

On Being “the Last Kantian in Nazi Germany”: Dwelling with Animals after Levinas¹

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for Tilottama Rajan

Apes too have organs that can grasp, but they do not have hands. The hand is infinitely different from all grasping organs – paws, claws, or fangs – *different by an abyss of essence*. Only a being that can speak, that is, think, can have hands.

Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking*

I saw well why the gods do not speak to us openly, nor let us answer. Till that word can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble that we think we mean? How can they meet us face to face till we have faces?

C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*

The Butchery of Everyday Life

“The last Kantian in Nazi Germany”: this is how Emmanuel Levinas (1990b, 153) describes “Bobby,” the dog who befriends him during his “long captivity” in a slave-labour camp. Thirty years after the fact, Levinas briefly tells the story of his terrible days in Camp 1492, days whose numbing inhumanity is momentarily relieved by the arrival of an animal that offers a semblance of respect. I say “semblance” because Levinas’s experience of Bobby is informed by conventional assumptions about animality that make it impossible for him straightforwardly to attribute dutifulness to a creature that is not human. *Mon semblable, mon frère*: Bobby doubles for the human, yet he is not human, and this indeterminacy about his ontological and moral status at once triggers Levinas’s most dogmatic claims about non-human life and tests the limits of their coherence. The enigma of the animal evokes contradictory thoughts and feelings in Levinas: it is these sentiments, and the axioms by which they are articulated, that form the focus of my remarks in this chapter. What is clear is that the dog provides welcome succour to the prisoners, but the fact that he is the last of his kind reminds us that he performs this duty – if duty is what it is – in an ashen world on the brink of

extinction. Yet Levinas's essay does not begin with such searing recollections. The first half of it is taken up with a sprightly reflection upon Talmudic readings of Exodus 22:31, in which God grants certain eating rights to dogs. How can creatures of "pure nature" be said to possess "rights" (Levinas 1990b, 151)? What supreme act of faithfulness to "man" prompted God to consecrate them in this unusual way? Levinas dallies with the "talmudic Doctors" who attempt to resolve these questions, but their "high hermeneutics" and "subtle exegesis" (152) are, finally, not to his liking. As he says, he is always "thinking of Bobby" (151), and that thought unerringly returns him to the singularity and the solitude of the true task at hand, the work that his essay is destined to do; namely, bearing witness. No "allegories," no animal fables of any kind, after Camp 1492.

Levinas sets the scene with the barest of details: "There were seventy of us in a forestry commando unit for Jewish prisoners of war," he recalls; "the French uniform still protected us from Hitlerian violence" (152). As "soldiers" rather than as "civilians" – the difference, we are reminded, lies in the sheer contingency of a piece of cloth – the prisoners are spared extermination in a death camp. But of course there is nothing to shelter them from other acts of brutality – acts whose informing prejudice, Levinas suggests, is as old as Judaism itself. An "archetypal" ruthlessness characterizes his captors, for whom the Jews have never been more than "animals" and for whom bestialization therefore remains the chief means by which to render the Jews humanly unthinkable. Laden with animalistic rhetoric, Levinas's account painfully reproduces the biologism that naturalizes his incarceration. "We were beings entrapped in their species" (153), he recalls, in effect turning the "paradox" that had quickened the minds of the "talmudic Doctors" inside out: once reduced to a creature of "pure nature," the Jew obliges no one, bears no rights. His sentences weighty with the burden of the memory of this humiliation, Levinas glimpses himself through the voracious eyes of his captors – eyes that "stripped us of our human skin": "We were subhuman, a gang of apes. A small inner murmur, the strength and wretchedness of persecuted people, reminded us of our essence as thinking creatures, but we were no longer part of the world ... We were ... beings without language" (153). Robbing the prisoners of the power to speak, the Nazis cause them to question their ability to reason – language and thinking being the exemplary characteristics by which the human has always been decisively distinguished from the animal. What breaks the binding force of this animalization is an animal, "Bobby." Wandering into the camp, the dog "unwittingly" bears witness to the humanity of Levinas and the other prisoners, remembering what the Nazis, in their unremitting sav-

agery, have forgotten. Like some strange, reversed *pharmakos*, Bobby is cast *into* (not out of) the mock-polis of the camp, restoring it – albeit momentarily – to a semblance of ethical “health.” Levinas asks: Are we not *men*? In his own way, Bobby answers: yes, and again, yes! “He would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us as we returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight. For him, there was no doubt that we were men ... This dog was the last Kantian in Nazi Germany” (153).

The animal act described in this passage, the focal point of the essay’s concluding paragraph, gives us much to think about. Suffice it to say I will be able here to touch upon only some of its complexities. If humans are capable of treating others like animals, then it may also be true that animals are capable of treating others *like humans*. Or like humans *should* be treated, “Kant” here operating as a kind of prosopopoeia for dutifulness and for the “oughtness” that is ordinarily said uniquely to tug on the conscience of human beings. Is Levinas’s figure merely a sentimentalizing anthropomorphism, improperly attributing human qualities to an animal who in turn finds those qualities in the prisoners (i.e., grasps that they are “men,” not animals)? The spectre of falling into such pathos haunts Levinas’s text; midway through the essay, he stops himself: “But enough of allegories! We have read too many fables and we are still taking the name of a dog in the figurative sense” (152). It could be said that it is Levinas’s allergy to animal fables that propels his narrative towards the concluding account of the slave camp, where, he hopes, a dog is just a dog. Even here, though, he must work against the allegorizing resonances of his own story, for Bobby’s apparently dutiful behaviour unavoidably recalls the scene in Homer’s *Odyssey* where Ulysses is greeted by his faithful hound, the last true Greek in Ithaca. Unable *not* to anthropomorphize Bobby, Levinas nevertheless preemptively attempts to distinguish his account from its epic pretext: “No, no!” he exclaims, Bobby and I are *not* like that dog and his master, for “they were in Ithaca and the Fatherland,” but “here,” in Nazi Germany, “we were nowhere.” “Nowhere” means a historical moment – the Holocaust – where mawkishness is utterly irrelevant, “beyond pathos,” as Levinas says elsewhere.² But it also means the dystopia of Camp 1492, where neither human nor animal is at home, the placeless place where the animalization of the Jews makes it *imperative* to (re)think the uses to which the ontotheological distinction between the two realms can be put.³ “We,” who? Who is my neighbour? To whom (or what) are obligations owed? With whom (or what) do I dwell? Levinas’s work insistently raises these fundamental questions, the protoethical openings for thought that come before every ontology. What matters above all is thinking rather than dissolving the distinction between

