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Performing the Open

Actors, Animals, Philosophers

Martin Puchner

Is it frivolous to care about animals at a time when human rights are under attack? Are demands for animal rights a luxury we cannot afford? Such questions, born from the justified desire to keep existing human rights from eroding further, sound reasonable enough. But they disregard the often elusive ways in which the treatment of humans and the treatment of animals are intimately connected. My attempts to highlight some of those connections will focus on three scenes of performance, two lecture performances and one theatre piece: a writer performs a provocative lecture on animal rights; a trained ape addresses the members of an academy; and a human actor is placed in a modified laboratory designed to test the intelligence of apes. The first performance was enacted by J.M. Coetzee at Princeton University as part of the 1997/98 annual Tanner Lectures. The second emerges from a literary text by Franz Kafka, "A Report to an Academy" (1917). The third takes place on a proscenium stage as envisioned by Samuel Beckett in his short mime *Act Without Words I* (1956). Their common project: showing how our understanding of the human depends on our conceptions of animals. At the same time, they recognize that this understanding cannot be reached simply by giving voice and agency to animals within the frame of human art. Instead, they aim at the very dividing line between humans and animals through a process of negative mimesis: they invert the perspective of representation; they mark the gap between humans and animals; they demonstrate the extent to which the very distinction between humans and animals is the product of projection and representation. Negative mimesis thus names a critique of anthropocentrism as it occurs in the sphere of theatre and performance, initiating a displacement or decentering of the human. Such decenterings are best explained through the work of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, whose critique of the "anthropological machine" provides the frame for the present essay. Indeed, the three performance scenes refer to and engage the philosophical tradition of reflecting on animals. Philosophy and performance thus emerge as the two alternative but related modes of sedimenting yet also of undoing anthropocentrism.

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Anti-Humanism

Even though it may sometimes seem that human and animal rights constitute a kind of zero-sum game in which we have to pick our fights, there exists in fact a long tradition of admitting some relation between the two. Within the philosophical tradition, such a relation is admitted even by philosophers who do not consider animals as genuine bearers of rights or subjects of ethical concerns. John Locke, for example, admonished the widespread cruelty toward animals he observed in children, “for the custom of tormenting and killing of beasts will, by degrees, harden their minds even towards men” ([1693] 1801:112). Immanuel Kant, likewise, cautioned that cruelty toward animals would encourage cruelty toward humans ([1780] 1963:239). Such arguments, which are common in the history of philosophy, continue to posit the well-being of humans as the ultimate rationale for avoiding the maltreatment of animals. Even organizations that call for the “humane” treatment of animals participate in this hierarchy of means and ends through which rights and obligations are conceptualized and articulated in terms of the human. This hierarchy is a symptom of an ingrained and widespread anthropocentrism that has kept philosophy—and not only philosophy—from arriving at a differentiated and just understanding of animals. Indeed, from the perspective of animal rights, the history of philosophy calls for a struggle against a philosophical anthropocentrism that takes humans to be the natural center of all systems of morals.

The most important philosophical impulse for reflecting on and displacing anthropomorphism has come, not unsurprisingly, from the more recent philosophical tradition of anti-humanism, including the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as well as their more recent interpreters such as Cary Wolfe. In using the machine as a figure for different forms of life, in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Deleuze and Guattari recycle the figure of the machine, which has been used, throughout the history of philosophy and most famously by Descartes, for denigrating animals by calling them mere machines. Equally important, among the anti-humanists, is Jacques Derrida, who attacked the human/animal dividing line as a metaphysical construction deeply rooted in our thoughts and habits. One minimal demand he made was to stop talking about “the animal” in opposition to “the human” (Derrida 2002). According to Derrida, the collective singular “animal” registers and continues an exclusionary logic that defines “the human” in opposition to “the animal” and thus impedes any attempt to displace anthropomorphism. Besides insisting on the plural “animals,” which may then also include human animals, Derrida also posited the encounter between the philosopher and one animal, between himself and his cat, as a scene from which a philosophy of the animal may emerge.

