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Otherwise than Anthropocentrism: Levinas Face-to-Face with the Animal

A Summary of the Doctoral Thesis

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Statement of the Problem. Could Levinas's ethics serve the interests of animal ethics? If so, how? This thesis makes a claim that Levinas's ethics could serve contemporary normative animal ethics discourse.

Method. The thesis claim would be proven if these four essential demands would be addressed:

1. To present the charges of anthropocentrism against Levinas's ethics by recent Levinasian scholars, to clarify their stand and that of Levinas;
2. To draw from the core of Levinas's philosophy some guiding principles that would serve as standard in determining if the interpretation and application of his significant ethical concepts to the current problems in animal ethics exhibits fidelity to the framework and current of Levinasian ethics;
3. To articulate and apply the significant ethical concepts in Levinas's thought that would address and enlighten the current problems in animal ethics; and,

4. To determine the unique contribution of Levinas's thought to the contemporary animal ethics discourse.

Hurdling the Charge of Anthropocentrism. Levinasian scholars charged Levinas of being 'anthropocentric' without clarifying what they mean about the term. Oscar Horta says: "Anthropocentrism is the disadvantageous treatment or consideration of those who are not members (or who are not considered members) of the human species." He makes a distinction between between 'anthropocentric' and 'anthropocentrist.' An anthropocentric is one who instinctively favors humans over nonhuman (nh) animals based upon a naïve attitude of being more empathetic with conspecifics; an anthropocentrist carries a moral argument with critical reasons for favoring humans over nh animals.

Animal ethicists who are Levinasian scholars, namely: Peter Atterton, Bob Plant, and Mark Calarco, charged Levinas with being anthropocentric for his statements in an interview with his students in 1986:

- One cannot entirely refuse a dog the face. It is in terms of the face [that one understands] the dog [. . .] It is not in the dog that the phenomenon of the face is in its purity.
- The human face is an altogether different thing, and we rediscover [only] afterward the face in the animal. I do not know whether one finds it in the snake! [laughter][. . .] Not

in the flea, for example. The flea! It's an insect, which jumps, eh? [laughter]

- We do not want to make an animal suffer needlessly, etcetera. But the prototype of this is human ethics.

Atterton states that Levinas is not clear: what distinguishes between a (human) face and a dog's 'vitality;' about the reasons for making an animal suffer necessarily; about his understanding of Darwin's 'survival of the fittest' because he misconstrues it to apply only to nh animals. Darwin is an advocate not of the difference between the human and animals but the obscurity of the difference.

Plant states that Levinas is not clear about what accounts for the transference from human misery to animal suffering because the distinction between faces of species goes against Levinasian face ethics that should skip that distinction. He favors Wittgenstein more in the intuitive account of that transfer on the instinctive notion of vulnerability and mortality.

Calarco advances Derrida's contention against Levinas that his notion of sacrificial benevolence, that of feeding the other's hunger by one's fasting,' operates on the sacrifice of animal meat. He appreciates that animals do have faces in Levinas but cringes when he says that their faces are only secondary to human faces.

My response to these scholars is that Levinas cannot be said to be a moral anthropocentrist in the way Horta defines the term, because, as the scholars claim it, he has no clear argument (reasons) about why human faces are different from animal faces, what could account for the immediate cognition of an animal's suffering by a human that does not pass through prejudicial distinctions, and why an animal may be made to suffer necessarily. Levinas, himself, in the interview says 'I do not know' five times, to emphasize his confusion. Levinas conceived his ethics to address the holocaust and if his ethics would be 'animal-friendly,' it would be a welcome prospect but if not, it is unfair to blame it on the philosopher. What is clear is that Levinas is not against animals because he did make a cutting statement that all living beings should be given moral consideration.

Furthermore, I contend that among the items of Levinas's confusion is to seemingly claim that only humans have faces because they can rise against the Darwinistic struggle. This doesn't bite, not only because Levinas misconstrues Darwin, but because the structure of Levinasian ethics is unilateral: it questions human acts over the animal without reciprocity. It is not a Levinasian demand for animals, that for them to have a face, they have to be benevolent toward others. It only demands that they be capable of suffering and death.

The Standard Principles for Fidelity to Levinasian Thought.

There rests a scholastic ethic on the part of a Levinasian researcher such as myself not to 'abuse' Levinas, that is, to use his thought in ways that are contradictory to the major aims of his ethical project; otherwise, this would not be a Levinasian research. This calls for a standard.