the *ethos* of the human and the animal. The “Nazi Germany” that has brought the Kantians to the threshold of extinction is all the evidence that one would ever need to grasp the foolishness and the mortal danger that comes of blurring the boundaries between human and non-human life. As Richard Klein (1995, 23) points out, the “Nazi *Lebensphilosophie* ... explicitly assimilated human striving to the impulses of animal instinct.” We see at least one reason why Levinas is so nervous about the prospect of anthropomorphizing Bobby: the sentimental humanization of animals and the brutal animalization of humans are two sides of the same assimilating gesture. In humanizing the animal, these fictions risk the topological reversal by which persons are in turn bestialized, which is to say the biologisms and racisms that naturalize ethnic cleansings and the creation of concentration camps, whether in Nazi Germany or present-day Bosnia.⁴

Those who object to the impropriety of anthropomorphic projections, Heidegger (1985, 124) once pointed out, presuppose a punctual knowledge of what it is to be properly human. But the propriety of “humanity” is what is least certain and most vulnerable for Levinas, exposed as it is to the infinite heteronomy of others. Do these others include animal others? Are we not responsible for those non-human others as they sometimes appear to be for us? But who is “*us*”? If the thought of “the animal” is in question, so be too, inevitably, is the thought of “the human” with which it has always been inextricably bound. Bobby’s delightful greetings compel Levinas to consider how it is that a “mere” animal could treat him with more dignity than his human captors, captors who could be said to behave like animals⁵ and to incarcerate their prisoners like animals – tellingly, fantastically, the “animal” is available as a figure for both master and slave – were it not for the fact that the question of what constitutes the animal is precisely what Bobby’s dutiful behaviour raises and complicates. We might also say that, unlike the Nazis, Bobby meets and engages Levinas *face-to-face*, were it not for the fact that what constitutes a face, and whether animals can be said to possess a face (a question to which I will return) is also implicitly in question here, as it is elsewhere in his work.

What is apparent is that sentimentalizing anthropomorphisms make genuinely ethical thought, whether we understand this in Kantian or Levinasian terms, impossible because, under the guise of a certain pathos, they peremptorily annihilate differences in the name of the (human) same. We must therefore, Levinas (1990b, 152) insists, stop “taking the name of a dog in the figurative sense”: that is the denunciation of rhetoric that acts as the engine of his essay. Figuring animals, we *configure* the human. But at what cost to the animals? What is more violently exclusionary: that the Jews are animal-

ized by the Nazis or that the “animal” has for so long been used as a marker by which ferociously to abject the other? Right away, Levinas’s essay invites us to think counterintuitively for how, as is said in good conscience, can we even consider the obligations that are due animals, “the debt,” as he says, “that is always open” (152) to them, when it is the obligations to the *human* other that are most cruelly at risk, that most palpably deserve consideration in a Holocaust testimony?

Levinas’s essay is remarkable for bringing these two questions into such close proximity, almost suggesting that the two forms of prejudice – one against the Jews, the other against animals – are in some way comparable. The animalization of human beings leads directly to the most horrific consequences, to be sure; but before we hear of this, before Levinas tells us about what it feels like to be incarcerated as a beast by the Nazis, he reminds us that the animalization of animals is, in its own way, also deadly and, thus, worthy of our concern. How are animals animalized by humans? Levinas’s answer is at once complex and brutally simple: *we eat meat*. Cloaked in a certain mocking humour, Levinas’s opening paragraph circles warily around the “carnivorous virility” of human beings. Like the dogs described in the biblical pretext for his essay, we too consume “flesh that is torn by beasts in the field.” We *are* those beasts, devouring each other in “the horrors of war,” sublimating our carnivorous desires into “hunting games,” and, finally, eating meat. This, from his opening paragraph:

There is enough, there, to make you a vegetarian again. If we are to believe Genesis, Adam, the father of us all, was one! There is, at least, enough there, to make us want to limit, through various interdictions, the butchery that every day claims our “consecrated” mouths! (151)

Remember this, Levinas advises, “as you plunge your fork into your roast.” *We are killing animals*, even if the murderousness of that sacrifice is effaced at the dinner table, while our mouths water and our eyes grow big. The consecration of flesh-sharing *is* its erasure, the spiritualization and *denegation* of its gory reality. Derrida (1995, 283): “The putting to death of the animal, says this denegation, is not a murder.” But this other scene, the everyday “butchery” behind the veneer of civilization, competes with yet another. Levinas makes a point of telling us that, all along, he has had something else firmly in mind. While he speaks to us about our carnivorous appetite for the animal other, the memory of another animal intrudes. He has always already intruded: “I am thinking of Bobby,” he writes, in the present progressive tense. These two thoughts, then, are *contiguous*, thought together, even if, in

the narrative of the essay, they are necessarily unpacked one after the other. It is Levinas's way of narrowing the distance between them without actually saying that they are the same thing. The implications of this contiguity are obvious and troublesome: the "non-criminal" putting to death of the animal is put alongside the "non-criminal" putting to death of the European Jews. About what the two thoughts say to each other, Levinas is pointedly silent: it is enough, for now, in the aftermath of "Hitler's exterminations" (Levinas 1990a, xiii), that they are considered jointly. For a scandalous instant, Levinas acts the part that Bobby will more or less play at the end of the essay; that is, as the one who, in the absence of others and in the absence of a respect for the other, *testifies* to the worthiness of the imprisoned and the murdered. Indeed, he reminds us that these others *are* murdered, butchered so that we may eat well. Here, it is *he*, not Bobby, who witnesses the biologicistic, naturalized, and consecrated degradation of the other. The testimonial logic of his essay's narrative could then be expressed in this way: first, human (Levinas) on behalf of animal, then, animal (Bobby) on behalf of human. The momentous implications of this chiasmic ethical exchange are irresistible. As John Llewelyn (1991a, 235) argues, Levinas here "all but proposes an analogy between the unspeakable human holocaust and the unspoken animal one."

