that altruistic acts – being-for-the-other – among humans and OTHAs 'are not traces of transcendence [as per Levinas, for example] but are acts that are purely and wholly immanent to the material world',<sup>242</sup> and happen frequently amongst and between all kinds of animals.

### ***II(a). Kinship and Altruism***

Some ethical theories and practices are based upon notions of kinship – especially in 'eastern' thought, where for key figures such as Zhang Zai, it is central. It might therefore be anticipated that if Merleau-Ponty's radical notion of inter-animal kinship is embraced, such theories could morph accordingly, providing a basis for motivating non-anthropocentric ethical behaviour. However, as evident in for instance JeeLoo Liu's arguments, basing ethical theories on a notion of kinship does not – perhaps cannot – *in itself* do much to motivate ethical, altruistic acts.

After discussing Nagel on altruism,<sup>243</sup> Liu concludes that '[t]he causal efficacy of reason as motivation is highly questionable',<sup>244</sup> reflecting the views of Damasio, and feminist and postmodern critiques of reason. She then shifts the discussion away from the 'west' by setting out Zhang Zai's approach, in which morality

consists in transforming one's biological existence into a moral existence, and in elevating one's physical desires into a form of altruistic desire – desire for the well-being of others. This elevated moral state is called 'humaneness (ren 仁)', which is roughly tantamount, though not restricted, to the virtue of altruism...<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Calarco, *Zoographies*, p.59.

<sup>243</sup> Thomas Nagel, 'What is it like to be a bat?', *The Philosophical Review*, 83 (1974), 435–50.

<sup>244</sup> JeeLoo Liu, 'Moral reason, moral sentiments and the realization of altruism: A motivational theory of altruism', *Asian Philosophy*, 22, 2 (2012), 93–119. NB: The quotations and page numbers I use are from a pre-publication manuscript, not from the published version. A free online copy of the published paper is available at [faculty.fullerton.edu/jeelooliu/Liu\\_Motivational Theory of Altruism.pdf](http://faculty.fullerton.edu/jeelooliu/Liu_Motivational Theory of Altruism.pdf).

<sup>245</sup> Liu, 'Moral reason, moral sentiments and the realization of altruism', p.9.

Of crucial importance for Zhang's approach is that for it to succeed, each individual has to adopt a belief in *universal* kinship<sup>246</sup> – available via 'reflection on the common origin of humankind', hence restricted to humans. But Liu finds Zhang's theory lacking because of its failure to actually *motivate* people holding this belief to act altruistically, hence its anthropocentrism is moot here.

Concluding that 'Both Nagel's and Zhang Zai's theories fail in aspects of causal efficacy, causal persistency and in particular, accessibility',<sup>247</sup> Liu turns to Wang Fuzhi, whose moral theory 'incorporates both moral reason and moral sentiments', and holds that altruism is possible via 'the combination of both moral sentiments and natural emotions, with the further requirement of *reflection* (*si* 思)'.<sup>248</sup>

For Wang, emotions are neither moral nor immoral, but are 'biologically based' responses to being-in-the-world, 'generally shared by humans and other animals'.<sup>249</sup> Insofar as this theory is based in the 'biological being' of *all* animals, it's interesting to compare with Merleau-Pontyan ideas;<sup>250</sup> (likening it to sociobiology is less convincing, as Wang's concept of biological beings is not reductivist). Nonetheless, Wang's theory relies on *extending* self-concern to others, and requiring moral agents to '*imagine* others as being similar to himself'.<sup>251</sup> As such, it is, effectively, a theory based on identity. Also problematic is the reliance on 'reflection'; something that Merleau-Ponty rejects as ontologically basic, in part because it's not shared by all animals.

Liu's next move, though, is of real interest to this discussion. Referencing Gilles Deleuze, she notes that

What has been the major mental block to altruism is that we conceive society merely as a collection of self-interested individuals in competition to maximize their own interests, and that the public good is always in conflict with immediate private goods. To remove this mental block, we

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<sup>246</sup> That is, that 'all people are related to me as my family members': *ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>247</sup> *ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>248</sup> *ibid.*, pp.15; 14.

<sup>249</sup> *ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>250</sup> This is evident when Liu characterizes Wang's position as follows, which resonates with Merleau-Ponty's ideas: 'A moral agent is first and foremost a biological being ... To reject human desires is to isolate human beings from the natural world and to cut them off from their biological nature' (*ibid.*, p.17).

<sup>251</sup> *ibid.*, p.19, my emphasis.

need to abandon this conception of society and consider society as a positively integrated totality instead.<sup>252</sup>

This rejection of sociobiological and the philosophical-ideological norms exemplified in a neo-Darwinist and consumer capitalist characterization of individuals as competitive is interesting,<sup>253</sup> and enables Liu to develop her ideas about motivating altruism, and to consider the key question of ‘how people can move from feeling sympathetic to taking the action to lend a helping hand’.<sup>254</sup> Arguing that ‘empathetic imagination carries more motivational force for altruism than mere sympathy does’, Liu concludes that

The empathetic imagination derived from Wang Fuzhi’s theory is not combined with the impersonal standpoint as in Nagel’s theory. Rather, this empathetic imagination is built on one’s relatedness to one’s family members and the passion of family love,

as per Deleuze. Hence, ‘[t]he next step is to *extend* (*tui* 推) one’s feelings for one’s own family to cultivate one’s concern for strangers’.<sup>255</sup> Such an unlimited approach to who and what might be felt for as one’s family – one’s *kin* – is arguably what Birch as well as Cheney and Weston propose (although they *don’t* refer to ‘kinship’); it also resonates with Merleau-Ponty’s all-encompassing element of flesh.

Liu concludes by developing her central argument that ‘[w]hat is needed for a proper social influence that enhances altruism then, is a social practice that treats altruism as a norm’.<sup>256</sup> There are notable parallels here to Josephine Donovan’s care ethics (see below), and to Cheney and Weston’s position that what’s needed to develop and motivate non-anthropocentric ethical behaviour is an attention to our comportment, the development of a behavioural etiquette. Each approach has commonalities vis-à-vis pointing up the

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<sup>252</sup> Cited *ibid.*, p.22.

<sup>253</sup> I refer further to this below, where I discuss capitalism’s interest in promoting an anthropocentric worldview in which environment – OTHAs and less animate entities – are presented as entirely separable from, and as resources for, humans.

<sup>254</sup> Liu, ‘Moral reason, moral sentiments and the realization of altruism’, p.23.

<sup>255</sup> *ibid.*, pp.24, 25.

<sup>256</sup> *ibid.*, p.27.

importance of bodily, perceptual, and socio-cultural awareness and education to ethical behaviour.

