

On the Poverty of Philosophy or the Black Hole of Factory Farming

by

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Animals are the main victims of history, and the treatment of domesticated animals in industrial farms is perhaps the worst crime in history.

Yuval Noah Harari[1]



I. Philosophical Controversies in the Antagonistic Area

Since the beginning of the first decade of this century, three among the leading philosophers of the leftist galaxy, Antonio (Toni) Negri, Giorgio Agamben and Slavoj Žižek, deeply committed to challenge the contemporary architectonics of power on behalf of the oppressed, have been engaged in an ongoing debate. One interest of this discussion lies in the fact that all three of them, in various degrees and with distinct nuances, find themselves at the crossroads between what are probably now the major sources of theoretical antagonistic politics – the entrenched neo-Marxist tradition and the more recent horizon of biopolitical thought.

The general focus of the discussion is the possibility of opposition to a system that is characterized as late global capitalism, sovereign power, empire, biopolitical control or disciplinary power. This opposition should be carried in the name of the dominated, the forgotten, the excluded and the discriminated against – of those who are subjugated, and reduced to a bare life which deprives them of their specific kind of existence and is stripped of every right, or of those who are exploited, and fall victims to reification and commodification.

The different approaches issue in different positions. Antonio Negri, the most Marxistically oriented, argues that Communism is possible, and that its achievement is tied to the constitution of a *common* which includes the shared wealth of the material world and the shared substance of our social being, and which should be affirmed against the current global system by the multitude – a network that acts in an organized way where all differences can be

expressed freely and equally. Agamben, on the other hand, widely acknowledged as the leading continuator of the biopolitical line of thought initiated by Michel Foucault, with his thesis of an original tie between sovereignty and the state of exception, and of the constant risk of the political production of bare life, aims at envisaging a political action which is merely destituent, rather than being constituent of a new political and legal order. Finally, Žižek, whose eclecticism blends Lacanian psychoanalysis with Marxian thought, and whose intellectual path is somewhat tortuous, fundamentally reaffirms the dominant role of class in contrast to race and gender, and, focusing on the struggle against the new apartheid in the form of walls and slums, asserts that the main task of the new century is to politicize the “destructured masses” of the Excluded.

About what, then, does the debate among these authors revolve? Here are some of their mutual criticisms. According to Žižek, Negri and his co-author Michael Hardt are too Marxist, as they do not abandon the Marxist scheme of historical progress, and their notion of the pure multitude ruling itself looks like the “ultimate capitalist fantasy”, while Agamben is too Foucauldian in arguing that the realm of bare life tends to be the realm of politics, and in seeing the modern project of political freedom merely as a deceptive mask for the disciplinary mechanisms of biopower.[2] For his part, Negri is suspicious of Žižek’s possible endorsement of elitist forms of political leadership like that of the Bolshevik party,[3] and argues that an important weakness in Agamben’s reflection is his conviction that power reduces every human being to a state of powerlessness, thus flattening “the reality of the biopolitical onto the fabric of a negative ontology” which totally misses history.[4] Finally, Agamben maintains that Negri fails to show that the movements’ constituting power is so different from sovereign power as to be immune from the latter’s sinister connotations, adding that “a political theory freed from the aporias of sovereignty is unthinkable” until the ontology of actuality is replaced by an ontology of potentiality,[5] and observes that philosophers like Žižek too easily refer to communism as if it were a clear concept, which after Stalin is hardly tenable.[6]

Do such discussions confront the hard facts of an age dominated by a mode of production that has surpassed all previous systems in terms of the capacity to bend reality to its ends? No. As Gregory Smulewicz-Zucker and Michael Thompson recently argued, this is a moment when the philosophical Left is detached from the mechanisms of power and of political reality, so that politics tends to collapse into culture.[7] Since at present antagonistic thinkers, unlike most of their precursors, are not also political leaders, the tone and content of their debates somehow bear the hallmark of that “scholastic view” which approaches the world as a text that must be interpreted rather than as a source of concrete problems eliciting urgent reactions.[8]

To this, it might be replied that, in a situation when there seems to be no critical mass to sustain political struggles, the existence of a texture of distinct but overlapping perspectives is surely important, and that the worst concrete problems, though not directly confronted, are at least identified and diagnosed. This may be true, but only partially, for there is a crucial problem which is totally overlooked.