When it comes to analyzing the relation between human and animal rights, however, the most significant anti-humanist philosopher is Agamben, who is deeply influenced by Derrida. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), Agamben draws on a legal and political history of the processes by which certain beings were excluded from the legal realm, what Agamben, borrowing from Roman law, calls the *homo sacer*. The Roman law calls such a being “sacred,” *sacer*, because it could be sacrificed without legal consequences. A *homo sacer* is a singular being that has been reduced to what Agamben calls the “bare life,” a biological existence that allows for no other attribute. His *Homo Sacer* thus recounts a history of exclusion—the various ways in which the law has managed to exclude specific humans from its protections.

It is via the figure of the *homo sacer* that Agamben considers the dividing line between humans and animals. One of the connections between the *homo sacer* and the animal Agamben discusses is the custom, in Germanic and Anglo-Saxon law, of defining the outcast bandit as a “wolf-man” and thus of placing this being in a “zone of indistinction between the human and the animal” (1998:105, 106). Bare life, it turns out, is precisely what can no longer be categorized as either human or animal. Thinking about this consequence more fully is the topic of a second study, *The Open: Man and Animal* (2004). This book relates the

distinction between man and animal not only to the figure of the wolf-man, but addresses the mechanism by which we distinguish between human and animal. It is here that it becomes clear how much the notion of the human, and thus of human rights, is bound up with the distinction drawn between the human and the animal. This distinction is crucial because when faced with the homo sacer one might be tempted to argue that the best way of fortifying human rights, of assuring that we forestall the creation of a homo sacer, would be to insist in all instances on the category of the human and thus to protect humans from slipping into this “zone of indistinction between the human and the animal.” Isn’t the blurring of the distinction, rather than the distinction itself, the problem here, as it is in the case of the wolf-man?

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It is this kind of argument that *The Open* seeks to oppose by analyzing how the distinction between the human and the animal is made in the first place. Agamben uses the term “anthropological machine” (33) to describe the repeated, almost automatic act of drawing the distinction between the human and the animal, an act through which the two categories are produced. Some animals are separated out from all the others and given a special name, “human,” which is then placed in opposition to a second category, defined by the exclusion from the human realm: “animal.” The fabrication of this distinction is particularly evident when it is projected into history, that is, when it serves to hypothesize an original human being that is not, or is no longer, simply an animal. But the same system is at work, according to Agamben, whenever the human is defined through an exclusion of the animal (man is the animal that is not an animal) and the animal as the exclusion of the human (the animal is that which is not human). Here is Agamben’s summary of this process:

Insofar as the production of man through the opposition man/animal, human/inhuman, is at stake here, the machine necessarily functions by means of an exclusion (which is always already a capturing) and an inclusion (which is also always already an exclusion). Indeed, precisely because the human is already presupposed every time, the machine actually produces a kind of state of exception, a zone of indeterminacy in which the outside nothing but the exclusion of an inside and the inside is in turn only the inclusion of an outside. (37)

This kind of argument about exclusion and inclusion is derived from Agamben’s definition of the state of exception. In his book *State of Exception* (2005), Agamben describes the creation of law-free zones, whose inhabitants are stripped of all rights.¹ Using a terminology borrowed from the reactionary German theoretician Carl Schmitt, Agamben argues that these zones are not produced when the laws guaranteeing human rights simply cease to exist or break down, leading to an anarchic world in which the stronger kills the weaker. Instead, they are instituted by modern democracies when these democracies suspend (rather than simply abolish) constitutional laws. While sometimes such suspensions are undertaken with the ultimate aim of abolishing democracy and the rule of law, as in the case of the National Socialists in Germany—who were directly aided by Schmitt in their suspension of the Weimar Constitution—more often such suspensions of the law have been undertaken in the name of the law, for example when Abraham Lincoln suspended habeas corpus during the U.S. Civil War.