One clear problem with Liu's approach is that the concept of kinship at its core remains familial: if this understanding is exploded utterly, as in Merleau-Ponty's ontology, then the notion of 'extending' to non-kin evaporates, since all beings are kin. To reach this point might seem at best improbable, if not actually impossible, given the power and specificity of long-held notions of human kinship – and, indeed, their shoring up in and of human/animal and animal/environment dichotomies. Yet as Oliver asks, 'what does it mean to insist that kinship between humans and animals is unthinkable? Is it any more unthinkable than the reality of failure that haunts our ideals of human kinship?' – and, as she then suggests:

Once we recognize that kinship is an impossible ideal, and a violent bloody ideal at that, we may be open to the possibility of 'strange kinship' based not on blood or on generation but on a shared embodiment and the gestures of love and friendship among living creatures made possible by bodies coexisting in a world on which we all depend.<sup>257</sup>

Despite, then, that a changed ontology alone may have no direct consequences for ethics, I'd agree with Oliver that there *is* real potential in motivating ethical behaviour in an ontology which bases kinship on shared embodiment – on *flesh*, more elementally – and is therefore universal rather than extensionist. Again, while this ontological shift may currently seem almost incomprehensible – from the perspective of a dominant ontology that demands an extensionist approach to the ethical treatment of OTHAs and less animate entities – the very fact that the idea is currently being taken seriously by philosophers, indicates it might play a part in non-anthropocentric future ethics. Additionally, if one combines a Merleau-Pontyan notion of ontological kinship with the Levinasian idea of 'the Other' calling us to ethical action, this may in fact open up the possibility of an ontology of flesh directing humans towards non-anthropocentric ethics.

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<sup>257</sup> Oliver, *Animal lessons*, p.228.

## ***II(b). The Face***

While Levinas's articulation of 'the face' is anthropocentric,<sup>258</sup> the concept and its role in ethical motivation arguably is not. Davy's deconstructionist re-reading of it, for instance, argues for the concept's value to what she terms 'an ethics beyond the interhuman'.<sup>259</sup> Her reading suggests, to me, a way to combine the immediacy of the ontological experience of 'the flesh' Merleau-Ponty discovers with the primacy of ethical experience of 'the Other' Levinas describes as coming before categories – that is, before knowledge.

Levinas's 'face' is Merleau-Pontyan in its embodiment,<sup>260</sup> and in its immediacy; for Levinas, 'the "nakedness of the face" constitutes "the meaning prior to 'things said'"<sup>261</sup> – which echoes Merleau-Ponty's notion of movement being akin to language amongst and between all embodied beings. The importance of the face to ethics is that it is via face-to-face relations that ethical relations exist, and it is in our seeing the Other's 'face' that we are 'called' to ethics. On Davy's reading,

What is crucial in ethical relations is that the Other expresses infinity, that the Other teaches, and that the Other can provoke oneself to ethics, not that the call to ethics be given through the speech of a human face.

Therefore, Davy argues,

[n]ot only human others can provoke ethical obligations in oneself, but also other than human persons such as other animals, plants, rocks, and other entities.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> See Plant, 'Welcoming dogs'; Calarco, *Zoographies*, Ch. 2.

<sup>259</sup> Davy holds that while her re-reading 'is not true to the historical Levinas, it is faithful to the spirit of his work. It is a better interpretation in the sense that it is more ethical' ('An other face of ethics in Levinas', p.40; she refers to Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, 'Editors' Introduction', *Re-reading Levinas*, ed. By Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley [Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991], pp.xi–xviii [p.xii]).

<sup>260</sup> By 'the face', Levinas means the 'whole sensible being' (Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the subject*, trans. Michael B. Smith [London: Athlone Press, 1993], p.102). This frees up the concept from being applicable only to humans and OTHAs with human-like faces. ('As such', writes Plant, 'it becomes even less clear why non-human animals... cannot be said to have a 'face' in the relevant ethical sense': 'Welcoming dogs', p.60.)

<sup>261</sup> Plant, 'Welcoming dogs', p.60 (citing Levinas, *God who comes to mind*). Plant problematizes Levinas's attitude to language here, but this is not pertinent for the general and metaphorical sense in which I refer here to the (not 'Levinas's, as such) idea of 'the face'.

<sup>262</sup> Davy, 'An other face of ethics in Levinas', p.40.

Especially given that ‘Levinas instructs that the Other obligates oneself before being thematized, and maintains that the capacities of the Other are irrelevant to my obligation to give the Other ethical consideration’,<sup>263</sup> her reading seems tenable. Hence, Davy develops from Levinas’s anthropocentric ethics, a clearly *non-anthropocentric* notion that not only evokes ethical feeling but also action in human beings in relation to other-than-human entities as well as other humans.

To accept Davy’s conclusions that face-to-face relations inspire ethical action, however, one must accept precisely this Levinasian premise – that in immediate, face-to-face relations, ethics is always already demanded.<sup>264</sup> In arguing for this – for the motivational power inherent in relations-with-others – Casey’s discussion of what he terms ‘the glance’ is an interesting neo-Levinasian development.

Arguing that the ‘face’ must be ‘dehumanized’ to be useful the field of eco-phenomenology,<sup>265</sup> Casey’s focus is not on OTHAs’ faces, but on ‘the equivalent of the face in the enviroing world’. He presents his own compelling example of a clear-cut mountainside in Montana compelling his attention and calling him to action.<sup>266</sup> He then argues that something important is elided by Levinas; that is, ‘the first moment of noticing’ – Casey’s ‘glance’.<sup>267</sup> His central argument is that ‘the human [sic] glance ... is indispensable for consequential ethical action’ because, in brief, it ‘*gives witness* to the other’ and welcome the

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<sup>263</sup> *ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>264</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Ethics as first philosophy’, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. by Sean Hand (London: Blackwell, 2009), pp.75–87.

<sup>265</sup> Edward S. Casey, ‘Taking a glance at the environment: Preliminary thoughts on a promising topic’, in *Eco-phenomenology*, ed. by Brown and Toadvine (2003) pp. 187–210 (p.202). Davy and Plant share this view.

<sup>266</sup> *ibid.*, pp.192; 199–200.

<sup>267</sup> Levinas elides this moment because, Casey opines, of his critique of perception as a form of knowledge, and for Levinas, ethics relies on ‘desire’, not knowledge. (See Casey, ‘Taking a glance at the environment’, 189, where Casey cites Levinas’s *Ethique et infini: dialogues avec Philippe Nemo* [Paris: Fayard, 1982].) Oliver picks up on and discusses this critique of vision in *Witnessing: Beyond recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), see esp. Ch. 8, ‘Vision and recognition’; Ch. 9, ‘Toward a new vision’. This is an interesting and important issue, not least given the arguments ‘against’ basing ethics on knowledge. The fact that Casey refers to ‘the *human* glance’ (p.188, emphasis mine) is also problematic – but not insurmountable in terms of using his basic idea to advance non-anthropocentric ethics as primary.



other into the ethical field of interrelationships.<sup>268</sup> Casey then elaborates on how aspects of environment – especially surfaces, which he says ‘show themselves to be eminently capable of *expressivity*’<sup>269</sup> – might call us to ethical action. Arguing that while a glance ‘suffices not just to see distress and disorder’ but also to pick ‘up the imperative to do something’ about it, he adds that to take the step from being noticeable to being compelling, ‘a certain *intensity*’ in and of the (sur)faces that we notice is required.<sup>270</sup>

Ironically, Casey’s exclusion of OTHAs is problematic. It is evident not just in his references to ‘the human glance’, but in his ecocentric focus on less animate entities to the exclusion of OTHAs, and in his focus on the visual as definitive of ‘the glance’. However, if we de-anthropocentrize his idea – allowing for fellow beings with different ways of predominantly sensing the life-world – I believe it potentially retains its usefulness in pinpointing an element of what, in encountering others, motivates us to act ethically.