I would like to generate this standard from Brian Shroeder who takes up Levinas's notion of the 'trace.' The trace as the event of the face's passing will serve as the fundamental standard by which to judge if the application of Levinas's concepts to the problems of animal ethics would still be within the interest of Levinas or not. In the following, I present two characteristics of the trace in order to draw up a proper method of interpretation for the employment of Levinas's ethical concepts on the problems of animal ethics.

The *first* characteristic of trace is that truth in ethics is based upon embodiment. Sense precedes the world of cultural signification. Levinas's idea of trace has deconstructive aims. I translate the passing visitation of the face toward the beyond as the open-ended interrogations caused by the direct encounter of the nh animal's embodiment in the formation of knowledge in the sciences. From this, we establish that the guiding question that would check on the fidelity of the interpretation and application of Levinas's ethical concepts on the nh animal would be: *how do actions and behaviors of*

animals that have been observed directly from living relations with them uproot pre-existing knowledge and notions of the animal in society?

The *second* feature of the event of trace in the face is this movement away from the self toward the other. Taking the principles of the movement without return to the ego and the selfsame as guidelines for an interpretive check if the application of Levinas's ethical concepts still serve Levinasian aims, the discussions of Levinas's ethical concepts will be guided by this question: *how do direct experiences with animals disrupt personal and societal moral universes and compel humans to pivot from anthropocentric interests to address the needs of the non-human animal other?*

Levinas's Central Ethical Concepts and their Application in Animal Ethics Problems. This thesis intends to employ four Levinasian ethical concepts: *il y a*, face, eros, and filiation. The discussions will: be ushered in by a true-life narrative of a specific animal; pose an ethical question emanating from the narrative; and, discuss how Levinas would approach the problem differently using his ethical concept.

Il y a. This chapter tells the story of how the ingenious inventor, William Lishman, trained Canadian geese how to fly and migrate, to address the crisis of the diminishment of these birds because of the bulldozing of their habitats. The question arises

from the fact that he does eat (his own) geese and runs a mink business with his wife: what explains this cognitive dissonance on the issue of meat, being that people normally feel for the animal's suffering and yet, cannot abstain from meat?

Contemporary animal ethics ferreted out the ethics of meat within the following points of conflict:

One, meat-eating has been there from the aboriginal times as indicator that the predator-prey relationship is the natural government of the life and the death principle of nature but animal ethicists argue that the modern production of meat is simply a system of violence against animals that support an indulgent culture for meat and that the proposal for 'humane' slaughterhouses still violate the principle that animals have a right to their own life.

Two, the vegan-imperative is a 'utopic ideology' of puritans who claim not to kill animals for meat and yet are silent about thousands of small animals killed in plant agriculture. But I argue that there is a difference between a guilt-stricken puritanism that is not livable and the conscious, planned, and systemic operation of meat plants.

Three, there are animal proteins necessary for a balanced and nourished diet but animal ethicists argue that the medical associations of developed countries claim that a properly-

managed vegan diet supplies all the necessary nutrients the human body needs at any age and condition.

Four, that the massive plant agriculture to sustain the vegan diet may not be earthly-sustainable because of the water-expense, the depletion of soil nutrients from mono-cropping, and the slashing of forests to give way to plantation areas. But animal ethicists insist that carbon emissions from meat-production still pose as the greatest contributor to the climate change threat and that ubiquitous plant agriculture such as permaculture could be managed in sustainable ways.

What remains to be answered is how Levinas would view the ethics of meat from his elucidation of the *il y a*. The *il y a* is Levinas's phenomenology of death. For Levinas, hellish death is the disappearance of an outside/alter realm wherein one is trapped within impersonality and anonymity.

The *first* feature is the impersonality of the *il y a*. Levinas imagines: what would be the state in which ". . . all things, beings and persons, returning to nothingness" be like? It is not really a void but an objective field of forces like a weather condition: there are forces around but they do not relate to anyone or anything. They are just there without being the matter of anything. He says, "It is impersonal like "it is raining" or "it is hot."

The *second* feature is the drag of waiting. The image that Levinas uses is the anguish of a child forcefully sent to bed by his parents. She sleeps alone at night, discriminated from the adult world, and experiences the horror of anonymity.

The connection of the *il y a* to the killing of nh animals for food and product resource is that culinary arts is part of the terror management of mortality salience. The desire to eat meat is the denial: 'only animals die and not me!' To mask the fear, humans indulge in the aesthetics of culinary arts to hide the horror of the stench of the death of the other animal and the *a priori* relation to him. The surrealistic aestheticism of gourmet is what sustains the cognitive dissonance of Lishman.