Like the states of exception envisioned by various democracies, the wolf-man and the homo sacer are created through a logic of exception. The law has created a no-law zone, but

1. Other writers to have connected these aspects of the War on Terror to Carl Schmitt are Judith Butler (2004:61ff) and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004:4–10).

this zone is not simply beyond the law, a domain in which the law has, for one reason or another, no more power. Instead, it is a zone produced by the law, since it is defined by a law that has engaged in an act of self-suspension. The zone is thus an inclusion as much as it is an exclusion; it is an exclusion internal to the law. This correspondence between the state of exception and the fabrication of the human has an important consequence, and that is the fact that the creation of this zone of exception—or indecision—must be undertaken again and again. It is a repeated act or, in Agamben’s Schmittian terminology, a repeated decision. In *The Open*, Agamben therefore writes:

Like every space of exception, this zone is, in truth, perfectly empty, and the truly human being who should occur there is only the place of a ceaselessly updated decision in which the caesurae and their rearticulation are always dislocated and displaced anew. What would thus be obtained, however, is neither an animal life nor a human life, but only a life that is separated and excluded from itself—only a *bare life*. (2004:38)

Here, the three lines of argument—bare life (from *Homo Sacer*), the state of exception (from *State of Exception*), and the animal (from *The Open*)—are brought together. The construction of the human as human depends on the workings of the anthropological machine, which is premised on a double exclusion that is similar to that produced by the state of exception. It becomes clear that all three studies participate in a general theory of exception—“Like every space of exception” in the quote above—that explains the creation of lawful no-law zones and humans that are no longer human. The ultimate point of this general theory of exception is the argument that these phenomena are not aberrations or accidents, but an integral part of the logic of exception.

Agamben’s abstract theory of exception finds its realization not only in the creation of such figures as the wolf-man or the homo sacer, but also in specific geographic locales, for example at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, which Agamben mentions in passing in *State of Exception*. Guantánamo Bay constitutes a true zone of exception in that it is an area entirely controlled by the United States, but officially belonging to Cuba. This way the U.S.

Government has been able to argue that no U.S. laws apply there.² And through the creation of a new category, “unlawful combatant,” international law is suspended in the zone as well. On 2 February 2002, the Office of the President announced: “the United States is treating and will continue to treat all of the individuals detained at Guantánamo humanely and, to the extent appropriate and consistent with military necessity, in a manner consistent with the principles of

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the Third Geneva Convention of 1949” (Office of the White House Press Secretary 2002). When detainees are treated “humanely” and “in a manner consistent with” the Geneva Convention, such treatment is a privilege that may happen to coincide with the Geneva Convention, but it is not a right. While Congress passed a bill in the fall of 2006—signed into law as the *Military Convictions Act of 2006* by the President on 17 October—that affirms forms of jurisdiction over the detainees held at Guantánamo Bay, President Bush has admitted to the existence of secret CIA detention facilities, which remain removed from juridical oversight. Even more so than Guantánamo Bay, with its well-defined and known geographical location, these secret, dispersed facilities are dislocated zones of exception, where former bearers of rights are being reduced to bare life.

2. Also see my article, “Guantánamo Bay: A State of Exception” (2004).

Perhaps surprisingly, Agamben's leap from the legal notion of exception to the anthropological machine has been confirmed in these geographical zones of exception as well. The status of bare life, the suspension of human rights and humane treatment has meant precisely that these detainees have been treated in a manner that might be described as "bestially." As the world learned in the spring of 2004, among the interrogation techniques used at Abu Ghraib, whether or not with the approval of superiors, included "riding" prisoners "like animals" and making them bark "like dogs," even as they were being attacked by actual dogs (Jehl and Schmitt 2004; Fisher 2004). Less is known, still, about Guantánamo Bay, although new information is coming out piece by piece. Unsurprisingly, given Agamben's argument, the question of the animal has surfaced there as well, and precisely in the legal dispute about the geographical status of the Bay as a no-law zone. During the Supreme Court hearings of *Shafiq Rasul, et al. v. George W. Bush, President of the United States, et al. No. 03-334* (2004), one of the cases addressing the status of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay, Justice David Souter made the following observation, recognizing that U.S. law has applied, for over a century, to "all aspects of life" in the Bay: "We even protect Cuban iguana."³ While endowing iguana with (Cuban) nationality, Justice Souter recognized that there should be no life, no species, that falls outside the law. This, however, is precisely what happened. The suspension of human rights has reduced the detainees to a status that cannot (even) be compared to "Cuban iguana." They are suspended somewhere between protected animals and unprotected humans.