For all his perspicuity about Levinas's essay, however, Llewelyn may slightly understate what he sees there. By characterizing the essay as doing everything *but* making such a proposition, we must be careful not to shrink from its double scene of sacrifice. For is this not *exactly* the proposition that Levinas is making, even and especially if he does not literally write it out for us to read? Levinas proposes this analogy between sacrifices by *not* proposing it, in a whispering gesture that is strategically affirmative *and* negative: "yes," because there is no denying the implications of Levinas's opening meditation on what it means, what it really means, to be an eater of flesh; "no," because Levinas does not simply equate the two events, much less call them by the same name, *l'Holocauste*. Perhaps the point is not so much that Levinas makes the analogy between animal sacrifice and human murder but, rather, that this analogy, once made, is so difficult to read. Perhaps it is not that the "unspeakable human holocaust" is so distant from the "unspoken animal one" that it can only be denigrated by the comparison but, rather, that the notion that animals are murdered is elevated, if only provisionally, to the highest thought. In other words, the fact that the question of our obligations to animals is raised in such a maximally important context (indeed, as the opening move in the evocation of that context) puts to us that the thought of the human, no matter how profound – the incarceration and extermination of the Jews standing as the figure par excellence for what

Jean-Luc Nancy calls “an absolute responsibility”⁷ – can never be wholly divorced from the thought of the animal.

To be sure, the lightness of Levinas’s touch reminds us that, for him, non-human animals cannot make the same morally relevant claims upon us as can human ones. Levinas will never be confused with the animal liberationist, for whom allowing “the interests of his own species to override the greater interests of members of other species” is unacceptable (Singer 1976, 9). I would argue, in fact, that Levinas’s contiguous thoughts about the “butchery” of animals and the murder of Jews resonate strangely *with*, and constitute a subtle renunciation *of*, Heidegger, who, in a series of lectures given in Bremen on technology in 1949, infamously claimed that the “motorized food industry” was “in essence the same as the manufacturing of corpses in gas chambers and extermination camps.”⁸ Heidegger’s claim will always need to be read very slowly, since its extreme callousness makes it impossible definitively to distinguish between, on the one hand, his long-standing critique of the West’s technological logic, for which the industrialization of agriculture and the bureaucratization of genocide are identical expressions of the “complete Europeanization of the earth and man” (Heidegger 1971, 15–16) and, on the other hand, a certain dehumanizing absolutism in his own thinking and politics. In this instance, as perhaps in many others, Heidegger may have become what he beheld. For Levinas, however, there is no question about the cruel basis of Heidegger’s remarks, nor about their origins far back in Heidegger’s work.

Levinas (1989, 488) readily concedes the critical power of Heidegger’s “extraordinary book of 1927” but asks rhetorically if “there was never any echo of Evil in it.” It cannot be accidental that evidence of such reverberations are to be found amid Heidegger’s most violently dogmatic claims about animality. For example, in the name of more rigorously determining how the being-towards-death of *Dasein* makes it into something that surpasses living creatures (a determination that is not without its Levinasian equivalent, as I shall argue), *Being and Time* distinguishes between the dying (*Sterben*) of *Dasein* and the perishing (*Verenden*) of beings that are merely alive: the human properly dies, whereas the animal simply ceases to live (Heidegger 1972, 240). With this distinction in mind, Heidegger’s Bremen assertion takes on utterly chilling consequences: in so far as the Jews perish with and *like* the animals who die in meat-processing plants – that is, as essentially similar “fabrications” of the military-industrial-agricultural complex – *they cannot be human*, which is to say, *because* the military-industrial-agricultural complex fails to distinguish between animals and certain animalized humans, it slaughters them both with impunity.

It goes without saying that none of this annihilating logic informs Levinas’s

comparison. Responding to Heidegger's claim, Levinas (1989, 487) says simply: "This stylistic turn of phrase, this analogy, this progression, are beyond commentary." Where Heidegger levels differences in the name of "essence," Levinas bids us, for a moment, to think two distinct thoughts together and, in doing so, safely preserves the incalculable differences between feeding people in the industrialized West and murdering them. Levinas's comparison is as unmistakable as it is delicate, dwelling within the interior, apposite spaces of his essay. In this gesture, important as much for *what* it might mean to us as it is for its being made at all, he points to the danger of making pronouncements from the relatively secure vantage point of a fundamental ontology; instead, he offers an opening and a lure for thought. He risks a question about the (animal) other, where Heidegger carelessly pronounces the death of the difference between their demise and the murder of the European Jews. Levinas quietly, almost inadvertently, allows us to think that there are other horrors capable of making a claim upon our conscience, other forms of "butchery" – Levinas's terrible, savage word so pointedly puts this to us – without for a moment suggesting that they are the *same* horror as the Holocaust. For both thinkers, the blindness of the West culminates in its arrogant faith in an instrumental reason that transforms the planet into so much raw material awaiting assimilation. But in Heidegger's desire to grasp the basis of this inherently rapacious manner of being in the world, and, more important, in his overweening confidence as a *thinker* that he can stand neutrally apart from its actual destructiveness, Heidegger threatens to *overlook* the names and the faces of the others for whom this neutrality means nothing less than annihilation. In Levinas's memorable phrase about Heidegger's failure to remember, the German philosopher proceeds "*as if consenting to horror*." And so he embodies everything Levinas has fought against; namely, the murderous indifference to difference by which alterities are compelled to be *im Wesen dasselbe* ("in essence the same").

In this, as in so many other ways, Levinas anticipates Derrida, for whom Heidegger's extraordinary statement represents an object lesson in what he calls "the ideology of difference." In attempting to deconstruct this ideology, with its insistence upon "a single limit between white and black, Jewish and non-Jewish," animal and human, Derrida (1987, 183) is *not* arguing that difference is irrelevant, especially when we are speaking about "the difference between people and animals ... between Auschwitz and battery farms":

No, no I am not advocating the *blurring* of differences. On the contrary, I am trying to explain how drawing an oppositional limit *itself* blurs the difference, the difference and the differences, not only between man and

animal, but among animal societies – there are an infinite number of animal societies, and within animal societies and within human society itself, so many differences.

Ideologies of difference are, in the end, ideologies of “homogeneity” (184), strategies and discourses that suppress uncontainable and irreducible variation in the name of an impossibly pure distinction between the same and the other. Criticizing Heidegger’s philosophical and political investment in such purity, his high-minded distaste for mixing it up with more earthly others, Levinas (1969, 134) will say that “*Dasein* ... is never hungry.” From this utterly anorexic perspective, Heidegger risks collapsing the difference between a meal and a corpse, while at the same moment and in the same gesture ferociously reinscribing the oppositional limit between those who are in a position to practise a fundamental ontology and those who are not. Speaking not from the relative safety of Bremen but from behind the barbed wire of Camp 1492, Levinas cannot afford to make such sacrifices, dissolving as they do the difference between life and death for people and animals alike.