II. Factory Farming

In the last seventy years, industrial societies witnessed the rise of an exploitation system which involves an unrivalled quantity of victims: each year, about 60 billions of individuals are killed all over the world.[9] The involved individuals are animals who, alienated from their forms of life, are bent to human ends in a new way – a way that, through the scientific production of malleable bodies capable of enduring extreme conditions, marks the apogee of that mode of enframing in which living beings are used as raw material to be unrestrainedly tampered with.[10]

Within this system, also known as the “animal industrial complex,”[11] individuals are for their whole life confined in cubicles too small even to turn, crammed into pens where they defecate on one another, or kept chained in the dark. They are drugged to grow so large that their legs and organs cannot keep up, and, if unwanted, they are ground up alive or tossed into bags to suffocate.[12] Here, it is possible to fully grasp the assertion that technology violates the very nature of the beings over whom it holds sway. For what emanates from such visions is the ontological horror at the technological processing of life – at life usurped, mechanized, and appropriated.”[13]

The final destiny of the beings forced to lead such a kind of life is the abattoir. Archetypical *capitalist* Henry Ford draw inspiration for assembly-line production from a visit to a Chicago slaughterhouse, where animal bodies passed from worker to worker.[14] Nonhuman bodies keep passing from worker to worker – shackled upside down, dragged through electrified water baths, or hoisted up on to the killing line for the death cut.[15] Comparing the treatment of animals from factory farms to slaughterhouses to the treatment of humans in the death camps, James Stanescu argues that, if the camps seemed especially concerned with the disposal of corpses, what characterizes the animal industrial system is not just the production of corpses, but the fabrication of lives to be part of the production of corpses. Within this realm, “it isn’t just that we experience death that can’t be called death, but also life that cannot be called life” – an entirely new phenomenon which resists the parallels with intra-human atrocities and which can be defined as “deading life,” or life that is not living.[16]

Paraphrasing Hannah Arendt on American slavery, one might claim that, in the face of this, no one can ignore “the primordial crime upon which the fabric of [our] society rests.” [17] And yet, the question of the mass subjugation and

exploitation of the members of other species is virtually nonexistent for our critical thinkers. In this sense, far from being antagonistic, their stances appear as supportive of the existing order – they might be seen as the left wing of the conservative camp.

III. Facing the Problem

The matter is essentially one of moral consideration. To regard something as an injustice, one must first grant moral consideration to the involved beings. And when some beings are denied consideration, the matter becomes one of establishing whether such denial is justifiable. Is it justifiable, then, to draw between human and nonhuman beings, as our authors do, a discriminatory line which condones dominion over the latter but not over the former?

Philosophy – the intellectual field traditionally charged with offering reasoned grounds for societal choices – while most often working *ex post*, advancing justifications for the prevailing doxa, is sometimes able to produce new horizons of moral consciousness, bringing out more just and universal principles. This is what occurred with the rise of the animal question. In connection with the elaboration of the rationale of the doctrine of universal human rights, many analytic moral philosophers argued that the expansive force of the egalitarian principles therein formulated could not be confined within the boundaries of our species, and produced arguments to the effect that we should extend basic equality, in the form of the fundamental negative right not to be interfered with, to nonhuman beings. On account of this connection, such arguments, although independently founded,^[18] can also be expressed in the form of *ad hominem* reasoning, that is, by showing that the humanist egalitarian premises, if consistently applied, lead to extensionist conclusions.^[19]

Do the authors under consideration, notwithstanding their unconventional positions, subscribe to the contemporary paradigm of human equality? Though outright references to it may be inconspicuous in their work, an up-close inspection shows that the paradigm looms large in the background. This holds both for the neo-Marxist and the biopolitical trend. Marxism is no longer what it was – a perspective centered on the redemptive role of a class in a historical process guided by the conflict between productive forces and productive modes – since, with the appearance of what was not haphazardly called Marxist humanism, the idea of the “new human being” increasingly overshadowed abstract entities like the laws of history,^[20] thereby making the theory permeable to contemporary human egalitarianism. Thus if Negri praises Renaissance humanism as the initiator of the notion of human equality, and lists human rights among the counterpowers that can guarantee the continued flourishing of humanity, Žižek states that human rights express the right to universality as such, and recoils in horror at the possibility that a human being may not be “recognized and/or treated as human.”^[21] Analogously, notwithstanding Michel Foucault’s wager that man [sic] would be erased like a face drawn in sand,^[22] biopolitical thought is not as anti-humanist as it is presented, as evidenced by the fact that, in his late ethical work, Foucault himself engaged with human rights discourse, reevaluating “what we call human rights or freedom.” Consistently with this, Agamben, after denouncing the camp as the place where the most absolute *conditio inhumana* is realized, focuses attention on the juridical procedures by which human beings can be completely “deprived of their rights and prerogatives,” while his notion of *Homo sacer* – a human being reduced to bare life – is tellingly seized by Žižek to condemn the idea that there can be humans who have no rights and are regarded as “inhuman.”^[23] In the light of all this, it is clearly possible to bring into play the *ad hominem* logic showing that a consistent application of the very premises of the intra-human egalitarianism these authors espoused must lead them to reconsider the status of animals.