The convergence of Agamben's two projects—the state of exception and the animal—can serve as a point of departure for thinking about animals precisely at a moment when human rights are under attack. Agamben's thought has two advantages: it aims at the conjunction of humans and animals; and it reveals the far-reaching consequences of the "anthropological machine." Agamben also emphasizes that this machine is closely connected to the history of philosophy itself. It is only via a critique of anthropocentric philosophy, along with all its legal and political consequences, that a genuine philosophy of animals is possible.

Anti-Philosophy

Attacking philosophy has become a common gesture among animal rights activists, who routinely, and justifiably, bemoan the track record of philosophy when it comes to animals. Prominent among them is an Australian writer named Elizabeth Costello, who argues that because philosophy has been so central to the denigration of animals—Agamben's anthropological machine—it is only by abandoning philosophy that we can ever hope to establish better relations with animals.

Costello's lecture, "The Poets and the Animals," seeks to come up with a better alternative, an attempt to avoid the rationalist pitfalls of the philosophers. This alternative is poetry, and literature more generally. True, Costello has to admit that many forms of literature about animals, especially the animal fable, use animals for the purpose of talking about human features and thus must be found guilty of literary anthropomorphism. But despite these traditions, Costello does insist on the superiority of literature. Her advocacy of literature over philosophy can be captured by two terms: embodiment and sympathetic imagination.

Embodiment is the subject matter of the first of Costello's lectures, whose main topic is not animals, but realist literature:

Realism has never been comfortable with ideas. It could not be otherwise: realism is premised on the idea that ideas have no autonomous existence, can exist only in things. So when it needs to debate ideas, as here, realism is driven to invent situations—walks

3. Transcript of the oral arguments, 20 April 2004, provided by DC IMC Research; accessed via <http://dc.indymedia.org/newswire/display/94932/index.php>. Checked against an audio recording and transcript available at http://www.supreme.lp.findlaw.com/supreme_court/docket/2003/april.html.

in the countryside, conversations—in which characters give voice to contending ideas and thereby in a certain sense embody them. (Coetzee 2003:9)

This passage can be read as an indictment of philosophy, at least of idealist philosophy: ideas don't, as philosophers presume, exist as bodiless entities, as platonic forms; they become real only insofar as they are embodied in persons and thus only when they appear in literature.

Costello is in a particularly good position to make such an argument on behalf of realism and against philosophy since she is not only not a philosopher, but also not human. More precisely, she is a fictional character, if that is the word, in the eponymous novel, if it is a novel, by the 2003 Nobel Laureate J.M. Coetzee. Elizabeth Costello is an embodied figure Coetzee constructs for the purpose of voicing a radical critique of philosophy with respect to animals. Although Coetzee's creation of Costello may seem to be the logical consequence of her theory of embodied and scenically grounded ideas, Coetzee develops several strategies for questioning or otherwise undoing this (literary) embodiment. One such strategy emerges from the passage about realist embodiment quoted above. Costello's praise of poetry as the vehicle of embodiment occurred after an omnipresent narrator has described a conversation in a gym between Costello's son and a professor of Canadian literature, Wheatley, just such a situation of embodied and scenically grounded dialogue that this passage calls for. However, the passage itself is precisely not spoken or thought by either of the two characters. This becomes clear in the sentences immediately following the quotation above:

The notion of embodying turns out to be pivotal. In such debates ideas do not and indeed cannot float free: they are tied to the speakers by whom they are enounced, and generated from the matrix of individual interests out of which their speakers act in the world—for instance, the son's concern that his mother not be treated as the Mickey Mouse post-colonial writer, or Wheatley's concern not to seem an old-fashioned absolutist. (9)

This speaker or thinker is neither the son nor Professor Wheatley; the passage is not grounded in a particular scene and not tied to a particular character or body. It does precisely what it claims to be impossible, namely to "float free." It is in this operation that we can see Coetzee's technique: he departs, at crucial moments, from realism and from embodiment in order to suggest, if only by contrast to embodied scenes, a realm of ideas that is somehow suspended between, and therefore cannot be grounded in, specific speakers and scenes. Coetzee himself thus does not heed the lessons of realism. If the advantage of poetry over philosophy is embodiment, then Coetzee makes sure to undercut this advantage at crucial moments in his text.