“But enough of this theology!” (Levinas 1990b, 151). With that mock exclamation, Levinas attempts to bring sudden closure to his thoughts on animal sacrifice, making it seem as if it had all been a false start and a strange detour. But a detour from what true path? When, two paragraphs later, he interjects “But enough of allegories!” (152), we see that he is yet again working the conceit that he is writing in the “wrong” mode. Much of the essay unfolds in this self-consciously dilatory manner, one effect of which is to throw into sharper relief the purposiveness that comes only with the concluding memories of Bobby and the slave camp. And even there, as I have suggested, Levinas continues to feel as if his account could, at any moment, fall into mere fabulation, or worse, sentimentality. Throughout, the thought of the animal is always somehow too anthropomorphic, always vanishing beneath the surface of its humanistic interpretations. In his opening sentence, Levinas acknowledges the problem “of attaching too much importance to what ‘goes into a man’s mouth,’ and not enough to what comes out” (151), but his pretense at embarrassment over succumbing precisely to this hazard puts to us that his flirtation with what he ironically dismisses as mere “theology” was worth the effort. In the apparent absence of an overarching design to the essay, the ensuing analogy between the “butchery that every day claims our ‘consecrated’ mouths” and the *other* butchery that haunts all of *Difficult Freedom* in effect operates as a kind of ghost narrative, linking the essay’s oddly disparate thoughts and tones into a delicate whole. For a

moment at least, before his allergy to making too much of animals overtakes his competing concern that we have made too little of them (especially when we sit down at the dinner table), the philosopher almost sounds as though he will abstain from animal flesh, as if he were the last vegetarian in the meat-eating West. Almost. Significantly, he does not in fact call for the end to animal sacrifice but, rather, for its thoughtful restriction. But in the name of what? On what grounds would animals oblige us to treat them in this fashion? Levinas does not say, content instead with evoking images of the feeding frenzy that lies just beyond our sight as creatures of culture. “There is, at least, enough there to make us want to limit, through various interdictions, the butchery” of everyday life. The careful self-distancing of Levinas’s syntax is worth remarking upon. It tells us that he is not so much concerned with the letter of dietary laws as he is with the more general – but no less pressing – question of what it means to consume animal flesh in the first place, what it says about *us*. Who are *we* for whom the murderous violence of killing the animal other and sharing its flesh “at the family table” is so effortlessly “sublimated by intelligence” (151)?

This is not the first time that Levinas has asked his readers to consider what John Caputo (1993, 197) calls “a repressed discourse on eating in philosophy.” A decade earlier, in *Totality and Infinity*, eating figures forth the irreducibly excessive relationship that the subject shares with the world:

Eating ... is to be sure not reducible to the chemistry of alimentation, [nor] ... to the set of gustative, olfactory, kinesthetic, and other sensations that would constitute the consciousness of eating. This sinking one’s teeth into the *things* which the act of eating involves above all measures the surplus of the reality of the aliment over every represented reality, a surplus that is not quantitative, but is the way the I, the absolute commencement, is suspended on the non-I. (Levinas 1969, 128–9, emphasis mine)

For Levinas, our fleshliness and our utter dependence upon consuming flesh voluptuously exposes and commits the “I” to the other in ways that are “ultimately prior to his ontological relation to himself (egology) or to the totality of things that we call the world” (Levinas 1986, 21). Always before the “I” and the “non-I,” and, as the condition of the possibility of their mutual imbrication, there is “nourishment.” As Seán Hand (1989, 37) remarks, “this conception of earthly enjoyment, whose forgetfulness of self is the first morality, marks a decisive break with *Dasein*.” Enjoyment, nourishment, eating – all are corporeal figures with which Levinas evokes the fundamen-

tal responsibility that the self has for the frailty of the other, the other's desires, hungers, thirsts, hurts, and pleasures. In Heidegger, *Dasein* is the virile and resolute entity that ostensibly does without food so as better to fix its sights on the alterity of its own death; in Levinas, *Dasein* suffers the pangs of hunger, and in that suffering it is always already turned towards the face of the others who are also hungry and who will also die. In the slightly later essay on Bobby, however, nourishment and enjoyment suddenly take on darker meanings, for they are phenomena that consistently occur *at the expense of the animal other* whose flesh we consume. To eat, we must eat an other; one creature's nourishment means another gets stripped of its skin: that is the cold logic of us warm-blooded animals that *Totality and Infinity* represses and that Levinas's reflections upon the butchery of everyday life recover for thought. Inasmuch as the earlier text generalizes the consumed others into "things" and "aliment," figuring them as foodstuffs whose craving makes the "I" possible, it remains wholly centred on the needs of "man" and thus caught within the egology that it critiques. Where in *Totality and Infinity* the animal's sacrifice at the hands (and teeth) of the human goes unnoticed, in "The Name of a Dog" it summons us to an obligation that Levinas almost always reserves for human beings: you *ought* not kill me.

Refusing the Animal Face; or, We Are What We Eat

There is no such thing as Animality, but only a regime of differences without opposition. The concept of animality, along with the "world poverty" of the animal, are human artifacts, indeed, artifacts that are difficult to wield; and their effect is to *efface* differences, to homogenize.

Jacques Derrida, "On Reading Heidegger"

The animal is the *dreamed* object.

Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order*

Levinas's disturbing image of a domestic space – the dinner table – forming an alibi for murder recalls questions raised by Derrida (1995, 280) in his recent work on what he calls "the carnivorous virility" of Western cultures. Why do these cultures leave "a place ... open ... for a noncriminal putting to death" (276) of living creatures? How is responsibility to the human other also a tacit form of permission to act irresponsibly towards the animal other? How does indifference to the animal configure the human? Significantly, Derrida almost always raises these questions by rereading the philosophemes and critical positions that are central to Levinas's critique of "traditional

humanism" (279). In quite different contexts (which itself attests to the fundamental nature of the problem at hand), Derrida characterizes animal sacrifice as symptomatic of a generalized carnivorous violence, a "carnophallogocentrism" modelled upon the "virile strength of the adult male" (280; Derrida 1990, 953). According to this "schema," "the subject does not want just to master and possess nature actively. In our cultures, he accepts sacrifice and eats flesh" (Derrida 1995, 281). The killing of animals, and the concomitant construction of the "animal" *as that which may be freely put to death for the purposes of consumption*, is profoundly related to the constitution of human *Dasein*. For that reason, he argues, "If we wish to speak of injustice, of violence or of a lack of respect toward what we still so confusedly call animals, we must reconsider in its totality the metaphysico-anthropocentric axiomatic that dominates, in the West, the thought of just and unjust" (Derrida 1990, 953).