The glance might, perhaps, be de-anthropocentrized by appealing to Merleau-Pontyan (and Damasian) ideas that conflate visible-tangible-audible: recognizing that while for humans, ‘the glance’ is what makes sense as a description of the first moment of ethical responsiveness in face-to-face relations, for different animals, another term might be more appropriate – for dogs, ‘the sniff’; for cats, ‘the first sound’; for dolphins, ‘the first echo’? I do not propose this facetiously! There are problems with Casey’s choice of a visual term that is epistemologically-loaded; however, there is promise in his idea if it is read metaphorically – or simply left as ‘the first moment of noticing’ – and elaborated beyond the anthropocentrism of privileging vision.

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<sup>268</sup> Casey, ‘Taking a glance at the environment’, pp.188; 189; see also Oliver, *Witnessing*, for a development of this idea. See my note on Casey’s apparent exclusion of OTHAs from ethics in the preceding footnote.

<sup>269</sup> *ibid.*, p.196; he makes this point in respect not just of environment but of the face and the whole animal body being similarly expressive via (changes on) their ‘surface’.

<sup>270</sup> Casey, ‘Taking a glance at the environment’, pp.198, 199.

Casey worries that '[e]nvironmentally uncaring people look away even before they glance; or if they look, they see little if anything of the suffering in the scarified face of the natural world'.<sup>271</sup> This raises further issues around motivating human beings to ethical action vis-à-vis OTHAs and environment; how to open their senses, as it were, to experience the suffering of those 'others'.

### ***II(c). Loving Nature***

Frustrated by environmental ethics' failure to sufficiently motivate conservation behaviours, Carol Booth asserts the need for 'a motivational turn', and in particular 'an adequate philosophy of psychology for moral philosophy'.<sup>272</sup> Her concerns are similar to mine: she worries that while most people agree conservation is morally important, 'burgeoning lists of threatened species and ongoing habitat destruction show that these so-called values are failing to motivate sufficient political and social pressure for conservation reform'.<sup>273</sup>

However, Booth looks to 'the best scientific information about motivation'<sup>274</sup> for answers, never sufficiently addressing *why* such information is sorely lacking. (She assumes the lack is primarily empirical.) Despite proposing the framework for a theory of motivation, she comes up against the issues and complexities faced by scientists trying to categorize and fully explain 'altruism': ultimately, there is insufficient 'scientific information' to reliably provide the rigour and certitude she claims 'philosophy' needs.

A central problem with Booth's approach, is that while asserting we lack 'a mature theory of motivation because we lack key scientific insights, particularly about the neurobiology of the mind',<sup>275</sup> she fails to see that 'scientific' insights might (i) not be available, and (ii) not be the answer to

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<sup>271</sup> *ibid.*, p.205.

<sup>272</sup> Booth, 'A motivational turn for environmental ethics', *Ethics & the Environment*, 14, 1 (2009), 53–78 (p.73, my emphasis).

<sup>273</sup> *ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>274</sup> *ibid.*, p.53.

<sup>275</sup> *ibid.*, p.58.

ethical questions (especially if ethics comes before knowledge). Further, she fails anyway to acknowledge the work of Damasio (a scientist!) and others that suggests quite clearly that *emotions* are, fundamentally, what motivate living, embodied beings.<sup>276</sup> This is something that care ethicists have long recognized (see below), and something that Milton takes up, from a phenomenological perspective.

In studying how, and why some humans love and *actively* protect nature, Milton concludes that ‘without emotion there is no commitment, no motivation, no action’.<sup>277</sup> In reaching this conclusion, she engages with a variety of complex issues and examples impossible to adequately summarize here. Ultimately, though, she (like Liu) finds that reasoning does not provoke environment- and OTHA-friendly action: knowledge absolutely plays a role (for instance in providing bases for emotional responses, and in enabling practically helpful responses to be implemented), but only perceptions and experiences that induce emotions, and generate feelings, actually motivate the ethical aspects of action.<sup>278</sup>

Milton argues that this is a problem in the contemporary western context, wherein emotions and feelings are radically undervalued, and reason – epitomized by objective, scientific reasoning – reigns. In brief, the problem is that if emotions and feelings are *necessary* to motivate ethical action, but reason and science are what are being *called upon* to motivate us, it’s unsurprising that insufficient people are acting ethically towards ‘the environment’ and OTHAs (not to mention each other!).

Milton’s work speaks to the difficult question of whether noticing the face of the Other – and seeing distress – actually causes us to *act* (to alleviate the distress). Both she and Damasio point to the intricate interrelations of what we term ‘emotion’ and ‘feelings’ and ‘knowledge’ or ‘reason’,<sup>279</sup> as well as to the

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<sup>276</sup> See e.g. Antonio Damasio, *The feeling of what happens: Body, emotion and the making of consciousness* (London: Vintage, 2000); *Self comes to mind: Constructing the conscious brain* (London: Willaim Heinemann, 2010) [kindle edition]

<sup>277</sup> Milton, *Loving nature*, p.150.

<sup>278</sup> *ibid.*, p.108.

<sup>279</sup> See e.g. Milton, *Loving nature*, p.64; Damasio, *The feeling of what happens*, pp.284–5.

essential role of emotion in decision-making and motivation.<sup>280</sup> As Casey notes of his experience in Montana, it was his friend who responded to the call for action from the clear-cut mountainside – primarily because he, not Casey, had the knowledge required to do something effective about the situation. But while knowledge of what to do – *how to* helpfully respond to the Other’s distress – is important, it’s not the whole story: we first have to be able to *see* (or otherwise perceive) the distress *as distress*. Ethics is a question of *desire* (which is Levinas’s contention). If we sense the life-world without the desire to be ethically open to others *as having a face*, it seems unlikely we’ll even be alert to (or ‘know’), let alone care about, the distress of others. To do this, we need to see OTHAs and environment, as well as fellow human beings, as having ‘faces’. (This is, of course, where Leopold, Rolston, and Eaton fail, ethically speaking: they are too caught up in their knowledge about ecology to see the individual faces of the OTHAs about which they write.)

In considering why some people personify ‘nature’ and the environment, while others do not (thinking of it instead as an impersonal system governed by laws, and in terms of resources), Milton makes a crucially important point. She claims that capitalism has played a central role in promoting impersonal rather than personal understandings of ‘nature’, and in sidelining emotion in favour of reason – because, essentially, emotion is no use to market interests.<sup>281</sup> She also notes how well served capitalism has been by a science that depersonalizes ‘nature’, since in so doing, the sense of moral responsibility towards nature – as ‘personal’ – is obliterated.<sup>282</sup> Noske similarly points up the role of capitalism and its self-serving relationship with a science that depersonalizes OTHAs: one example she provides has also to do with ‘motivation’, when she notes the ‘costs and benefits’ analysis of biologists who propose the concept of reciprocal altruism – a concept that ‘embodies a liberal ideology which emphasizes free market exchange of goods and services and

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<sup>280</sup> See e.g. Milton, *Loving nature*, p.24; Damasio, *The feeling of what happens*, pp.41, 54.

<sup>281</sup> Milton, *Loving nature*, p.134; she notes this is part of why emotion – e.g., an attachment to land, sacred or otherwise – has no place in decision making processes in the UK, even if such feelings familiar to many westerners: p.141.

<sup>282</sup> Milton, *Loving nature*, p.53.

passes off possessive individualism as a “law of nature”<sup>283</sup> These points reveal the extent to which free market capitalism is implicated in the currently deeply anthropocentric worldview: something evident, too, in how other-than-humans are so often talked about via instrumental(izing) language<sup>284</sup> – for instance as ‘resources’, as an ‘investment’, as having ‘value’.