This undercutting of embodied realism is indicative of the ambivalent attitude toward literature that informs the entire novel of ideas. Despite the critique of philosophy and the embrace of poetry advocated by its protagonist, the text *Elizabeth Costello* does not simply embrace fictional literature against philosophy. Rather it is positioned somewhere between philosophy and poetry, thus occupying a complicated position, as Marjorie Garber (1999:79) has argued, with respect to the ancient battle between poetry and philosophy evoked in Plato's *Republic*. Coetzee had been invited to give the Tanner lectures at Princeton University, traditionally a venue for academic and philosophical lectures. To the surprise of many participants, he chose to present his lectures through the persona of Elizabeth Costello. We thus have a writer who is being asked to give an academic lecture, but who writes instead a novel of ideas in which a fictional writer, in an academic lecture, advances an argument against philosophy and in favor of poetry. These generic crossings have important consequences for Costello's polemic, for they mean that she does not attack philosophy from the outside, but from a position that is half outside and half inside the anthropological machine. One preliminary conclusion to be drawn from this position is that philosophy should not be abandoned but crossed—to use a loaded term derived from the breeding of animals—with poetry. This

means that imagined, literary embodiment is not the solution to philosophy's often abstract, disembodied speculations. Rather, embodiment is both posited and undone at one and the same time.

A similar undoing can be observed with respect to Costello's second category: the use of a sympathetic imagination. One literary text in which Costello claims to recognize literature's powers of sympathetic imagination is Franz Kafka's "Report to an Academy" (1917). Costello praises Kafka's text as an empathetic depiction of an animal, an ape named Red Peter who has learned to speak and who reports his captivity to the learned members of the academy. Kafka had been able to enter the subjectivity of the animal in addition to depicting the violence done to the animal by forcing it to imitate humans. The poet not only embodies the animal, but accesses its subjectivity.

Costello contrasts Kafka's sympathetic rendering with a critique of one of its possible sources, the intelligence experiments on apes conducted by the German primatologist Wolfgang Köhler in Tenerife. Köhler had created experimental setups in which apes were given various tools with which they could access food strategically placed just outside their reach. Lacking Kafka's poetic imagination, Köhler's experiments are part of the anthropological machine, the machine that continually reinscribes the dividing line between the human and the animal. Costello says: "This is as far as Köhler, for all his sympathy and insight, is able to go; this is where a poet might have commenced, with a feeling for the ape's experience" (Coetzee 2003:74). Where Köhler's sympathy ends, poetry must continue to render, for us, the ape as ape. Costello proceeds to give us just such a perspective of the ape in Köhler's experiment through an act of sympathetic imagination:

Sultan is alone in his pen. He is hungry: the food that used to arrive regularly has unaccountably ceased coming. The human who used to feed him and has now stopped feeding him stretches a wire over the pen three metres above ground level, and hangs a bunch of bananas from it. Into the pen he drags three wooden crates. Then he disappears, closing the gate behind him, though he is still somewhere in the vicinity, since one can smell him. Sultan knows: Now one is supposed to think. That is what the bananas up there are about. The bananas are there to make one think, to spur one to the limits of one's thought. But what must one think? One thinks: Why is he starving me? One thinks: What have I done? Why has he stopped liking me? One thinks: Why does he not want these crates any more? [...] The right thought to think is: How does one use the crates to reach bananas? (72–73)

Inspired by Kafka's treatment of this source, Costello wants to rescue the ape from Köhler's clutches by sympathetically imagining the variety of emotions and thoughts of the ape that are otherwise forced into the rigid and narrow scheme of the intelligence experiment.