Needless to say, this reconsideration extends well beyond the question of what or whether meat should be eaten:

The question is no longer one of knowing if it is "good" to eat the other or if the other is "good" to eat, nor of knowing which other. One eats him regardless and lets oneself be eaten by him ... The moral question is thus not, nor has it ever been: should one eat or not eat, eat this and not that ... man or animal, but since *one must* eat in any case and since it is and tastes good to eat, and since there is no definition of the good [*du bien*], *how* for goodness' sake should one *eat well* [*bien manger*]? And what does this imply? What is eating? How is this metonymy of introjection to be regulated? (Derrida 1995, 282)

Alluding to this passage, Caputo (1993, 198) observes: "We have to eat and we have to eat something living. That is the law of the flesh." As if cognizant of this imperative, Levinas does not call for an outright abstention from carnivorousness but, rather, for grasping the significance of the *law of the flesh* that articulates us, or, in his words, "that every day *claims* our 'consecrated' mouths." If we cannot *not* assimilate the other, and if what "we" *are* is irreducible to a complex spectrum of incorporation and interiorization (of which animal sacrifice is but one example), then the need to examine the axioms by which these forms of "eating" are conducted, far from becoming irrelevant, becomes all the more pressing. (On this point, Derrida differs most profoundly with Heidegger, or at least the Heidegger for whom the myriad differences between the industrial consumption of human and animal corpses had ceased to matter.) Briefly, for Derrida the point is not that

we must stop eating meat – as he says, the distinction between animal and plant “flesh” is itself suspect – but to think critically about how carno-phallogocentric discourses and regimes (1) “install the virile figure at the determinative center of the subject” (Derrida 1995, 280); (2) abject those (others) who are deemed not to have the same brawny “appetites” as “men”: women, homosexuals, celibates, and vegetarians (281); and (3) sacrifice animals in such a way that their being put to death is not considered killing (283).

As an example of the most profound “ideology of homogeneity,” Derrida argues, carno-phallogocentrism requires that strict distinctions be maintained between “symbolic” and “real” objects of sacrifice. This is no more apparent than in the interdiction, “Thou shalt not kill,” which Derrida reads after Levinas as:

Thou shalt not kill thy neighbour. Consequences follow upon one another, and must do so continuously: thou shalt not make him suffer, which is sometimes worse than death, thou shalt not do him harm, thou shalt not eat him, not even a little bit, and so forth. (279)

On the other hand, “The putting to death of the animal is not a murder,” a “denegation” or repression that Derrida links “to the violent institution of the ‘who’ as subject” (283). The neighbour, the neighbourhood of the human, with its attendant determinations of just and unjust action towards the other, is in this way constructed over and against the realm of the non-human, generalized and simplified as the “animal,” for which the sixth commandment is inapplicable. According to the exclusionary principles of this “sacrificial” logic, humans may consume and be consumed in any number of symbolic ways but are forbidden to be carnivores of each other, “real” cannibalism figuring forth the animalizing behaviour par excellence, the very mark distinguishing “advanced” from “primitive” societies. Here, the extraordinary exceptions to the law against anthrophagy prove the rule of culture. Animals and other living creatures, on the other hand, may be put to death at will. “Such are the executions of ingestion, incorporation, or introjection of the corpse,” Derrida argues; “An operation as real as it is symbolic when the corpse is ‘animal’ (and who can be made to believe that our cultures are carnivorous because animal proteins are irreplaceable?)” (278). Only animals, *as* animals, “naturally” form real sacrifices to each other (or what Levinas [1990b, 151] calls “this devouring within species”).

Yet the separation of “symbolic” from “real” operations and objects of ingestion is extremely problematical since “eating” is at best a metonym for “infinitely different modes of the conception-appropriation-assimilation

of the other” (Derrida 1995, 281). Moreover, how is one to distinguish decisively between symbolic and non-symbolic forms of carnivorous violence when that distinction, in addition to “all symbolic or linguistic appropriations” that involve the capture and consumption of the other, is irreducible to a generalized “eating” that precedes and exceeds the constitution of the “human.” As Derrida observes, determining a purely *symbolic* form of sacrifice that would decisively define the “human” “is very difficult, truly impossible to delimit in this case, hence the enormity of the task, its essential excessiveness, a certain unclassifiability or the monstrosity of that *for which* we have to answer here, or *before* which (whom? what?) we have to answer” (278). At what point *is* an (animal) corpse “just” a corpse or eating “simply” eating? What perspective, short of the loftily panoptic one that Heidegger adopts in his 1949 lectures, would enable us to make such absolute determinations? A radical surplus of differences and *différance* will always unsettle the oppositional limit between the human and the animal, and the man-centred determinations of “the just and the unjust” upon which the rigorous purity of this limit rests. To the extent that this excess displaces the thought of the “human” (and thus the “animal”), it is rightly felt to be “monstrous” and “unclassifiable” – and for that reason, entirely useful to the “task” of gaining a point of critical leverage on the humanisms that have always presupposed and policed an essential difference and oppositional limit between human and non-human life.

Can we say that Levinas disrupts “the boundaries that institute the human subject (preferably and paradigmatically the adult male, rather than the woman, child, or animal) as the measure of the just and the unjust” (Derrida 1990, 953)? In the opening paragraph of his essay, as I have argued, Levinas’s disconcerting analogy strikes twice at the heart of a human-centred cosmos: “we” live in a culture that failed catastrophically to grasp the injustice of killing Jews; but “we” also live in a culture for which the justness of putting animals to death is simply not an intelligible consideration. The fact that Levinas is willing to raise the second question alongside the first, which is to say, in such close proximity to “‘the’ question and ‘the’ figure of responsibility” (Derrida 1995, 285) characterizing our modernity, suggests the maximal nature of what is at stake here, the radical possibilities that can be opened up when the reach of the ethical question *who is my neighbour?* is widened to include non-human acquaintances. If animals are also murdered, if their deaths are no longer denegated as merely being put to death, then to whom or what am I answerable? The unstated analogy between the murder of Jews and the killing of animals in effect creates a *rhetorical* neighbourhood in which animals and humans dwell and summon each other into responsibility.