### III. Care Ethics

Given Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on movement and behaviour as interrogative; Damasio’s emphasis on an *embodied* self as being motivated by emotion rather than by reason (insofar as he sees them as separable); and Milton’s discoveries about what motivates ‘nature protectionists’, the role of emotion *must* be acknowledged as central in and to motivating ethical behaviour. Feminist ethicists of care do precisely this, aiming explicitly ‘to restore ... emotional responses to the philosophical debate and to validate them as authentic modes of knowledge’.<sup>285</sup> Arguably, so do a number of ‘eastern’ philosophies, including those focused on the concept of *ren*.<sup>286</sup>

If this is the case, then OTHA behaviour can of course be ethical, too, since the evidence that OTHAs have emotions is overwhelming.<sup>287</sup>

Animal care ethics, though, is concerned with how humans treat OTHAs.<sup>288</sup> While feminist animal care theory has been around for over twenty

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<sup>283</sup> Noske, *Beyond boundaries*, p.97.

<sup>284</sup> See Kheel, *Nature ethics*, pp.15-16, where Kheel notes the ‘devaluation’ of OTHAs implied by such language.

<sup>285</sup> Josephine Donovan, ‘Feminism and the treatment of animals: From care to dialogue’, *Signs*, 31 (2006) 305–29 (p.306).

<sup>286</sup> See the discussion about western care ethics and the concept of ‘*ren*’, or ‘*jen*’ (‘仁’), following Chenyang Li’s 1994 suggestion that Confucian *jen* ethics is similar to feminist care ethics: see Chenyang Li, ‘The Confucian concept of *jen* and the feminist ethics of care: A comparative study’, *Hypatia*, 9, 1 (1994), 70–89; and then Daniel Star, ‘Do Confucians really care? A defense of the distinctiveness of care ethics: A reply to Chenyang Li’, *Hypatia*, 17, 1 (2002), 77–106; Lijun Yuan, ‘Ethics of care and concept of *jen*: A reply to Chenyang Li’, *Hypatia*, 17, 1 (2002), 107–29; and Chenyang Li, ‘Revisiting Confucian *jen* ethics and feminist care ethics: A reply to Daniel Star and Lijun Yuan’, *Hypatia*, 17, 1 (2002), 130–40. See also Shirong Luo, ‘Relation, virtue, and relational virtue: Three concepts of caring’, *Hypatia*, 22, 3 (2007), 92–110.

<sup>287</sup> This remains so even if one accepts Damasio’s position that while all animals have emotions, most (i.e., animals except humans and possibly a few other species) don’t have feelings (i.e., the awareness that ‘I’ am experiencing emotions).

<sup>288</sup> See Donovan, ‘Feminism and the treatment of animals’, p.316.

years now,<sup>289</sup> I focus here on Donovan's 2006 article, in which she emphasizes care theory's dialogical nature, clarifying that, in contrast to how it's sometimes interpreted,

It is not so much ... a matter of caring for animals as mothers (human and nonhuman) care for their infants as it is one of listening to animals, paying emotional attention, taking seriously – caring about – what they are telling us.<sup>290</sup>

Here, the parallels with a position such as Cheney and Weston's, with an emphasis on comportment, is evident. Equally, Donovan emphasizes not just the importance but the possibility of *communicating* with OTHAs. It seems she has a Merleau-Pontyan view of how we can understand OTHAs, since she argues that 'We need ... to reorient or reemphasize that care theory means listening to other life-forms regardless of how alien they may seem to us and incorporating their communications into our moral reaction to them', and that we 'can read other creatures' language on the principle of homology, for their nonverbal language is very much like ours'.<sup>291</sup> Offering examples including reading the body language of a deer being pursued by a hunter and a dog who's been cut, Donovan states that – effectively on the basis of egomorphism – 'The question, therefore, whether humans can understand animals is, in my opinion, a moot one'.<sup>292</sup> In this way, Donovan rejects the 'denial of the body in ethical decision-making and in the production of knowledge',<sup>293</sup> evoking in the process an appeal to the 'strange kinship' Merleau-Ponty identifies between all animals as a basis on which humans have no excuse to claim not to know what OTHAs' wishes are, at least on a basic level. It's worth noting, then, that Donovan give

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<sup>289</sup> For some of its earliest expressions, see Donovan, 'Animal rights and feminist theory'; Deane Curtin, 'Toward an ecological ethic of care', *Hypatia*, 6, 1 (1991), 60–74. Contemporary (human-focused) care ethics was initiated by Carol Gilligan's 1982 book, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard UP) – although as Dorothy Rogers shows, at least two late-nineteenth-century female thinkers 'anticipated' it (in a political theory of altruism and a pacifist theory of international cooperation), despite their insistence their 'feminine' ideas were based on rationality rather than emotions: Dorothy Rogers, 'Before "care": Marietta Kies, Lucia Ames Mead, and feminist political theory', *Hypatia*, 19, 2 (2004), 105–17 (p.105).

<sup>290</sup> Donovan, 'Feminism and the treatment of animals', p.305.

<sup>291</sup> *ibid.*, p.315.

<sup>292</sup> *ibid.*, p.322; she cites Midgley here, too: 'That they can [i.e., that 'humans can understand animals'] has been abundantly proved, as Midgley points out, by their repeated success in doing so': see Midgley, *Animals and why they matter*, pp.113, 115, 133, 142.

<sup>293</sup> Warkentin, 'Interspecies etiquette', p.104.

little credence to ecocentric holist philosophers – and others – who endorse hunting as an ethical form of wildlife ‘management’:

our ethic of how to treat the deer should be based on what we know of the deer’s wishes. If one reads and pays attention to the body language of the deer who is fleeing from the hunter, taking seriously the communication from the deer that she does not want to be killed or injured, one would have to conclude that the hunter should lay down his gun.<sup>294</sup>

The ecofeminist animal care ethic– like the feminist critique of science’s anthropocentrism – seems to share much with Merleau-Ponty’s ontology. Indeed, given Donovan’s emphasis on the importance of *embodied* decision-making,<sup>295</sup> and on the importance of comportment to our grasping OTHAs’ wishes, Merleau-Ponty’s notions of shared kinship, inter-animality and the flesh seem well suited to founding and advancing a care ethic of the kind Donovan espouses – as does, centrally, his insistence that embodied movement is how all animals participate in ‘a tacit language’ immanent in environment, body and others (discussed earlier: more generally, I agree with Kelly A. Burns and Carol Bigwood that Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy has enormous potential in addressing some of the gaps in feminist theories of embodied selfhood).<sup>296</sup>

Care ethics is not an entirely unitary position, of course, and while Donovan’s work was foundational in bringing it into the realm of OTHAs, hers is not its only voice. However, Donovan’s work is instructive, suggesting a high degree of affinity between a Merleau-Pontyan ontology and feminist animal

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<sup>294</sup> Donovan, ‘Feminism and the treatment of animals’, p.316.

<sup>295</sup> Josephine Donovan, ‘Animal rights and feminist theory’; ‘Attention to suffering: Sympathy as a basis for ethical treatment of animals’, in *Beyond animal rights: A feminist caring ethic for the treatment of animals*, ed. by Donovan and Adams (New York: Continuum, 1996), pp.147–69; ‘Feminism and the treatment of animals’.