Costello's plea for poetic sympathy, like her argument for embodiment, is in need of qualification and critique. While in the case of embodiment such a critique is provided by Coetzee, in the case of sympathetic imagination, Coetzee is less forthcoming. While representing the subjectivity of Köhler's apes might serve as a counterweight to Köhler's putatively cold-blooded experiments, it is precisely not this kind of sympathetic imagination that makes Kafka's story such a powerful tool for derailing the anthropological machine. Rather, it is a particular form of what one might call negative mimesis. Red Peter reports the long and painful process through which he adopted the manners and habits of humans. Red Peter, in other words, has been anthropomorphizing himself. To this extent, the story literalizes and exposes the mechanisms and violence of the anthropological machine, a machine that forces

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on to other species the particular modes of the human. At the same time, it becomes clear that Red Peter self-anthropomorphizes only to survive. He rejects the values, the claims to superiority, that constitute the ideology of the anthropomorphic machine. He only trains himself to perform in a human manner for strategic purposes; one might speak of a strategic humanism.

Kafka thus does not attempt, through sympathy, to represent the ape as ape, supposedly freed from all anthropological machines. As a human writing for other humans about apes, that would be impossible or naive. Instead, his story reveals the animal as a kind of gap, a gap between the ape's mode of appearance, which is necessarily anthropomorphic—using human language, modes of address, and forms of communication—and the ape's life, the unrepresented and unrepresentable life which Red Peter is trying to save by all means. Kafka does not pretend that he can simply abandon the anthropological machine. But he refurbishes it, uses it against itself, creating a kind of controlled breakdown within which the nonhuman can, negatively, appear. This is not a sympathetic rendering of the ape, but a negative mimesis in which literature remains deliberately at one remove from the animal and only represents the violent process of anthropomorphization itself.

Aping Actors

Both Kafka and Coetzee present their fictions as accounts of particular forms of academic lecture performances. Coetzee's novel revolves around the delivery of Costello's lectures and Kafka's around the delivery of the ape's report to the assembled members of the academy. It is as if the question of embodiment and sympathy, like the question of the animal more generally, was yearning to break out of the domain of literature and thus of human language and into the domain of theatre and performance. Does not the theatre seem capable of crossing the dividing line between the human and the animal by virtue of its dependence on nonverbal, physical communication, on an expressive language of gestures? And furthermore, in theatre and performance, illusions about a fictional embodiment and imaginative sympathy are confronted, one would think, with the actual reality of human and animal bodies and the direct expressions of their respective subjectivities.

To be sure, the concept of an embodied, gestural language does not avoid all the difficult questions associated with language, in particular the vexed question of whether or to what extent animals have language(s). The strict denial that animals might possess a language or different languages has been a chief ingredient of philosophical humanism, of the philosophical editions of the anthropological machine since Aristotle. But expanding the notion of language to include embodied communication opens up a domain somewhere between mimesis and gesture. Once we admit such a domain, we can speak of different types of expressive systems that do not rely on a binary logic that attributes the distinction between human and animal to a lack, in animals, of language as such. Charles Darwin's *On the Expression of Emotions in Men and Animals* (1872) might count as an attempt to think about this question across the dividing line and human and animal. Darwin's interest in this question has also been taken up by performance studies (see Schechner 2003). For the most part, however, the dividing line between humans and animals is reinscribed almost as soon as it is questioned. One can go back all the way to Aristotle, whose famous remark in *The Poetics* (1448b4) about mimesis can be taken as indicative of all subsequent thinking about humans and animals onstage: although Aristotle does not deny animals the capacity for mimesis, it is to humans that he attributes its highest and most elaborate forms.

Just as the concept of a gestural language is not necessarily free from anthropomorphism, so the theatre is not necessarily free from the workings of the anthropological machine. Red Peter's report to an academy reminds one, for example, of the training of apes for circus performances, which usually owe their success to the enforced imitation of the human—the stage version, one might say, of the anthropological machine. In the theatre and the circus, animals

are used and exploited much more directly than in animal fables. Different theatre and performance situations, in other words, are not free from anthropomorphism, and the putatively more direct presentation of animal bodies and animal agency is framed not by a sympathetic or unsympathetic writer, as is the case in literature, but by various other mediating figures, including animal trainers, human performers, and the apparatus of the theatre itself.