Elsewhere in Levinas's work, including elsewhere in the essay on Bobby, this call goes mostly unheard. For example, Levinas has been asked if animals have faces and, thus, if they command the respect that the human face commands. His response is telling:

One cannot entirely refuse the face of an animal ... Yet the priority here is not found in the animal, but in the human face. We understand the animal, the face of an animal, in accordance with *Dasein*. The phenomenon of the face is not in its purest form in the dog. In the dog, in the animal, there are other phenomena. For example, the force of nature is pure vitality. It is more this which characterizes the dog. But it also has a face ... The human face is completely different and only afterwards do we discover the face of an animal. (Levinas 1988, 169)

Much could be said about the rich interview of which this response forms a small part, and I can focus on only a few details here. We should note that, from the start, Levinas never questions whether there are "animals" and "humans" as such." Like Heidegger before him, the insistence upon the oppositional limit dividing the two entities presupposes that they exist as such. Even when Levinas disrupts the boundaries constituting the human, as he certainly does when he characterizes the subject as always already being held "hostage" to an absolute Other, he reinscribes the boundaries defining the animal, as if his critique of humanism remained more or less within a certain anthropological space. Levinas's somewhat evasive syntax qualifies any openness to the animal other by casting that muted act of affirmation in the form of a (double) negative: that one cannot *entirely* say "no" to the animal face means that saying "yes" is the exceptional rather than the categorically imperative act, supplemental in nature, rather than constitutive. The problem lies not with the human, who cannot or will not see this face, but decisively with the animal, whose face lacks the "purest form" that we are presumed to see with absolute clarity when the *visage* is human. What it is about the animal face that lingers once the human has finished with its refusals remains quite unclear since it is difficult to conceive of an absolute demand and responsibility – which is what the "face" usually connotes in Levinas's work – that is also somehow partial. Levinas concedes, positively, that there is something about the animal that compels us to face it; but he focuses negatively on the something else, which spoils and reduces that duty. All faces *as* faces are irrefutable, but some are less irrefutable than others. The notion that the animal face is not in its "purest form" implies that there is a continuum joining the faceless to the faced when everything else about Levinas's rhetoric points assertively towards an abyss of essence

dividing the two phenomena. The animal face is “completely” other than the human face, yet the human remains the implacable standard against which the “purity” of the animal face is measured. Thus the animal both has and does not have a face; it is characterized in its essence by having (face) without having. In this redoubled and contradictory gesture, strongly reminiscent of the illogicality characterizing Heidegger’s description of living creatures as *weltarm* (poor-in-the-world)⁹, Levinas insists upon an absolute separation of human and animal while at the same moment reinscribing the animal face in what Derrida (1989, 55) would call “a certain anthropocentric or even humanist teleology.”

The animal’s face cannot be entirely ignored; yet Levinas is scrupulously careful to assert that even this fractional connection vis-à-vis the human must *not* be misinterpreted as placing animals on a developmental path that might lead to the human: “The widespread thesis that the ethical is biological amounts to saying that, ultimately, the human is only the last stage of the evolution of the animal. I would say, on the contrary, that in relation to the animal, *the human is a new phenomenon*” (Levinas 1988, 172, emphasis mine). Levinas’s experience with and reflection upon Nazism makes it imperative that the “ethical” *not* be contaminated by the “biological” lest the destinal thinking of the latter become the means by which to exterminate the obligations of the former. The frankly anthropocentric insistence that the human cannot be reduced to an essence has remained, as Derrida suggests in another context, “*up until now* ... the price to be paid in the ethico-political denunciation of biologism, racism, naturalism” (Derrida 1989, 56). But this does not preclude us from tracing the axiomatic decisions, not to say the contradictions and elisions, underwriting Levinas’s discourse of animality, a discourse whose very attempt to think beyond the ontological reinscribes ancient ontotheological distinctions between the human and animal. For example, one sign that Levinas resorts to the profoundest metaphysical humanism is that he proceeds as if the distinction between the “ethical” and the “biological” was *itself* not consequentially ethical in nature, a sealing off of one neighbourhood from another, and a ghettoizing of the animal in the abiding space of the “biological” – for which we may take Levinas to mean something like *Nur-noch-leben*, “just-plain-life.”¹⁰

Levinas’s move against the “biological” almost exactly reproduces Heidegger’s long-standing objection to *Lebensphilosophie*, both old and new. Original thinking – that is, thinking that presupposes the originality, or “newness,” of the human phenomenon – only suffers at the hands of the zoologists. For that reason, Heidegger (1993, 234) was offended by Aristotle, who had failed to set “the *humanitas* of man high enough” by calling the

human an animal equipped with language. For both thinkers, the being-human of the human wholly exceeds the thought of the biological in which animality is immured; the heteronomic relation to the other, the being-ethical of the human, is unrelated to the life of the (other) living creatures, whose infinite differences from humans, but also from each other, are erased, and that erasure in turn is *fixed* by the name par excellence for natural “rule”: the “biological.” For Levinas, the animal face is always compromised by competing phenomena, all of them unnamed except for the most pressing, indeed, the very figure of *irrepressibility* – namely, the “pure vitality” of “the force of nature.” “The being of animals,” Levinas (1988, 172) will subsequently say, “is a struggle for life.” The animal is imagined to be the creature for which being-alive takes precedence over all other essential characteristics: without remainder, the being-animal of the animal *is* its “vitality.” Notwithstanding the radical critique of traditional humanisms that Levinas mobilizes around the notion of the “face,” he resorts to the most conventional conceptual schemes when he tries to account for the animal other. According to this configuration, “Man” is exemplarily free from the blind force of nature, whereas animals are immersed in the liveliness that constitutes their animated existence to the precise extent that it deprives them of their liberty, their ability to “question,” to anticipate both their “own” death and the death of another, as well as to reason, to speak, to mourn, to have a history, or to possess a soul. Levinas frankly puts to us that he “understand[s] the animal in accordance with *Dasein*”; that is, he measures the animal against the “purity” of *Dasein*, “purity” here signifying *Dasein*’s prior, bare, and asymmetrical relation to the Other. The animal enjoys an excess of life over face, even if the means by which one could make, much less weigh, these relative distinctions remains completely mysterious. *Dasein*, on the other hand, is something more and better than merely being-alive. And if Levinas is also to insist, *contra* Heidegger, that his version of *Dasein* feels the pangs of hunger, then that only proves that he is forced to separate it from the being-alive of animals without making that vitality entirely inaccessible to it.¹¹