What the recently developed egalitarian arguments radically undermine are ingrained attitudes in mainstream customary morality whose faults we now see as fairly evident. Amongst them, two have been particularly devastating. The first one is the legitimation of inferior treatment for some human categories – such as non-Western peoples – on the basis of grand metaphysical narratives invoked to make sense of the cosmos. Against this, it was argued that it is unacceptable because *arbitrary* to rank human individuals according to their alleged level within idiosyncratic hierarchies of value. Needless to say, this implies the delegitimation of inferior treatment for nonhuman individuals according to equally idiosyncratic hierarchies, be they metaphysical, natural or even religious. The second critical target, whose influence cast a long shadow over our history, is the sanction of discrimination against some human beings founded on their membership in a particular biological group. Against this, it was argued that purely physical attributes such as skin color, eye shape or genital structure are morally *irrelevant* characteristics,^[24] thus substantiating the present indictment of racism and sexism. Since, however, also the discrimination founded on species membership is a form of biologism, *speciesism* too is discredited, and it becomes inadmissible to treat the other animals as inferiors merely on the ground that “they are not human.”^[25]

To these philosophical rationales for extending basic equality to nonhuman beings, some leftist philosophers – among them Negri’s co-author, Michael Hardt –^[26] object that ethics is one thing, and politics quite another, and that thereby their perspectives cannot be accused of ignoring animals, dealing as they do with different problems. And, whether they focus on the facet of the political concerning end-states and the realm of desirable political institutions, or on the dynamic sphere of the struggles conducted by political forces to alter society, two considerations are regularly invoked to exclude nonhuman individuals, and both revolve around some construal of the notion of agency.

When what is at issue is the functioning of society, exclusion is normally justified by appeal to the perfectionist approach that differentiates on the basis of cognitive levels, sanctioning disqualification for less mentally endowed individuals on the grounds that they are unable to govern themselves and – a fortiori – to lead a life of public participation implying forms of reciprocity and a commitment to reasoned discourse. Since, however, it was just this sort of perfectionism which underlay the institutionalization or outright elimination of cognitively non-paradigmatic members of our species, a further reference to contemporary human egalitarianism comes into play here. For it was just the realization that, irrespective of one's intellectual level and of one's capacity for agency, from the subjective point of view of each individual human being one's life and welfare have just as much importance as those of any other, so that to ignore the interests of the mentally disabled implies flatly giving up ethical *impartiality*, that led to the present creation of programs of appropriate protection and involvement for the weakest among us. Consistency thereby requires not only the repudiation of the exclusion of nonhumans based on forms of perfectionism, but also, as it was recently argued within *English-speaking* political philosophy,[27] the adoption of parallel policies of inclusion.

If, on the other hand, one turns to the dynamic sphere of the fight to alter society, the attempted exclusion of nonhumans tends to be referred to the view, arising in the political debates of the 1960's,[28] that the oppressed cannot become free if they do not develop their own political project through their own agency, and that it is both wrong and paternalistic to fight in the name, and on behalf, of other subjugated groups. However, even leaving aside the fact that not only do animals display their own forms of resistance[29] but new concepts for analyzing forms of animal dependent agency are now being developed,[30] it is once again the full ethico-political acceptance of the children's and disability rights movements standing up for immature and non-paradigmatic humans which bespeaks the blatant *unfairness* of a view claiming that just the most helpless victims of discrimination – those who cannot defend themselves[31] – are not entitled to defense by concerned others.[32] This cannot but dispel the attempt to delegitimize nonhumans as a group deserving resistance and mobilization on the part of a genuine political movement.

If these arguments have the effect of unearthing the inconsistencies which mar the perspectives in question, however, the unacceptability of the leftist blindness to a practice like factory farming – and of course to other forms of nonhuman exploitation like “scientific experimentation” which, though not involving such staggering numbers of individuals, are structurally analogous – can be highlighted also from a different angle, that is, by considering whether the main critical categories employed to diagnose and denounce social pathologies can be suddenly dropped as soon as the species boundary is reached.

Such critical categories revolve around two main families of concepts which, though somehow intertwining, remain different in that they place emphasis on differing aspects of the powerful-powerless relationship, since one is centered on the idea of being in the power of, or wholly subject to, someone else, and is captured by the notion of subjugation, while the other focuses on the aspect of being objectified and converted into an instrument to others' ends, and is summarized by the notion of exploitation.

IV. Subjugation and the Reduction to Bare Life

The notion of bare life, present in Walter Benjamin as *bloßes Leben*, or the “nothing but life” as contrasted to historical life,[33] adumbrated in Arendt's idea of the “mere existence” of those whose exclusion from the legal regime is “an invitation to murder”[34], reinterpreted and popularized by Giorgio Agamben, and then widely adopted in biopolitical discourse, is now the main theoretical tool employed to denounce and challenge subjugation in the intra-human context. Can such a category be confined to the members of *Homo sapiens*? In order to answer this question, the present use of the concept must be clarified. To what exactly does it refer? Though “bare life” is actually used in different ways,[35] and even lends itself to some conceptual acrobatics, it seems that its various senses can be referable to two basic construals, which are often two sides of the same coin – one focusing on subjective impotence or even spoliation, and the other focusing on objective impotence tied to exclusion. In the former case what one faces is an either contingent or structural condition of deprivation with respect to some kind of existence, and in the latter case is instead a state of rightlessness which may include the liability to be killed with impunity.