The use and abuse of animals onstage has been one of the most contested issues in the battle between some animal rights activists and animal trainers. While animal trainers are often, among humans, the most attuned to specific animals, their defensive attitude toward animal rights activists has made this debate particularly unhelpful. One prominent example is Vicki Hearne, whose insightful writings on animals are unfortunately littered with invectives against animal rights activists. In one essay, entitled “What’s Wrong with Animal Rights?” (1992), on the relations between humans and dogs, she develops a notion of mutual dependence between human and animal in which the human nevertheless claims a kind of natural superiority and authority. More directly related to the topic of animals in the theatre is her account of a Las Vegas comedy show that includes orangutan performers in “Can an Ape Tell a Joke?” (Hearne 1994). This essay serves as a defense of the show’s creator and orangutan trainer, Bobby Berosini, against the accusation of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) that the training involves cruelty toward animals. Are these orangutans similar to Kafka’s Red Peter? Or to Köhler’s experiments?

PETA charged—and supported the charge with video documentation—that one or several orangutans were struck with a baton before the show. In her essay, Hearne defends the “correction” of animals (just as she defends obedience training of dogs): “if properly applied at the right moment, a correction will cause the animal to stop aggressive behavior and perform happily and well” (1994:198). Hearne’s defense of correction and obedience training maintains or even confirms a form of anthropomorphism. Hearne assumes that animals perform “happily” when they perform “well,” which requires the correcting intervention of a human trainer. The show in question thematizes this very question. It depicts Berosini trying to train the orangutans, who rebel against their trainer in all kinds of ways. In the end, however, it is Berosini who controls the animals, despite the many variants of an inverted hierarchy that were part of the comedy routine. Humans and apes become actors, and though both groups cross the dividing line, it is all within the frame of a comedy routine. The rebellion of the orangutans against their master is nothing but a joke for the enjoyment of the human audience.

Hearne’s (and Berosini’s) claim that the orangutans can be seen as cocreators of the show and therefore realize their inner potential constitutes an interesting limit case of animal ethics. Hearne might claim that the violence of the training is a mere means to an end, namely the realization of the orangutans as comedians. Couldn’t one weigh the violence done to orangutans in the process of training against the happiness they derive from performing onstage? Hearne wants to believe that merely because the orangutans don’t run away during the performance they are not being abused and that they choose to remain with Berosini and with the theatre. However, even though the apes would probably run away under certain extreme conditions, their not doing so does not prove the absence of violence nor of other forms of manipulation through which the apes are induced to stay with the show. More importantly, the show itself is framed by a human theatre, invented by humans, and performed for the amusement of humans. Its comedy resides in the fact that the orangutans are not only dressed as humans but also inhabit a human environment onstage. These orangutans are, in the end, not so different from Kafka’s Red Peter, who is forced to imitate humans in order to survive. The only difference is that Kafka’s text carefully left the space of the actual life of Red Peter empty, whereas Hearne and Berosini have no interest in such a negative mimesis (which would certainly be less effective as comedy, if not as art). I am not sure how Costello would represent the subjectivity of these animal performers, but I think that such a representation would not be so different from that of Köhler’s experiment.

Just as Kafka found a way of unhinging the anthropological machine in literature by means of a negative mimesis, Samuel Beckett did the same for the theatre in his *Act Without Words I*. Much more directly and explicitly than Kafka, Beckett borrows the scenario for this piece from Köhler. *Act Without Words I* is a precise rendering of Köhler's setup: a caged creature is confronted with a desired substance—bananas in Köhler's experiments, water in Beckett's—which is placed out of reach. Various tools and implements are then provided—ropes, boxes, scissors—which the creature must use intelligently in order to reach the desired substance. What is required is precisely the kind of goal-oriented, instrumental intelligence Costello critiqued in Köhler as an unimaginative and therefore anthropomorphic routine.

While Costello sympathetically and poetically takes the perspective of the ape, Beckett does something that more closely resembles Kafka's negative mimesis and his way of showing merely the costs and the loss experienced by the humanized, anthropomorphized ape.

Rather than showing the violence and anthropomorphization inflicted upon an ape, Beckett shows the process by which actors are treated like Köhler's apes. *Act Without Words I* is about the training of human actors in the theatre.