<sup>296</sup> Burns and Bigwood agree that ecofeminism, and feminism more generally, fails to adequately address the issue of selfhood and embodiment. Both theorists are ultimately concerned with aspects of the same lack in feminist philosophy, i.e., the lack of a theory of the self that makes sense of our embodied-ness, yet simultaneously allows for the workings of culture that oppress bodies of ‘women’. For Burns, ecofeminist Karen Warren fails to do so in her version of ‘care ethics’, which as a result weakens her theory by not fully addressing why we might care about environment (and other beings). Bigwood, in contrast, focuses on Judith Butler’s work: Carol Bigwood, ‘Renaturalizing the body (with the help of Merleau-Ponty)’, *Hypatia*, 6, 3 (1991), 54–73; Burns, ‘Warren’s ecofeminist ethics and Merleau-Ponty’s body-subject’.

care ethics, as well as between such ethics and the focus on etiquette and comportment I've identified as central to non-anthropocentrism.

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In a recent BBC documentary presented by Sir David Attenborough, an elephant calf is shown to be desperately thirsty, and his/her<sup>297</sup> deterioration is filmed; the lack of water ultimately leads to the calf's death, and the footage shows the mother's distress at her child's evident suffering. Referring to the sequence, which drew complaints from viewers, Attenborough is reported as saying: 'Of course you see really tough things, but *there's nothing you can do about them*' (my emphasis). He added:

If I saw a little baby gazelle and a cheetah coming along about to pounce on it, if I nipped out of the Landrover and said boo to the cheetah...

Well ... it might say something quite rude to me back, but apart from that you would have a frightened baby gazelle, and a cheetah which would perhaps go away and have to attack another baby gazelle.

The little baby gazelle would be so traumatised it would be lost, so you actually make things far worse by interfering than not.

If you're a film cameraman you are trained as it were to be the observer, a non-participant. That's very important.<sup>298</sup>

I'd argue that Attenborough's attempt to explain (away) the failure to act (to prevent the calf from dying of thirst) in this case by way of his hypothetical example concerning a cheetah attacking a baby gazelle, reveals just how tenuous his ethical position is. The story he offers is an extremely poor parallel: it sets out a situation quite unlike that in which the baby elephant found itself. First, there was no predator threatening the elephant; no cheetah was present (only several humans willing to effectively ignore its suffering on

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<sup>297</sup> The calf's gender isn't specified either in the documentary or in any reports I read.

<sup>298</sup> Hannah Furness, 'Sir David Attenborough defends filming baby elephant death', *telegraph.co.uk*, 29 January 2013 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/9832410/Sir-David-Attenborough-defends-filming-baby-elephant-death.html>>, last accessed 30 January 2013. Attenborough's words as quoted here are similar to explanations by him quoted elsewhere.



the basis of their status as ‘non-participant observers’); second, unlike in the hypothetical situation, taking action to prevent a death, i.e., providing water for the elephant, would not have put in danger the humans on scene, nor would their actions have ‘deprived’ a predator of its potential kill; third, it is not remotely likely that the baby elephant would have ended up ‘traumatized’ and ‘lost’ in the face of being given water by a human being, to save it from death. Arguably, it was significantly more traumatic to be aware of humans watching it, whilst it suffered horribly.

In such circumstances, I’d argue that Attenborough’s arguments – those of the scientific ‘objectivity’ involved in being non-participant observers – quite evidently hold very little moral weight. Equally, arguments from an overtly capitalist perspective – e.g., that the calf was more ‘valuable’ in the market (of nature programming) dead than alive; or that the human-calf relationship has no market value, hence is meaningless – are unethical. In contrast, arguments that the calf’s ‘face’ – the suffering clearly evident in its movements and sounds, experienced via egomorphism – called, or should have called, fellow living beings to ethical *action* (not just to feel sympathy or empathy) seem ethically stronger, irrespective of the specific embodiment (as an elephant) of the being concerned.<sup>299</sup> Certainly, it seems clear that the viewers who complained place ethics before knowledge, in the sense that Cheney and Weston propose – experiencing the elephant calf as a fellow embodied being who was suffering, and whom another embodied being could have helped.

Any arguments that any human being should *not* take action in this sort of case – on what amount to epistemological grounds privileging ‘observation’ over ethics – are simply not compelling. Nor would they even be an option if the baby in question had been human, thereby revealing the crux of the problem: anthropocentrism.

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<sup>299</sup> The ethic proposed by Grace Clement seems apposite here: as Donovan summarizes it, she ‘argues for a general theory of noninterference in the wild but proposes nevertheless that a human encountering an individual suffering animal in the wild should act to alleviate that suffering’ (Donovan, ‘Feminism and the treatment of animals’, p.317; see Grace Clement, ‘The ethic of care and the problem of wild animals’, *Between the Species*, 3 (2003), 1–9. Available online at <http://cla.calpoly.edu/~jlynch/clement.htm>.

As it happens, in this case the calf's situation was part of a larger problem, where long-term drought was causing numerous OTHA deaths. The documentary's producer explains this, holding that he was therefore 'powerless' to help.<sup>300</sup> This begs the question of whether the same attitude – the same lack of action – would apply were thousands of humans dying from drought.<sup>301</sup> Nor does it erase the fact that Attenborough provides an explanation that evokes their status as non-participant observers, and uses an unrelated hypothetical example to justify the (in)action.<sup>302</sup> Further, underscoring the disregard for *individual* OTHAs this kind of anthropocentrism reveals (displaying instead an interest in *species*),<sup>303</sup> the producer says there's 'a happy ending' because when the rains came, 'the mum had another chance to have babies' and 'more than 200 baby elephants were born – a record'.<sup>304</sup>

This example reveals a great deal about the issues and concerns of this dissertation – as well as about the enormous complexity of situations in which individual embodied suffering takes place.

It indicates that humans can and do feel not just empathy for OTHAs, but that many of us feel this as a call to (ethical) action, and object strongly to humans who resist (or don't experience) such a call. It also suggests that in

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<sup>300</sup> James Honeyborne, producer of 'Africa', 'Baby elephant death in show Africa was a natural tragedy we couldn't prevent. Viewer storm at harrowing scenes', *thesun.co.uk*, 11 January 2013, [www.thesun.co.uk/sol/features/4737734/david-attenborough-africa-baby-elephant.html](http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/features/4737734/david-attenborough-africa-baby-elephant.html), last accessed 6 February 2013.

<sup>301</sup> Of course the answer might well be that yes, nothing – or not enough – would be done, since thousands of 'other' (non-western) humans suffer daily, while 'the west' helps comparatively little. That is a whole other dissertation, but does echo my earlier point that intra-human behaviours including sexism and racism as well as slavery and torture are, as Oliver argues (in *Animal lessons*) inseparable from the ways in which humans have, historically, treated OTHAs (see footnote 51 herein above).

<sup>302</sup> Some scientist/filmmakers reject such appeals to 'it's just nature' or 'I'm just an objective observer' arguments, recognizing the anthropocentrism, the ignorance of OTHAs as individuals in such positions. Another recent documentary shows a lion cub whose back is broken by a predator then being abandoned by her extremely distressed mother (who goes looking for her missing second cub). A significant difference here is that the filmmakers explained the situation without, arguably, eliding the cub's ethical 'personhood' (see e.g., [facebook.com/TheLastLions](https://www.facebook.com/TheLastLions), post dated 20 February 2013).