When bare life is construed in the first way, the kind of existence the involved individuals are stripped of is, of course, their distinctive kind of existence. Within the humanistic framework of most biopolitical thought, thus, the specific kind in question is the *human* kind of existence, which tends to be translated into the possibility of being a political actor when the deprivation is relatively minor, or into the possibility of exercising allegedly distinctive human capacities when the deprivation is thoroughgoing. Thus, one is confronted with bare life when human beings are incapacitated with respect to their active engagement within society, or, worse, when they are divested of such attributes as rationality or the linguistic capacity.

Though in the literature examples of the former instance range from refugees to stateless people, and examples of the latter range from the *Muselmann* in the camp to the overcomatose attached to life-support systems, in all cases there is a tendency to negatively equate what remains – what is left after the deprivation – with animality, or, more hazily, with a “inhumanity” that surreptitiously redirects to animality. It is clear that if animality is a priori assumed as the negative term of comparison – the very image of deficiency – bare life as a critical category referring to deprivation with respect to

one's kind of existence cannot be applied to nonhumans either in the sense that they cannot be *reduced* to that state or in the sense that their being in that state is politically neutral as it is their natural lot. But this assumption is unwarranted: it is not only outdated, but mistaken, to maintain that "animal life" is what remains after social agency or even attributes like rationality and language are erased, since there is ample evidence that nonhuman individuals display all these abilities in various degrees. Moreover, with what coherence can one revolt against the subjection of a totally unconscious being like the overcomatose, while ignoring the subjection of intelligent and communicative beings like cows, or pigs, or chickens? Lastly, the idea of kind of existence here at issue is derived in character, as it is obtained by coupling the abstract notion with a concrete reference to a specific bearer – the human being. If, however, the notion is not epistemologically constrained by such an anthropocentric framework, and is used instead in its basic sense of what governs the way a being dwells in the world, it is undeniable that the deprivation of one's specific kind of existence – the fact that an organism is prevented from performing those actions which it is natural for it to perform – is a harm, and must be condemned, whatever the being in question. Indeed, without this basic moral judgment, it would be impossible to refer to the derived judgment that substantiates the denouncement of such a deprivation in the human case.[36] Ultimately, a defense of the mere intra-human applicability of the category of bare life based on the construal in terms of *subjective* deprivation is untenable.

What, then, of the *objective* construal, referring to a state of rightlessness and exclusion, whose prototypical adduced cases are mass denaturalizations or denials of the right of asylum resulting in internment? In this case, the exclusion of nonhuman individuals from the application of the notion is normally advocated by appealing to the idea that animals are not the kind of beings of whom a situation of divestment of rights can be predicated, either because, descriptively, they enjoy no rights, or because, normatively, they cannot have rights.

The first claim is both false and inconsequential: it is false since in our societies animals enjoy some albeit limited rights, and it is inconsequential because one cannot derive the evaluative conclusion that a being cannot have rights from the factual premise that it doesn't have them. And the second horn of the objection – the claim that nonhumans cannot have rights – far from being self-evident, stands in need of justification. Such a justification is lacking, for, as outlined above, all the traditional rationales for downgrading animals and, by implication, for denying them the protection of those products of moral and legal theories called rights, appear unacceptable on the grounds of being affected by arbitrariness, irrelevance, lack of impartiality and unfairness. Needless to say, moreover, any argument against granting basic rights to nonhumans can also be an argument against granting basic rights to some humans. Thus, also the attempt to exclude nonhumans from the application of the notion of bare life starting from its rendering in terms of *objective* deprivation fails.

But if nonhumans are the kinds of beings who can be both reduced to a condition of wretchedness and sunk in a situation of rightlessness, in the face of industrialized farming and analogous institutions it is difficult not to agree with Cary Wolfe's claim that animals are today, on a scale unprecedented in human history, "the site of the very ur-form" of that absolute powerlessness which the notion of bare life epitomizes.[37] And such a diagnosis becomes even more sinister if, still following Wolfe, one adds to this line of biopolitical thought the approach focusing on the subjection of beings to disciplines, technology and, especially, to the dispositifs established between discourses, institutions and laws whose function is a global exercise of power. Procedures routinely performed in the animal industrial complex like eugenic interventions, artificial insemination, inoculation or pharmaceutical enhancement can indeed be viewed as the exemplary expression of that maximization of control over life and death that Foucault termed as *making live*, so that "from the vantage of a Foucauldian biopolitics... we are forced to conclude that current practices of factory farming and the like... constitute not just some embarrassing sideline of modern life that has nothing to do with politics proper.. [but] must be seen... as in fact constitutively political for biopolitics in its modern form." [38]