For Beckett's test creature is not an ape but a human being—"the man." And the test does not occur somewhere in Tenerife, but right here, in front of our eyes—on a stage. By replacing apes with actors, Beckett attacks the dividing line between the human and the animal from the other side, as it were: rather than showing the violence and anthropomorphization inflicted upon an ape, he shows the process by which actors are treated like Köhler's apes. *Act Without Words I* is about the training of human actors in the theatre.

The whole setup—including the exposed test actor, the invisible operator in the flies, and the appearing and disappearing objects—makes full use of the proscenium stage. Indeed, the whole piece can be seen as a meditation on the proscenium stage: what it hides and exposes, its whole mechanical apparatus and mode of appearance. In other words, Beckett does what Hearne neglects, namely to reflect critically on the human theatre itself. Like Köhler's ape, Beckett's man thoughtfully processes each new obstacle and implement—"he reflects"—and performs a new attempt at reaching the water. However, Beckett does not presume to get inside the test actor's head. He does not engage in a sympathetic attempt to assume the subjective position of the creature as Costello recommends. On the contrary, we, the audience, watch the creature, ruthlessly exposed to our eyes by a proscenium stage that allows for no hiding place. The audience, in other words, is in a position similar to Köhler's, waiting for the creature to think the right thoughts, measuring the process, noticing false moves, and hoping for the narrative climax of success. Unlike Costello, who seems to think that it is possible to overcome Köhler's external view through sympathetic imagination, Beckett knows how much his own enterprise, the creation of an artistic representation, is complicit with a position such as Köhler's.

In treating actors like apes, Beckett places this piece in the tradition of the antitheatrical prejudice. This prejudice has led to the frequent association of the actors, and the art of acting, with the act of aping (Adorno 1973:181), a presumably external, mindless, purposeless form of imitation. Training is something that is done not only to apes, but, in Beckett's antitheatrical view, also to actors, whose own mimesis is not much more sophisticated than that of apes. But, as in Kafka, the resemblance cuts both ways: if actors are treated like apes, and in particular in the way Köhler treated apes, then we may take this treatment not only as a point of departure for animal liberation, but also as a critique of acting, at least a certain type of nonliberated acting according to which the actor fulfills the functions prescribed by the playwright and the director. Nonliberated, tightly controlled acting is, of course, precisely the kind of acting Beckett demanded of his actors, and we may therefore read *Act Without Words I* as Beckett's self-critique. More important, however, is the inversion itself: now it is

not an actor who imitates humans, but a human who is placed in the position of Köhler's ape. And since Beckett's piece involves and depends on the proscenium stage—the whole apparatus of producing a spectacle—Beckett does with the theatre what Kafka does with literary language, namely calling into question the medium in which he tries to represent the relation between the human, the actor, and the ape. Beckett does not presume that the stage is a space free from human mediation. By transferring Köhler's setup to the theatre, he exposes the manipulation and training that is part of the theatrical machine.

Conclusion

Much of the discourse of animal liberation derives from a critique of philosophical anthropomorphism. It thus tends to rely on a polemic against such figures as Aristotle, Kant, Köhler, or even philosophy as such. My discussion of philosophers, writers, and dramatists shows that the most important strategy for displacing anthropomorphism, philosophical or otherwise, is by way of a negative mimesis. For Coetzee this means using a genre that moves back and forth between poetry and philosophy, that both presents and undoes embodiment and sympathetic imagination. For Kafka it means exposing the violence of imitating the human that is forced onto the animal. In Beckett, finally, it means placing actors in the position of apes, thus causing a confrontation between the prejudice against animals and that against actors. On the side of philosophy, only philosophers such as Agamben, whose conceptions of philosophy target the distinction between man and animal (on which so much philosophy is premised), are capable of displacing philosophy's anthropomorphism. Agamben also demonstrates that a philosophical questioning of philosophy and its resulting openness toward animals can serve as a point of departure for reconsidering the abuses that often reinforce the privileging of human rights over animal rights. Perhaps it is only by taking animal rights seriously that we can preserve the rights of humans.

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