Face. This chapter narrated the saga of the orca, Keiko, who was captured in Icelandic waters as a baby, sold and forced to perform in a marine park in Mexico for years, and eventually performed the title role of the film *Free Willy* which propelled him to world fame. His fans, mostly children, started on the seed fund aimed at the dream of bringing him back to Iceland and freeing him, as it were, to make his fictive story come true. The fund rose to millions of dollars and the operation of freeing him had been closely covered by global media. The criticism of the politician Steiner Bastesen leads the discussion: why was Keiko's funds and meat not given to the hungry in Africa? In short, what is the moral status of the nh animal?

The classic method used in normative animal ethics is to search for substance qualities in the animal that would serve as basis to invest the animal with protection and preservation value. The moral value of the animal rests on discourses of equality, rights, and personhood.

Peter Singer used the argument of Jeremy Bentham: "The question is not, can they reason? nor can they talk? but can they suffer?" This fed Singer the idea for his argument of equal moral consideration for the nh animal. The capacity for suffering in nh animals indicates an interest for their own welfare, and this, should receive equal moral consideration along human interests. Not to do so would be to discriminate against the animal which Singer calls 'speciesist.'

Tom Regan advances the argument of animal rights. What makes nh animal rights possible is the argument that they are beings who are subjects-of-a-life. Mere being subjects-of-a-life invests a living being an inherent value (regardless of levels of sentience), and thus, rights, regardless of levels of experiences. To make this clearer, Regan uses the image of cup to explain that in discussions of moral value, people value what goes on in the cup but not the cup itself.

Mark Rowlands takes up the argument of personhood of the animal. What is most significant for him is meaning of personhood on the level of the metaphysical. Rowlands

proceeds to extract the common denominators between the definitions of Daniel Dennett, Thomas White, and Tom Beauchamp and comes up with these features: the capacity to be conscious; the capacity for cognition condition such as learning, reasoning, and problem-solving; the capacity for self-conscious or self-awareness, and; the capacity for other-awareness.

Levinas would approach the question of the moral status of the non-human animal by moving away from a dwelling on what is *in* the animal and to focus on the emotional effect that the animal has in the human.

In Levinas, one has moral status when one has a face. But what does 'face' mean for Levinas? Levinas has said that "The face is present in its refusal to be contained." The mark of face is not so much the existence of agential qualities. The indicator of face is the power of the other to invoke the ethical command: "Thou shalt not kill!"

The face has an infinity which "has meaning all by itself," an otherness that resists colonization. Levinas defines otherness in the sense not only of difference but alterity. Alterity is a kind of a difference in which no common rational category could be used as comparison. The other resists any comparison to the I-ego.

The presence of the face of the animal is demonstrated how the animal's suffering is able to elicit behaviors in the human that breach their ego and the egoistic cultural ideologies of what an animal is.

The *first* idealistic totality breached by Keiko is the overcoming of media image, his own showbiz iconization. Keiko moves the public to become benevolent toward him to the extent that the operation to free him in Iceland would end his showbiz career.

The *second* system of totality that Keiko has breached is that of the economic sacrifice for his cause. The funds of Keiko rose to 20 million dollars, which I am assuming, is the sacrifice of many people and groups who would have used these funds for their private purposes and human-oriented organizational causes.

The *third* totality that Keiko breaches has to do with the ethical testimony of an insider witness who risks his comfort, reputation, and career as an animal behaviorist to expose the anomalies behind the Keiko Release Project which exposed the lie that Keiko rehabilitated in the wild successfully. This witness is Mark Simmons, who wrote the book *Killing Keiko: The True Story of Free Willy's Return to the Wild* published in 2014.

Confronting Bastesen's satirical question on why Keiko's meat and the enormous funds raised for him were not spent on the

starving people of Africa, the answer to this is that Keiko has been seen as face and other in the Levinasian sense.

Eros. This chapter features the story of Andre the seal, how he was captured by Harry Goodridge to be tamed and to serve as his diving companion, how Harry struggled to provide him the safe and comfortable life in which he was free to oscillate between wild and urban spaces. The ethical interrogation here is: could Harry Goodridge's taming of Andre be considered an ethical act?