When Levinas turns his mind to an animal other than a dog, he falters, as if he were at the point of exceeding the conceptual tolerances of his own argument, the place where the “ethical,” already overextended into the animal kingdom and thus compromising the putative “newness” of the human “phenomenon,” must finally break with the “biological”: “I don’t know if a snake has a face. I can’t answer that question. A more specific analysis is needed” (1988, 172). Without a clear or consistent sense of what the proper trait of the animal *is*, Levinas finds himself – squeamishly? – unable either to say

“yes” or “no” to the snake. Summarily to deny the snake what was equivocal-ly given to the dog would perhaps betray too clearly how *Dasein*’s point of view is not neutrally indifferent to the “biological” but, rather, is anthropocentric and even sentimental in its hierarchization of living creatures. The earlier claim that the dog’s face could not be entirely disavowed was positively predicated on the possibility, however partial, of there being something like an animal *Dasein*; but Levinas makes it clear at this point that the same claim also negatively opens the way, in theory, for a continuous gradation of refusals that increases the farther “down” the evolutionary scale one looks.

To be fair to Levinas, he does call for additional “analysis” of the question. When considered in the context of his rather dogmatic assertions about human *Dasein*, however, his hesitancy about the snake’s face points to the following logic: if the dog’s face is mostly denied, and if the snake’s face remains unclear, then the notion of the face of, say, the insect, will be more questionable still. Perhaps that visage will be incomprehensible or irrelevant; nothing about Levinas’s rhetoric of animality precludes that conclusion and exclusion. Discriminating between animal genera, Levinas never doubts that there is a uniform region – but not quite a neighbourhood – called *animality*, for which any particular creature should stand as an example. But how can one animal genus be “more” animalistic than another at the same time that “animality” as an essentializing concept is expected to maintain any kind of meaningful force? Levinas falls into an anthropological discourse that Derrida (1989, 11) would say “is all the more peremptory and authoritarian for having to hide a discomfiture” – in this case, the tacit concession that “animality” does not describe the nature of living things but is a variably meaningful figure in service of configuring and consolidating the exemplarity of the human.

Working with two different standards of animal exemplarity, Levinas reproduces the oppositional limit between human and animal *within* the realm of the biological. To do so, he relies upon at least two traditional and teleological schema. First, in evoking a biological hierarchy of relative “complexity” that ranks warm-blooded mammals “over” cold-blooded reptiles, Levinas naturalizes the superiority of the dog vis-à-vis the snake. In other words, he makes the putative “biological” proximity of the dog to the human substitute for a nearness in ethical essence – this notwithstanding his explicit insistence that thinking *Dasein* is a function of the founding difference between the “ethical” and the “biological.” Second, Levinas is perhaps never more firmly within the grasp of an anthropology than in his choice of exemplary animals. For the “dog” and the “snake” are of course not two living creatures among many but (at least for Jews, Greeks, and Christians, all

of whom Levinas invokes in his essay) the very emblems of, on the one hand, dutifulness and unqualified friendship and, on the other hand, irresponsibility, lowliness, and evil bestiality.

“With the appearance of the human – and this is my entire philosophy – there is something more important than my life, and that is the life of the other” (Levinas 1988, 172). By this point we need hardly say that the “other” to which Levinas refers is paradigmatically the other human, whose importance is marked by its ability to stand outside “nature” and the “biological.” As Derrida (1995, 284) observes, “What is still to come or what remains buried in an almost inaccessible memory is the thinking of a responsibility that does not stop at *this* determination of the neighbour, at the dominant scheme of this determination.” For Levinas, only the human is truly subjected to and by the injunction, “Thou shalt not kill.” The sixth commandment is the basis for all ethics; it is the “primordial expression,” “the first word” that configures the human, summoning it to an asymmetrical locution before it has said or done anything: “to see a face is already to hear: ‘thou shalt not kill’” (Levinas, 8). But Levinas leaves unexplained how the human grasps the importance of “the *life* of the other” and thus comprehends the possibility of its *death*, while at the same time being something completely different from the “vitality” of living things. We might ask Levinas the same question that Derrida (1989, 120) asks Heidegger: “What is death for a *Dasein* that it is never defined *essentially* as a living thing?” What can “life” and “death” mean in the discourse of the “ethical” once it is decisively divided from the realm of the merely “biological”? (We might also reverse the terms of the question and ask what an “animal” is if it attaches “importance” to its own life but remains constitutively incapable, which is to say, *in all cases*, unable either to intimate “the life of the other” or to bear responsibility for it? But what then is “life” for the mortal animal that it should be said not to mourn the death of the other life?) If the face of the animal does not confront us, then the “asymmetrical relation with the other” (Levinas, 1969, 225) is rendered impossible, and the interdiction that is the basis of ethics has no binding effect.

Of course, within the human neighbourhood the sixth commandment can hardly be said to have been scrupulously obeyed; it is, as Levinas (1988, 169) says, an “authority ... without force.” The face is a “demand” that remains as the possibility of ethics whether we accept or deny that “demand.” But even its refusal is reappropriated to the anthropocentric axioms governing Levinas’s discourse. We see this perhaps most clearly in *Totality and Infinity*, where Levinas (1969, 222) argues that “violence” and “war ... presuppose the face and the transcendence of the being appearing in the face.”

If “Thou shalt not kill” means “Thou shalt not kill – except in certain cases, for example, in battle,” then the privilege of this murderous exception also lies entirely with the human. Humans “hunt” animals and “labour” with nature, to be sure, but because the objects of these confrontations lack a face, Levinas claims, it cannot accurately be said that “warfare” or “violence” is carried out against them. To some extent, this curious and somewhat worrisome claim is informed by the distinction – which we have already encountered – Heidegger makes when he distinguishes between the dying (*Sterben*) of *Dasein* and the perishing (*Verenden*) of beings that are merely alive. In the case of Levinas, the entitlement of pursuing war, and thus of suffering its fatal violence, lies properly with “Man” and is an element of the propriety of “Man.” According to this logic, animals are not bona fide casualties; they are hunted down and they perish, but they do not die in battle with human beings. (Interestingly, by the time he writes his essay on Bobby, Levinas will recognize this denegation of murder for what it is – making killing into a kind of sport.)