V. Exploitation and Reification

If the biopolitical category of bare life confronts the question of subjugation, the Marxist category of reification (from the *Latin res*, "thing") squarely confronts the question of exploitation, for exploitation occurs on a continuum involving a growing scale of damages which reaches its limit in the conversion into a thing. And while even the umbrella category of exploitation is under revision, as recognized by Žižek himself, who admits he doesn't have an answer to the question of how such a notion functions today,[39] the category of reification – already complex and multifaceted since its first deployment in critical theory – has undergone several changes in the transition from classical to contemporary Marxism. Within the context of such changes, one can clearly detect a tendency to shift from a focus on abstract entities like mental or social processes to a focus on concrete individuals. Thus, the Lukacsian stress on the impenetrability of reified concepts and on the erasure from the life-world of all qualitative and historical aspects that the rationalizing dominion imposes on capitalist societies[40] gives way to Horkheimer and Adorno's emphasis both on the process which, guided by instrumental reason, turns everything, including subjects, into something repeatable and replaceable, and on the connection between the technological dominion of nature and reification as "blindness to torment;"[41] until, more recently, in Axel Honneth one assists to an overshadowing of the traditional aspect of ascribing the blame to the social system in favor of a construal of reification as a violation of moral principles

involving the abandonment of “recognition”, or of the empathetic engagement owed to individuals “not possessing thing-like characteristics.”[42]

As a result of these alterations, which are in consonance with Marxist humanism’s propensity to abandon its classical metaphysical baggage, the notion of reification acquires new potentialities. Revitalizing Marx’s claim that “the worker sinks to the level of a commodity and becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities,”[43] it enables the development of a comprehensive critique of the damages inflicted to actual individuals exposed to reification. Can one say that animals are excluded from the number of these individuals? Even though, since to deny the possibility of nonhuman reification implies that animals already possess thing-like characteristics, and given that the conditions of application of the concept of thing relate to passiveness and unawareness, to see (the other) animals as things seems – contra Kant[44] – wholly implausible, attempts to secure exclusion have nonetheless been made. Axel Honneth, for instance, after claiming that recognition of *the emotional states of others* is an elementary form of intersubjectivity having the status of “original” or “primary” recognition, defends the conclusion that one can only *indirectly* speak of a reification of nonhumans by recognizing other persons’ feelings about them –[45] a conclusion that is clearly reached only at the price of plain circularity, that is, by preliminarily a) dividing the world into human beings and “nonhuman *objects*”, and b) conceptualizing reification in terms of a typification that refuses to grant “specifically human qualities” to individuals.[46] In the face of such a *petitio principii*, nothing appears sounder than the standpoint of Adorno and Horkheimer, who, vindicating both reason and commonsense, unhesitatingly counted animals among the subjects apprehended in terms of manipulation and administration.[47]

In the light of all this, far from losing the destabilizing potential of the initial formulation, the challenge to reification that focuses on turningselves into things is in fact immediately a social critique of capitalism. For while a thoroughly anthropocentric version of this critique currently starts being addressed to the looming technological commodification of *human* beings by “the conjunction of capitalism, informatics and genetics,”[48] it is just the critique of the reification of *nonhuman* beings which brings into full light the destructive power of the modern capitalist market. On the one hand, albeit animals have long been items of property, it is their recent status as commodities that has attained the result of a total de-subjectification and of an actual reduction to the thing-like reality of an instrument. On the other, as it has been aptly remarked,[49] with the emergence of the animal industrial complex the process by which the thingification of the commodity permeates and structures society as a whole reaches its apex, reinforcing the epistemological condition of a distortion of consciousness and giving free rein to the abstract, quantitative mode of calculability intrinsic to the rise of modern societies. In this perspective, the struggle against reification in action can empower the struggle against reification in thought.[50]

Edward Said once noted that, like people and schools, ideas and theories too travel, and crucial changes, due to times and places, occur between their successive elaborations.[51] A construal of reification focusing on the actual treatment of nonhuman beings in late capitalism would clearly leave behind the vague leftist mentions of the need to fight against a “world reified by biopower,”[52] or of the tie between the reification of interpersonal relations and the “personalization of .. objective social processes,”[53] recovering instead the radicality of a critique that, by attacking factory farming, points at the heart of the exploitation system. For the animal, not the worker, is “the most wretched of commodities,” and, as Horkheimer observed, the basement of the present capitalist house is the slaughterhouse.[54]

VI. An incongruous (and reversible?) silence

Wingless, featherless, blind, and brain-damaged, entrapped in the hell of humanity, do they recall their wholeness in the phantom limbic soul of themselves? And if they do, are such memories of their essential identity, eluding the procrustean blades of annihilation, experienced as a compensation or a curse? When hens in a battery cage fall asleep, perchance to dream, how do they feel when they wake up?

Karen Davis[55]

That those who arrange, take profit of, or benefit from, the horrific reality of the animal industrial complex might minimize or even defend it, is *prima facie* in the order of things: they are the enemy. But that those who are critical of contemporary society and fight against injustice overlook it is nothing short of scandalous.