Two popular stances in normative animal ethics dominate the scene. This is the Abolitionist stand, at the helm of which is Gary Francione and the Citizenship theory, represented by Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka. They clashed on the following points:

On the issue of the animal's right to their own life, welfare, and autonomy, the Abolitionist perspective, banking on the principle of equal regard for rights between humans and non-human animals, contends that animals have the right *not* to be property. The proposed solution to the present domestication of animals is to continue to care for them but eventually to unbreed them unto extinction. The Citizenship theory contends that the project of unbreed-unto-extinction is not practically tenable but Abolitionism insists that it is possible if there should be a paradigm shift, even if the reversal takes thousands of years to implement.

On the issue of dependence of domesticated animals, from the perspective of the Citizenship theory, domestic animals cannot be said to be treated unjustly simply on the premise of their dependence upon humans. Interdependence is inherent in human relationships as it is in the nh animal world. The idea that dependency is pathological is gendered in psychological theory, espoused by the masculine worldview wherein independence is the standard. The Citizenship theory insists that even if domestication ends in time, there still exists, the ethical obligation to intervene for the welfare of the vulnerable species in the wild, under the principle of reparative justice for climate change. In short, this intervention in wildlife would still propagate domestication and thus, domestication is inevitable. It is not dependence of animals that is at issue but the humane treatment of animals in all kinds of human-nh animal relationships.

I intend to use Levinas's concept of eros in this task of affirming the reality of the human-nh animal significant relationship that precedes animal ethics's interrogation of animal domestication

What is important to take note also is that by *eros*, I do not wish to refer to the sexual act or coitus, that the erotic relationship is qualified as "erotic" only if coitus is present. But I would like to stress that it is not the presence of coitus that characterizes a significant relationship. There could be sex without commitment, or even without basic feelings of

attraction, just the 'itch, 'as it were. In Levinas's phenomenology of *eros*, what is highlighted is the infinity of desire which aims not at the possession of the beloved but the beyond, the future of the relationship.

The sexual that is implied in the *eros* also has to be understood in the larger sense. In psychology, the sexual includes the sensual which is touch and caress. Levinas has a phenomenology of touch and caress which will be discussed later. From this, it could be said that even parents who caress their children are said to have a sexual relationship with them, though not coital. It is the touch that identifies the significance of the relationship. Only family and accepted friends (significant beloveds) could be touched: all others are simply acquaintances and strangers. Levinas's notion of *eros* has three characteristics:

The *first* aspect is the alterity of *eros*. This refers to the fact that humans could also fall in love with the animal obsessively such as the case of Timothy Treadwell, an American bear enthusiast who, in his diaries confessed that the bears are 'worth dying for.' Timothy worked for the cause of the Alaskan bears and died from having been eaten up by the animals he loved.

The *second* feature of Levinas's notion of *eros* is that of caress; it aims at the ungraspable, the not-yet. The way to tame many animals is by caress and many animals love to be caressed. It is

the language of love and trust. The mark of trust that the animal's heart had been won over is when he allows 'petting' or being caressed. Levinas had been most critical about the description of caress: it is not just any touch. The caress is a touch that does not grasp; it lets the other be in her otherness.

The *third* feature of Levinasian eros is its essential orientation toward an open-ended future. This refers to the willingness to tend faithfully to the essential unpredictability and impermanency of the relationship.

Addressing the question: is it ethical for Harry to have tamed and kept Andre? The main merit of the entire discussion on Levinas's eros is that it changes the structure of the original interrogation. The question is not anymore if it is ethical at all to tame a wild animal but what is ethical within the conduct of the taming and of the significant relationship that ensues. It cannot be said that Levinas would support the abduction of Andre. But that what he acknowledges is that the fatal attraction to animals is inevitable because it comes from alterity. Taming is the ethical alternative to abduction so that the animal may choose to consent to the relationship within the context of an invitation. Levinas says is that it is possible to form an ethical significant relationship with a nh animal.

Filiation. This chapter presents the crisis of the invasion of polar bears in the community of Belushya Guba in Novaja Zemlya.

They are casualties of climate change. Their ice platforms which they use to hunt have melted and thus, are starving. They are migrants from the polar caps in search for food and are rummaging the garbage bins of human villages. The pressing question here is: what could be done to help the polar bears?

Normative animal ethicists like Claire Palmer conceives of three strategies, but with ethical perspectives that clash. The rectificatory justice perspective demands that we have positive duties to help animals suffering from anthropogenic climate change. The beneficence perspective demands that we have positive duties to animals suffering from non-anthropogenic causes, if we have the adequate expertise and means.

One, it is possible to aid the polar bears by putting them in sanctuaries as a rectificatory approach. But this would clash from the beneficence perspective because we may lack the means to address pathogenic vulnerabilities that may arise from domestication.