<sup>303</sup> This was also the case in other reports. In one, though, following the lines 'Ah, that's nature programmes. No undivine interventions' with 'But human intervention on a bigger scale can work' suggests some awareness – and some cynicism – about the ways television sticks to a 'non-interventionist' representation of 'nature' in nature programmes, while of course in reality, humans intervene in nature incessantly – albeit for 'good', as well as for bad. Martin Chilton, 'Africa, final episode, BBC One, review', *telegraph.co.uk*, 6 February 2013, [www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/9853742/Africa-final-episode-BBC-One-review.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/9853742/Africa-final-episode-BBC-One-review.html), last accessed 22 February 2013.

<sup>304</sup> Honeyborne, 'Baby elephant death in show Africa'.

lived experience, ethical feelings *are* prior to epistemology: Attenborough's comments<sup>305</sup> indicate that it *was* emotionally 'tough' to watch the calf die, and that it was, therefore, only the commitment to a scientific ideal of being a 'non-participant observer' that prevented him from acting when he *felt* he ought. Arguably, an ontology – a worldview – based on the notion of shared flesh with *all* embodied others, as well as with environment, would have made his position unthinkable – and the elephant might not have died.

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The above example also suggests the potential ethical power of an ontology quite different from that which currently dominates human consciousness. Departing from the view expressed by Toadvine, I concur with Brook and with Molly Hadley Jenson, amongst others: a Merleau-Pontyan 'view of the self as elementally open and reciprocally involved with others is an ethically potent interpretation', and '[a]n ethics informed by Merleau-Ponty's flesh summons us to seek a course of action that promotes exchanges and relations among a diversity of beings within the ecological community and preserves rich possibilities of ecological relations in the future'.<sup>306</sup>

In this context, notions such as egomorphism, the 'call' to ethical action evoked in and by the 'face', and the recognition of the importance of emotion and feelings to (ethical) motivation arguably work with (and to promote) ontology as discovered by Merleau-Ponty and his readers. In the current philosophical climate – in the west, and more widely – an analysis and more widespread acceptance of such notions can only help shift worldviews towards a less anthropocentric ontology, and towards less anthropocentric ethics. As Davy suggests, this is desirable because

If ethics do not come before epistemology, before thematization, they may not arise at all, leaving us stuck in an anthropocentric view of the world.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> See my emphasis in the long quote in the text. In addition, Attenborough says: 'The worst thing in this series as far as I'm concerned was that poor little baby elephant dying of thirst': Furness, 'Sir David Attenborough defends filming baby elephant death'.

<sup>306</sup> Molly Hadley Jensen, "'Fleshing" out an ethic of diversity', pp.197; 200.

<sup>307</sup> Davy, 'An other face of ethics in Levinas', pp.60–61.

Yet still even those who commit their lives to OTHAs and environment – including iconic figures such as Attenborough – resist the ‘call’ of an elephant calf, choosing to remain ‘stuck in an anthropocentric view of the world’ in which it is considered more ethical to maintain an ‘objective’ position as an ‘observer’ than to provide water for a dying OTHA. This alone, I’d argue, evidences not just the need to promote the primacy of ethics, but the damage done in the name of an epistemology that actively resists it. It’s to the question of epistemology’s privilege that I now turn.

#### **IV. Ethics, ‘Philosophy’, Epistemophilia**

A significant link between western philosophy and western science is – reflecting the roots of the word ‘philosophy’ – a love and privileging of knowledge. Indeed, not only does philosophy mean ‘the love of knowledge, or wisdom’, but the Latin roots of the word science mean ‘knowledge’ or ‘wisdom’. It is therefore unsurprising that philosophy ‘loves’ science!

The prioritizing of knowledge over ethics has been and remains of particular concern to many; it’s of course what Levinas questions in asserting ethics as an alternative first philosophy,<sup>308</sup> and is largely what motivates feminist care ethics. Here, I focus specifically on the problem of epistemophilia.

Proposing that ‘philosophy’ can be interpreted not just as ‘the love of wisdom’ but as ‘the wisdom of love’, Irigaray writes:

This possible interpretation would imply that philosophy joins together, more than it has done in the West, the body, the heart, and the mind. That it not be founded on contempt for nature. That it not resort to a logic that formalizes the real by removing it from concrete experience; that it be less a normative science of the truth than the search for measures that help in living better: with oneself, with others, with the world...<sup>309</sup>

This hope for philosophy is implied in care ethics as well as ethics of comportment, and is evident too in a range of non-western thought.

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<sup>308</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Ethics as first philosophy’, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. by Sean Hand (London: Blackwell, 2009); his particular concern is that, in western philosophy since Aristotle, ‘The labour of thought wins out over the otherness of things and men’ (p.78).

<sup>309</sup> Irigaray, *The way of love*, p.2.

Min Ou Yang resists the very notion of ‘philosophy’ as being applicable to Chinese thought. He points out that ‘[t]he attitude of loving and therefore enjoying the wonder of wisdom’ – epistemophilia – is a decidedly western phenomenon: ‘[i]n Chinese culture, loving or enjoying wisdom ... [was] mentioned by Confucius, but it has never been a celebrated tradition or an end of intellectual activities’.<sup>310</sup> His central point is that just because (western) ‘philosophy purports to study or search for something that is supposed to be universal does not make the philosophical practice itself universal’. He therefore proposes the term ‘sinosophy’ instead of ‘Chinese philosophy’,<sup>311</sup> substituting ‘sino (Chinese)’ for the attitude of ‘philo (love)’. Whilst this doesn’t eradicate ‘sophia (knowledge/wisdom)’ from the equation, it does share Irigaray’s emphatic foregrounding of ‘rational’ western philosophy’s basis in the *love* (an emotion!) of wisdom/knowledge. By reminding us that other cultures don’t share this love – this reification – of epistemology, it provides a clear sense of the historical and cultural specificity of philosophy in the west. It’s then interesting to consider how Ou Yang summarizes the different purposes he argues inform philosophy and sinosophy:

the former roughly prioritizes all sorts of human knowledge and enjoys the wonder with it, while the main concern of the latter is human life itself, and how to achieve peacefulness, harmony and stability of body and mind.

Here, sinosophy seems to have much in common with philosophers of nonanthropocentrism: it, like them, desires not ‘knowledge’, but to live life peacefully and harmoniously.

Sinosophy’s exclusion of OTHAs implicit in the reference to ‘human life’ is problematic, as is the apparent mind/body dualism. So while I agree with Merleau-Ponty that ‘western philosophy can learn from Indian and Chinese thought “to rediscover our relationship to Being”’,<sup>312</sup> it’s clearly not that Indian and Chinese thought simply overcome philosophy’s limitations in respect of

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<sup>310</sup> Min Ou Yang, ‘There is no need for *Zhongguo Zhexue* to be philosophy’, *Asian Philosophy*, 22, 3 (2012), 199–223. NB: My quotations are from a pre-publication manuscript, so I have not included page numbers.

<sup>311</sup> These – ‘sinosophy’ (a neologism) and ‘Chinese philosophy’ – are two alternative translations of the ‘*Zhongguo zhexue*’ of his title: Ou Yang, ‘There is no need for *Zhongguo Zhexue* to be philosophy’.