It is time that the antagonistic thinkers stop advancing patronizing comments on “the complex—and not always edifying—economy of relations between men [sic] and animals,” or vague and condescending remarks on the suffering of animals, [56] and get once and for all rid of such distortions as the identification, contra any ethological evidence, between animality and an inferior and egotistical realm of being.[57] It is time that what remains of the politico-philosophical opposition confronts the fact that no one who doesn’t stigmatize and challenge the capitalistic and biopolitical monster of factory farming can be considered either a serious political analyst or a serious opponent of that which exists. For if the very principles of contemporary egalitarianism logically imply an overcoming of the species barrier, and the main tools for the critique of society can be directly applied to the nonhuman plight in late capitalism, the liberation of animals from the institutions that reduce them to mere means to human ends turns out to be an urgent and universal political task.

Going back to his previous self in Italian 1968, Antonio Negri nostalgically mentions those “adventures of bodies and minds” that characterized the times when there wasn’t simply a theory but a transformative practice, when intellectual reflection produced experiences and laboratories of life and the biopolitical field was “explored in all its ethico-practical intensity.” [58] It is astounding that the contemporary Left doesn’t realize that, despite the difficulties of challenging an overarching paradigm and of fighting something so pervasive as animal subjugation, those who take up such a struggle not only become immediately practical in eliminating from their lives the by-products of the industrial commodification of nonhumans, but have also created, in the present desert of the real, [59] a thriving movement that is gradually developing its own political praxis, and that conspicuously asserts its willingness to engage in constant, transformative activism.

Notes

- [1] Yuval Noah Harari, “Industrial farming is one of the worst crimes in history,” *The Guardian*, September 25, 2015, at
- [2] Slavoj Žižek, “*Objet a* as Inherent Limit to Capitalism: on Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri”, <http://www.lacan.com/zizmultitude.htm>; Žižek, “Blows against the Empire”, <http://www.lacan.com/zizblow.htm>; Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real. Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 95
- [3] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, Penguin, 2004, p. 404
- [4] Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri, “It’s a Powerful life”, *Cultural Critique* 57, 2004; A. Negri, “Giorgio Agamben: The Discreet Taste of the Dialectic,” in Matthew Calarco and Steven De Caroli, eds., *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life* (Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press 2007) p. 123; A. Negri, “The sacred dilemma of inoperosity. On Giorgio Agamben’s *Opus Dei*”, Translated by Jason Francis Mc Gimsey and edited by Matteo Pasquinelli, originally published on *il manifesto* on the 24th of February 2012, <http://www.uninomade.org/negri-on-agamben-opus-dei/>
- [5] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 1998) pp. 43ff.
- [6] Giorgio Agamben, “La democrazia è un concetto ambiguo,” Intervista al Red Notebook e agli *Ενθέματα* της Αυγής, 4 Marzo 2014, at <http://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/interviste/giorgio-agamben-la-democrazia-%C3%A8-un-concetto-ambiguo>
- [7] Gregory Smulewicz-Zucker and Michael J. Thompson, “The Treason of Intellectual Radicalism and the Collapse of Leftist Politics”, *Logos* 2016, vol. 15, at <http://logosjournal.com/2015/thompson-zucker/>.
- [8] Pierre Bourdieu, “The Scholastic Point of View,” *Cultural Anthropology* 5/4 (1990): 380-391.
- [9] “Beyond Factory Farming: Sustainable Solutions for Animals, People and the Planet,” 25 November 2009, <http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/themes/animal-welfare/news-detail/en/c/37597/>; this figure excludes all aquatic animals. An example can render this unfathomable figure more comprehensible: in September 2018, a single hurricane, Florence, killed in North Carolina an estimated 1.7 million chickens – see <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2018/9/19/1796994/-Toxic-coal-ash-rancid-hog-waste-and-fetid-sewage-spill-across-Carolinas-in-wake-of-Florence?detail=emaildkre>. The annual numbers involved in the parallel use of animals in medical and bio-pharmaceutical experimentation amount to the 0,02% of the number of animals annually killed for food; the underestimated figure of 115.3 million animals excludes all invertebrates. See “How many animals are used in experiments around the world?” at <http://lushprize.org/many-animals-used-experiments-around-world/>.
- [10] Richard Twine, “The industrialisation of animals: What happened to ethics?”, *The Scavenger*, 12 December 2010, at <http://www.thescavenger.net/social-justice-sp-24912/animals/538-the-iindustrialisation-of-animals-where-are-the-ethics-89912.html>) On enframing see in particular Cary Wolfe, *Before the Law* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012), p. 3.
- [11] The phrase “animal industrial complex” comes from Barbara Noske, *Human and Other Animals* (London: Pluto Press 1989).
- [12] Peta, “Chickens Used for Food,” at <http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-food/factory-farming/chickens/>
- [13] Bruce V. Foltz, “Heidegger, Ethics, and Animals,” *Between the Species* 1993, vol.9, at <http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1841&context=bts>