Two, it is possible to fund some very expensive wind turbines to make more ice for the polar bears within their habitat, as a rectificatory approach. But this may clash with the beneficence approach in that we may not be able to predict the long-term effect these turbines may cause in the marine ecosystems.

Three, as a rectificatory approach, it may be possible to administer assisted migration: transfer these polar bears to

another arctic ecosystem where there is more ice. But this may clash with the beneficence perspective in that polar bears are apex predators and we may not be able to ensure the resulting predator-prey balance in the new habitat.

The above discussions give rise to three ambiguities in which Levinas's concept of filiation may shed some light.

One, there is an ambiguity if it is ethical to use some animals as bridge to breed their future species line because it seems like 'exploitation.' Levinas's idea of filiation enlightens that the ethic of caring springs from the parenting instinct: animals seem like children to us. And so Levinas affirms that to care for these bears is not to be concerned with their species which is abstract but caring personally, in view of their future young.

Two, there is an ambiguity if 'wildness' from the utilitarian perspective is really a value in the sense that animals that are r-strategists multiply enormously, live wild, and yet, since they are not personally cared for, suffer unbearably. This is in comparison with animals that are k-strategists, reproduce in smaller numbers but care for their young. The idea in question is that it may be wiser to engineer animals genetically to become r-strategists. The success rate for survival is higher and it also diminishes wild animal suffering. Levinas's concept of filiation does not entertain the calculus of suffering in the abstract sense. What he is keen on is the sacrifice of personal

comfort to relieve other wild animals of suffering. What is significant in Levinas is taking personal 'trouble' to care for neighboring wild animals such as putting out winter coves for them or participating in wild animal rescue training and services in communities.

Three, there is an ambiguity as to how much knowledge and expertise is needed to justify ethically the intervention. For Levinas, the child (or the animal ward) is seen in Levinas as incarnate hope for the future. She is the embodiment of the best qualities of the parents but also, as an alterity, the child creates her own future radically. This would mean that, for Levinas, the ethical question is not how much knowledge is needed to be able to intervene, but as part of the past generation, not to impose that the universe should remain the same. In short, part of the ethics of filiation is to have faith in the future for all species rescued under climate change.

Levinas's Contribution to Animal Ethics. Conclusions are drawn by way of defining how Levinas contributed to contemporary normative animal ethics discourse by use of his central ethical concepts and by checking on how they adhere to the standard of basing the ethical insights from embodiment and the move away from ego.

From the concept of *il y a*, Levinas contributes to the ethics of meat by articulating a metaphysics of death, by highlighting

that the fear of death is not annihilation but impersonality and alienation from the other. This implies that *existere* always includes the relationship with the other animal. This is demonstrated by the culinary arts that turns out to be a management terror of one's own death that denies an essential relation to the other animal. The ethics of alimentation in Levinas is to check on indulgent eating which demands the radical move that we fast (on meat) to free the animal.

From the concept of face, Levinas contributes to the discourse of the moral status of nh animals by turning away from an analyses of what agential qualities are present in the animal but a focus on how humans are affected by the animal, as a method of proving the nh animal as a moral subject. Face refers to embodiment, subject to mortality and suffering, which need not always be technically referring to the features of the human face, and in this, any physiology of any animal may be included. The moral pressure of the face of the animal upon the human is proven and measured by the many acts of self-sacrifice that are performed to ensure his welfare.

From the concept of eros, Levinas contributes by highlighting that the ethics of domestication is underscored by the ethics of taming. What we learn here is that there is a fatal attraction to the animal that is erotic (which need not be coital) and that the relationship with a particular animal should be included in the taxonomy of human loves and should not rest as a pet-ty affair.

Levinas's phenomenology of caress and touch serves as the ethical guide on the ethical conduct of the relationship with the animal. Caressing means relating with the animal from a respectful distance, not to egoistically possess the beloved, being careful in allowing the freedom of the non-human animal by way of body language to speak his own terms of relationship.

From the concept of filiation, Levinas contributes by articulating that care appeals to the parental instinct and that there is such a thing as a 'feeling that the animal is my child,' already present in pet-keeping. But when applied in the context of wild animal parental care under climate change justice, Levinas's value of alterity would point out that the attitude of ethics is not 'control over the future of things' but a welcoming faith in alterity, in the attitude that when choices are done with the utmost care and concern for the welfare of the other, the human-non-human animal patterns of relationship will change and along with it, ethical configurations.