<sup>312</sup> Jung, ‘Merleau-Ponty’s transversal geophilosophy and sinic aesthetics of nature’, p.237.

anthropocentrism, androcentrism and their founding dichotomies (if only they did!).<sup>313</sup> Nonetheless, they can teach the west something in terms of priorities: they evidence the partiality of ‘philosophy’, and simultaneously that there exist thought systems in the world that resist privileging knowledge, thereby providing ways to imagine ethics – or *ways to live* – differently; to focus on *knowing love* rather than on loving knowledge.

This dissertation is concerned primarily with philosophy, but is written as part of an interdisciplinary degree that brings together ‘philosophy’ and ‘anthrozoology’. As such, concerns about the inadequacies of ‘philosophy’ are perhaps especially pertinent. Both Irigaray and Ou Yang suggest that ‘philosophy’ is inadequate to attend to the ethical, and to the complexity of lived experience and relationships.

Irigaray’s concern in particular is that the narrow conception of ‘self’ arising from privileging and conversing with only those who are similar to one’s self is precisely *unwise*, arising from ‘a fear or an incapacity to enter into relation with the other’ ... unthinkingly ‘constrain[ing] him to remain among those like himself without confronting the delicate relational, but also logical, problems that a dialogue with one or several different subjects poses, or would pose’.<sup>314</sup> She accuses philosophers of having done precisely this. Embracing an ontology of flesh and the notion of intersubjectivity offers a way to counter this, to engage with others of all sorts, and thereby to confront the problems involved in encountering multiple and multifarious ‘others’. It also recognizes difference, as Irigaray insists we must – but includes non-human others in its conception of those who embody differences, which Irigaray does not. What Irigaray adds, though, to Merleau-Ponty’s ontology, is the point that as well as sharing one flesh, we share the same air – that ‘[a]ir is that in which we dwell and which dwells in us ... providing for passages ... between us’.<sup>315</sup> In evoking

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<sup>313</sup> For a relevant example of both what sinosophy might offer western thought but also the problems – including androcentrism in sinosophy as in philosophy – see the discussion about western care ethics and the concept of ‘*ren*’, or ‘*jen*’ (‘仁’): the sources are listed above at footnote 286.

<sup>314</sup> Irigaray, *The way of love*, p.5.

<sup>315</sup> *ibid.*, p.67.

air as ‘what is left in common between subjects living in different worlds’,<sup>316</sup> Irigaray offers another way towards love – towards recognizing that rather than our being isolated, the space between us, between all things, is *full*.

The trouble with philosophers, says Irigaray, is that they have ‘forgotten air and thereby forgotten that [they are] nourished and supported by air’.<sup>317</sup> What Irigaray encourages us to remember is ‘the density of air remaining in between’ us and others;<sup>318</sup> a density that, as Oliver puts it, is ‘the medium through which we perceive the world’.<sup>319</sup> Full of vibrations, particles, energy and waves, air – like flesh – is full of energy, of vitality, and enables us to connect with others.

Given Merleau-Ponty’s insistence on synaesthesia, on the intertwined nature of our senses, then vision too is proximal, as our flesh touches the flesh of the world, and so flesh and air work together to ensure that while we are all distinct, we are all also always connected to others – not just to other humans, but to all other animals, and also to all other non-human entities.

## **V. Revisiting ‘Ethics’**

In their article inspired by Cheney and Weston’s ideas, Jickling and Paquet write in respect of the Yukon wolves their article concerns that ‘we are the wolf’s relations as much as she is ours’,<sup>320</sup> Latterly, though, they briefly tell the same story I did about Leopold and the wolf, and write: ‘shooting that wolf was not ennobling and he felt that deeply’.<sup>321</sup> What they miss, though, is precisely what Kheel critiques: that Leopold *doesn’t care* about the individual wolf, but is motivated by decidedly anthropocentric emotions (a love of hunting, for one) and the equally anthropocentric science of ecology and his feelings ‘for’ the mountain (which he uses to represent a scientific view of ‘the environment’).

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<sup>316</sup> *ibid.*, p.67.

<sup>317</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Forgetting of Air* (1999), cited in Oliver, *Witnessing*, p.213.

<sup>318</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Elemental Passions*, trans. Joanne Collie & Judith Still (London: The Athlone Press, 1992), p.100.

<sup>319</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing*, p.193.

<sup>320</sup> Jickling and Paquet, ‘Wolf stories’, p.116.

<sup>321</sup> *ibid.*, p.127.

Contra. Jickling and Paquet's suggestion, I'd argue, Leopold totally misses the call to ethics in the wolf's face: his embodied etiquette, his comportment, towards the wolf is *far* from respectful, as is his refusal to *listen* to her, and to recognize her as an individual. This is because he had an *a priori* idea of her as an object – which is precisely the danger when epistemology (an 'ecological' worldview, in this case) is placed ahead of ethics (which is, ironically, the very position Jickling and Paquet argue for so eloquently in their article). Leopold's behaviour – his lack of 'listening' to the wolf, in Donovan's terms; of recognizing her as having subjectivity and sharing his flesh, in Merleau-Pontyan terms – cannot possibly be read as ethical.

In contrast, Francione's ethics arguably have some affinities with a Merleau-Pontyan approach to OTHAs, if not less animate entities. His failure to challenge the anthropocentrism of the key concepts he uses 'for' OTHAs – especially sentience, rights, and personhood – remains deeply problematic, as discussed above. However, he explicitly rejects the ethical significance of how much 'like' humans individual OTHAs are, holding that [t]he only thing ... required is that nonhumans be sentient' – defining sentience here as meaning to be 'perceptually aware'.<sup>322</sup> This suggests Francione has an essential awareness of all animals as sense-sensing, and even as sharing the same flesh. However, his basic conviction that OTHAs have ethical 'faces' is firmly in conflict with the anthropocentric, human-defined terms with which he then works to establish their 'rights' – placing knowledge, as he does, ahead of ethics.

So while Francione's identity politics are in many ways a world(view) away from those proposed by non-anthropocentric philosophies of indistinction, his founding attitude towards OTHAs is less distant. That said, Francione's vehement rejection of a feminist animal care ethic's critique of the dominant concepts of rights and personhood, and insistence that 'animal rights theory is the *only* way to alter the status

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<sup>322</sup> Francione, 'Animal welfare and the moral value of nonhuman animals', p.31; see also esp. pp.34–35.



of animals as property, or “things”<sup>323</sup> makes it clear he’s unlikely to personally develop his theory along the lines of a different ontology.

The difference between Francione and Leopold remains, though: Francione sees OTHAs as beings-for-themselves, while Leopold sees them as resources, as beings-for-humans and ‘the biotic community’ as a whole.

These are but a couple of broad-brush suggestions as to the possible impact of a Merleau-Pontyan ontology on currently mainstream approaches to ‘animal ethics’. They would be interesting to consider further, as would care ethics, Val Plumwood’s more recent ecofeminist virtue ethics,<sup>324</sup> and other philosophies I’ve barely touched upon, including specifically vegetarian and vegan ethics.

## **VI. Of Flesh and Air**

While the currently hegemonic, scientific-capitalist worldview is anthropocentric and promotes in myriad ways the concept of an isolated, individual, thinking human subject against whom all others are objectified and, generally, seen as separable from and resources for ‘humanity’, this worldview is far from universally accepted, even in the west. Despite its machinations, and its enormous sphere of influence, many individuals and groups of humans reject it – if to varying extents, and whether consciously or not.