- [14] Charles Patterson, “Animals, Slavery, and the Holocaust,” *Logos* 2005, vol. 4, at http://www.logosjournal.com/issue_4.2/patterson.htm
- [15] Peta, “Factory Farming: Misery for Animals,” at <http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-food/factory-farming/>; Vegan Outreach, “Even if you like meat,” at <http://www.veganoutreach.org/EIYLM.pdf>
- [16] James Stanescu, “Beyond Biopolitics: Animal Studies, Factory Farms, and the Advent of Degrading Life,” *PhaenEx* 2013, vol. 8 (2): 135–160, at <https://phaenex.uwindsor.ca/index.php/phaenex/article/view/4090>.
- [17] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 71-72.
- [18] The literature is now extensive, but see at least Paola Cavalieri, *The Death of the Animal. A Dialogue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Steve F. Sapontzis, *Morals, Reason and Animals* (Philadelphia, Pa: Temple University Press, 1987); Evelyn Pluhar, *Beyond Prejudice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); and Edward R. Johnson, *Species and Morality*, Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, July 1976 [University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Mi].
- [19] The classical definition of the ad hominem argument is offered by John Locke in terms of pressing someone with consequences drawn from her/his own principles or concessions. See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter XVII, 21.
- [20] There had been of course previous hints in this direction. See e.g. Georg Lukacs’ early reference to how “Marx’s ‘humanism’ diverges from all the movements that recognized how capitalism violates and destroys everything human.” G. Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass: Mit Press, 1968), p. 190.
- [21] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 76; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Declaration* (Kindle Edition, 2012), at <https://antonionegrienglish.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/93152857-hardt-negri-declaration-2012.pdf>; Slavoj Zizek, “The Obscurity of Human Rights: Violence as Symptom”, 2005, at <http://www.lacan.com/zizviol.htm>
- [22] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002) p. 422.
- [23] Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End. Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis, Mn: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) p. 35; *ibid.*, p. 39; Slavoj Zizek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Mass: Mit Press, 2006) p. 110-11, 401-2, at <https://libcom.org/files/Zizek-The%20Parallax%20View.pdf>
- [24] See e.g. James Rachels, ed., *Moral Problems*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1979 [1964]), p. 6, or Michael Tooley, “Abortion and Infanticide,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1972, Vol. 2 (1), p. 51 ff, at <https://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/file.php/PPP504/Michael%20Tooley,%20Abortion%20and%20infanticide.pdf>
- [25] For a recent investigation of the philosophical concept of speciesism as a psychological construct, see Lucius Caviola, Jim A.C. Everett, and Nadira S. Faber, “The Moral Standing of Animals: Towards a Psychology of Speciesism,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Mar 08, 2018, no Pagination Specified, also at <http://www.jimaceverett.com/publications/the-moral-standing-of-animals-towards-a-psychology-of-speciesism/>
- [26] Massimo Filippi. Michael Hardt, Marco Maurizi, *Altre Specie di Politica* (Sesto San Giovanni: Mimesis, 2016), pp. 40 ff.
- [27] Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, “Make it so: Envisioning a Zoopolitical Revolution,” in Paola Cavalieri, ed., *Philosophy and the politics of animal liberation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
- [28] See e.g. on paternalism “How and Why Did Women in SNCC (the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) Author a Pathbreaking Feminist Manifesto, 1964-1965?” at <http://womhist.alexanderstreet.com/SNCC/intro.htm>.
- [29] On animal resistance see.g. Jason Hribal, *Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance*(Oakland, Ca: CounterPunch, 2010); Éric Baratay, *Le point de vue animal. Une autre version de l’histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 2012); Paola Cavalieri, “Animal liberation: A political perspective”, in P. Cavalieri, ed., *Philosophy and the politics*, cit.; and Eva Mejer, “Animal Activism and Interspecies Change”, 2016, at <http://www.animalliberationcurrents.com/2016/11/29/animal-activism-and-interspecies-change/>.
- [30] On dependent agency, see Donaldson and Kymlicka, “Animals in Political Theory,” in Linda Kalof, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) also at http://www.academia.edu/9064303/Sue_Donaldson_and_Will_Kymlicka_Animals_in_Political_Theory_.

[31] In the words of Brian Barry, of those individuals who are unable “to organize an effective resistance”; see Brian Barry, *Theories of Justice* (Berkeley, Ca: University of California Press, 1989), p. 163. For a powerful analysis of the analogies and intersections between the plight of disabled humans and the plight of nonhumans and for a critical discourse on the way they are, and can be, incorporated in a struggle for global justice see Sunaura Taylor, *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (New York: New Press, 2017).

[32] Zizek himself has admitted this: Slavoj Zizek, *Trouble in Paradise* (London: Penguin 2014), p. 143.

[33] See on this Carlo Salzani, “From Benjamin’s *Leben* to Agamben’s *Nuda Vita*: A Genealogy”, at http://www.academia.edu/15220558/From_Benjamin_s_bloes_Leben_to_Agamben_s_nuda_vita_A_Genealogy.

[34] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Orlando, Fl: Harvest Book, 1973), p. 302ff.

[35] See among others e.g. Andrew Norris, “Giorgio Agamben and the Politics of the Living Dead,” *Diacritics* 2000, Vol. 30 (4), pp. 38-58, at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1566307>.