In this context, surely Merleau-Ponty’s ontology is not so difficult to entertain. The notion of shared embodiment and kinship with OTHAs is not so strange – unless one accepts the dominant worldview that, shaped by masculinism and capitalism, works to hide such realities by promoting ‘scientific’ knowledge and ridiculing ‘anthropomorphism’. And the idea of other, less animate elements of nature being part of that same flesh? This is surely not much of a stretch, either: people often express an affinity with trees, a one-ness with the sky and the earth, feelings for plants, rivers, oceans... there

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<sup>323</sup> See Francione, *Animals as persons*, p.187; more generally, Ch. 6, ‘Ecofeminism and animal rights: A review of *Beyond animal rights: A feminist caring ethic for the treatment of animals*’.

<sup>324</sup> See e.g., Val Plumwood, ‘Integrating ethical frameworks for animals, humans, and nature: A critical feminist eco-socialist analysis’, *Ethics & the Environment*, 5, 2 (2000), 285–322.

is nothing so *very* extraordinary about the experiences and perceptions that ground Merleau-Ponty's ontology: they are precisely everywhere, all around us, if we pay attention to our senses.

The notion of movement, too, might easily be expanded: for Merleau-Ponty, the focus is on humans and OTHAs, but *all* life moves (plants grow, winds blow, tectonic plates shift), and animals interact with *all* life – not just with each other, but with all flesh. There is a story in which a woman slowly turns to stone; towards the end, she sees movement in the hillside – in the earth, in the rocks themselves.<sup>325</sup> Not (entirely) metaphorical, this reminds us that rocks move, the earth lives... it is only our particular, anthropocentric perception in and of time that makes this hard to 'see'.

And then there is air. As Irigaray articulates, air is not just around us, but in us; it connects us, there is not 'nothing there' in our life-world (as contemporary physics confirms)... like Merleau-Ponty's element of flesh, the element of air is always of us, always between us, always connecting as well as sustaining us. And then, as J.M. Howarth proposes, 'our moods are part of our nature, our nature and not our understanding or our rationality, and our nature is more like nature than we may often think'.<sup>326</sup> How does she arrive at this, but via thinking through Merleau-Ponty: considering his position that behaviour occurs in different styles – different beings have, precisely, different styles of being, of behaviour, on his account – then, says Howarth,

If we are to find resemblances between us and nature, the obvious place to look would be behaviour, movement, since that is something we share with nature: nature moves. Nature can "echo" our moods because it moves in detectably similar, if mysterious, ways.<sup>327</sup>

And so, ultimately, not only is the ontology revealed by Merleau-Ponty and those following him full of promise in overcoming epistemophilia as embodied in anthropocentrism, androcentrism, and the rest, but achieving

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<sup>325</sup> The story to which I refer is A.S. Byatt's 'A Stone Woman', in *The Little Black Book of Stories* (London: Vintage, 2004).

<sup>326</sup> J.M. Howarth, 'Nature's moods', p.116.

<sup>327</sup> *ibid.*, p.115.

such a worldview is not impossible, is not merely theoretical – as are, for example, the many rigidly worked-through ‘systems’ of ethics that have been proposed and still vie for position in western philosophy (and beyond). It seems to me that human people’s current behaviours – especially those which challenge the hegemony of mainstream science, of anthropocentrism, of androcentrism – already imply an awareness of an alternative way of experiencing and responding to reality (and shaping the constructs humans inevitably create), and a desire to implement change. There is also plenty to support, and little to refute, that OTHAs *are* our kin, in that they share embodiment and what motivates us humans – that is, emotions. To suggest otherwise, to argue against egomorphism, is little more than an unfounded reiteration of Cartesianism at its worst, at its most disembodied and solipsistic... it is to (inexplicably, except Irigaray perhaps explains it) cut oneself off from experience, from others, and from not just flesh but air. And to think that we can exist with knowledge, but without flesh, without air? That is epistemophilia – that is, *philosophy* – gone dangerously awry.

**Conclusions:**  
**ELEMENTAL COMPORIMENT:**  
**AN ETIQUETTE OF ONE FLESH?**

Our ethical responsibility comes not from our sovereignty or our autonomy but from our interdependence on the earth and its creatures. (Kelly Oliver, 2009)<sup>328</sup>

The philosophies I've focused on resist reifying the love of knowledge, promoting instead an ethics that is primary, prior to epistemology, and based on an ontology of kinship between all animals and a life-world that shares one 'flesh'. They thereby provide insights and strategies especially potent in rethinking notions of selfhood and environment beyond anthropocentrism. By discussing some of those ideas, I hope to have identified ways via which a non-anthropocentric ontology and ethics might be discovered, pursued, and shared.

Anthropocentrism and its founding dichotomies must, ethically, be rejected. They lead not just to Leopold's depersonalizing utterly the murder of an individual wolf, to Rolston's responding similarly to the death of an individual elk, but to the promulgation of a worldview that sees *all* OTHAs as lacking selfhood; to an expanse of similarly anthropocentric attitudes and 'reasons' to kill, maim, and 'manage' innumerable OTHAs and less animate entities; to treat all non-human others as resources; even to Attenborough's letting an elephant calf die when he could have provided it with the water it needed to survive.

A non-anthropocentric ethic will not rise automatically from the ontology Merleau-Ponty's remarkable work reveals and opens up to us. I have argued that it can, perhaps at best, provide us with a worldview far more likely to promote and enable us to live in less anthropocentric ways. Any non-anthropocentric ethics it gives rise to would be akin to the holist ecofeminist

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<sup>328</sup> Oliver, *Animal lessons*, p.305.

philosophy Kheel envisages<sup>329</sup> – that is, less a defined ethic, and more an ethos, or ‘way of life’.

To achieve this way of life, we must, ethically, resist – and, crucially, build alternatives to – an ontology and forms of knowledge that encourage us to do nothing when a fellow being is suffering, when we sense in its face a call to ethical action. We should not just do everything we can to help that being, but to ensure that we inhabit a world where it’s incomprehensible – an unthinkable breach of embodied etiquette – to do otherwise.

We need a new worldview based on a Merleau-Pontyan expression of ontology. An ethics informed by such an ontology, of flesh, cannot be abstracted from experience and intersubjectal relations, and, as Hadley Jensen argues, is eminently well suited to respond to the contemporary environmental crisis that envelops us all<sup>330</sup> – humans, OTHAs, and less animate entities.

Whether or not we will become better able to communicate with OTHAs, and thus to participate in a more mutual ethics, I don’t know. But we already have the ability to implement a less anthropocentric ethics than we do, globally, as the ‘dominant’ species. We are more than capable of perceiving the basic desires of many OTHAs and less animate entities, and those alone make abundantly clear that we should behave very differently from the way in which we currently do towards all non-humans with whom we share one flesh and one air... elements that we are slowly but surely destroying.

Perhaps most of all we can recognize the reality of inter-animal intersubjectality, and the reality of love for non-human as well as human others. We must find and found ways to contextualize our love of knowledge within this knowledge of love – and to prioritize love. This is not a call for a simplistic ‘ethic of care’, promoting universal ‘love’: instead, as Donovan and others suggest, it has everything to do with our etiquette – our body-subject comportment and our listening *and responding* to the communications and wishes of others of all sorts.

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<sup>329</sup> Kheel, *Nature ethics*, p.251.

<sup>330</sup> Hadley Jensen, “‘Fleshing’ out an ethic of diversity”, p.200.

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