[36] On the distinction between basic moral principles and derived moral principles see Michael Tooley, *Abortion and Infanticide*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 16-7, and id., “Speciesism and Basic Moral Principles,” *Etica & Animali*, vol. 9, (1998), p. 6.

[37] Cary Wolfe, *Before the Law*, cit., p. 46.

[38] Ibid.

[39] “Divine Violence and Liberated Territories: SOFT TARGETS talks with Slavoj Zizek”. 4 June 2007, at <http://www.softtargetsjournal.com/web/zizek.php>

[40] See the famous chapter of *History and Class Consciousness*, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat”. But even Lukacs touches on the “individual” facet of reification when he stresses how “the process by which the worker is reified and becomes a commodity dehumanises him and cripples and atrophies his ‘soul.’” See G. Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, cit., p. 172.

[41] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Palo Alto, Ca: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 191, 65.

[42] Axel Honneth, “Reification: A Recognition-Theoretical View”, Tanner Lecture on human values in UC Berkeley, 2005, p. 96, at http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/h/Honneth_2006.pdf.

[43] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (New York: International Publishers, 1964), *Estranged Labour*, also at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>.

[44] The literature which analytically undermines Kant’s claim is now extensive. See at least Edward Johnson, *Species and Morality*, cit.; Tom Regan, *The case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley, Ca: University of California Press, 1983), Chapter V, sect. 5.5; Christina Hoff, “Kant’s Invidious Humanism”, *Environmental Ethics* 1983 vol. 5 (1), pp. 63-70; and Paola Cavalieri, *The Animal Question* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), chapt. III.

[45] A. Honneth, “Reification,” cit., pp. 133-34.

[46] Axel Honneth, “Réification, connaissance, reconnaissance: Quelques malentendus.” *Esprit* 2008 (July), pp. 96–5. For a different critique see Nathan Everson, “Recognition Theory and the Question of the Animal”, <https://www.scribd.com/document/45624403/Recognition-Theory-and-the-Question-of-the-Animal>

[47] T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, cit., p. 65. Curiously enough, Honneth, though devoting much attention to the question of autism (“Reification,” cit., pp. 115 ff.), does not grasp the autistic facet of his approach to animals.

[48] See Frédéric Vandenberghe, *What’s Critical About Critical Realism?: Essays in Reconstructive Social Theory*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), pp. 248-49.

[49] Gregory Smulewicz-Zucker, “The Problem with *Commodifying* Animals,” in Gregory Smulewicz-Zucker, ed., *Strangers to Nature: Animal Lives and Human Ethics* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2012), p.164 ff.

[50] I am here inverting a claim made by Paresh Chandra in “Raymond Williams, Working-Class Struggle and the Jerkiness of History”, *Radical Notes*, May 4, 2014, <https://radicalnotes.com/tag/raymond-williams/>

[51] Edward W. Said, "Traveling Theory," 1980, in E. Said, *The world, the text, and the critic* (Harvard, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[52] Toni Negri, "Spunti di 'critica preveggente' nel Capitolo VI inedito di Marx", *UniNomade* 28/08/2012, at <http://www.uninomade.org/critica-preveggente-capitolo-sesto/>.

[53] Slavoj Zizek, *First as Tragedy, then as Farce* (London: Verso 2009), p. 141.

[54] Max Horkheimer, *Dawn and decline: notes 1926- 1931 and 1950-1969* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), p. 66.

[55] Karen Davis, "Procrustean Solutions to Animal Identity and Welfare Problems", in John Sanbonmatsu, ed., *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011) p. 53.

[56] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open* (Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 2004) p. 15; Slavoj Zizek, *Trouble in Paradise*, cit., p. 143. See also the incongruous considerations about an allegedly nature-loving Francis of Assisi "posing a joyous life including all of being and nature, the animals, sister moon, brother sun", in M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Empire*, cit., p. 413. Actually, Zizek is the only one who quite moderately touched on the topic. But his attitude is not only condescending, but also contradictory. For example, if in *Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008, p. 53) he critically refers to "animals slaughtered for our consumption," in "The Prospects of Radical Politics Today," (*International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, 2008, Vol. 5, at https://www2.ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/vol5_1/v5-1-article3-zizek.html) he attacks animal rights. And if in a 2010 conference at the Birkbeck Institute, he condemns our disavowal of animal exploitation, he feels the need to specify that he is not "becoming Peter Singer." See on this JonHochschartner, "Socialist Animalism: Essays, Interviews, and Fiction", at https://archive.org/stream/SocialistAnimalismPdf/Socialist%20Animalism%20pdf_djvu.txt

[57] Once again, see Zizek, "The Prospects of Radical Politics Today," cit. See also Alain Badiou's contention that "individuality," with its attendant selfishness and competition is seen as one and the same thing with "animality," in A. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London, Verso, 2015) p. 234.

[58] Negri, "The Italian difference," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 2009, Vol 5, (1), at <http://people.duke.edu/~dainotto/Texts/negri.pdf>, pp. 12-13.

[59] Slavoj Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, cit.

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