By extension, it could be argued, it *is* argued, that the agricultural-industrial-technological complex does not carry out warfare against the natural world; rather, it “develops” and “cultivates”¹² the “wilderness,” the myriad regions that lie outside of the neighbourhood of “civilized” “Man.” This is not merely a question of semantics but of the ways in which philosophemes like “warfare” and “violence” are put into the service of configuring the human, and of policing a series of mutually reinforcing boundaries that divide realms, each of which is imagined to be separately homogeneous – “human” and “non-human,” “Man” and “nature.” But if it is not warfare that has been conducted against the buffalo, the Brazilian rainforest, and the animalized human (the terrible epithets “savage” and “Gook,” or, more recently, the Serbo-Croatian slur, *zuti mrav* [“yellow ant” or “pest”] come to mind), to cite only a few examples, then what is it? What is effaced or ignored by restricting “warfare” to mean the systematic violence of humans against humans as something peculiar to *Dasein*, the sole creature capable of apprehending “the importance of the life of the other”? In as much as Levinas designates the human neighbourhood as the “totality” that is exemplarily capable of suffering the violence of war, he saves the global village by destroying it, or at least by exposing it to the possibility of its destruction. But, as always, the perimeter marking the human from the non-human, the faced from those without faces, is unstable, disrupted, subjected to differences that cannot be contained by the separating out the “ethical” from the “biological” (but *not* thereby collapsing one region into the other). If these complications were not always already in place, then why would there be any need

for the kinds of imperious, insistent moves characterizing Levinas's discourse (and not only his, as we have seen in the case of Heidegger) with respect to the enigma of the animal?

At the risk of being too literal-minded, I might quickly recall – and then only interrogatively – the horrific case of the Vietnam War in order to throw into relief both the limitations of Levinas's claim and the need to think of a responsibility that does not stop at his determination of the neighbour. Could one meaningfully describe what the American military – among other armies – did to the human population of Vietnam as *warfare* and not extend that term to describe what it also did, and with equally systematic ferocity, to the Vietnamese countryside using Agent Orange (a herbicide whose chemical components were partly produced in Canada)? At what point could one distinguish between the destruction of an agricultural way of life and the people living that life? Perhaps only a so-called First World culture, which is to say a culture that knows nothing of the realities of subsistence farming, could afford to call one form of violence “warfare” and the other, using the jargon of the motorized food industry, the work of “defoliation.” What ideology of homogeneity would need to be in place, what oppositional limits would need to be inscribed in the name of the exemplarity of human *Dasein*, in order for one to say that the American military did not *murder* Vietnam, the land, its ways of life, its peoples, its animals? Or that the peoples and the animals and the place in which they all dwelled did not *differently* command a form of absolute respect from the United States, that they did not *differently* summon the army of occupation to the originary obligation, *Thou shalt not kill!*

Although Levinas does not say it this way, only by projecting a face upon non-human others, and thus subjecting them to the rhetorical violence of a prosopopeia, can they be said to be murdered. But who is to say that one manner of speaking about killing is rhetorically aberrant and the other proper, or that some creatures die and others cease living? *Totality and Infinity* suggests that we can say that we conduct “warfare” against animals only by anthropomorphically confusing that ferocity with what is actually happening – namely, “hunting”. Similarly, “violence” bears only upon human *Dasein*, whereas bringing force to bear upon the faceless elements “reduce[s] itself to a labour” (Levinas 1969, 142). But he can make this claim only by ignoring how “warfare” and “violence” are themselves figures – figures that carry out the work of *anthropomorphizing* “Man” by differentially positing those qualities that make human living and dying *human*, over and against the non-violence that is imagined to happen to the faceless animals and elements. In this anthropocentric universe, animals and the elements of the

“natural” world are the objects of human action – hunting, labour – rather than entities that oblige us fundamentally.

The being-war of war and the being-human of humanity are here openly, deeply complicit with each other, a complicity we might consider when we think of the denegations of murder once the non-human is decreed not to have a face, the alibis that always put the human somewhere else, doing something else when it comes to killing animals and dehumanized or animalized humans: the “culling” and “management” of herds, the “euthanization” of laboratory animals, but also the “cleansing” and “pacification” of human populations, the “saving” of villages by their incineration, and the “manufacturing” (*die Fabrikation*) of corpses. Above all, Levinas teaches us *not* to analogize incomparably different deaths, with too little to say or care about their differences, in the manner of Heidegger. In the essay on Bobby, as I have argued, he even obliges us to think of human and animal deaths as capable of illuminating each other in their separate darknesses. For the most part, however, Levinas’s neighbourhood remains resolutely human. As Derrida (1995, 279) argues, “The ‘Thou shalt not kill’ – with all its consequences, which are limitless – has never been understood within the Judeo-Christian tradition, nor apparently by Levinas, as a ‘Thou shalt not put to death the living in general.’” The sixth commandment has a double force in culture: not only, as Levinas contends, as the interdiction that commands obligation to the human other but also as tacit *permission* to think the animal others, and all the living things for which the “animal” comes zoomorphically to stand, as lying “outside” of the neighbourhood of call and response. To this extent, Derrida sees a striking similarity between Heidegger and Levinas: “In spite of the differences separating them, they nonetheless remain profound humanisms *to the extent that they do not sacrifice sacrifice.*” For both, the human subject lives “in a world where sacrifice is possible and where it is not forbidden to make an attempt on life in general, but only on human life, on the neighbour’s life” (279).

The Cyborg Kantian

Animals; difficulty of explaining these.

E.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*

Benevolence toward those in need is a universal duty of men, just because they are to be considered fellow men, that is, as rational beings with needs, united by nature in one dwelling place so that they can help each other.

Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*

To the extent that Levinas asks us to reconsider the consecrated butchery of everyday life, Derrida's assessment cannot be entirely correct. For a moment, Levinas in fact *does* appear willing to sacrifice sacrifice, or at least to put into question the humanism that is rightly appalled at the murder of Jews but less worried about the killing of animals. But if he is willing to extend the neighbourhood encompassed by the sixth commandment to the animals at the beginning of his essay, by its conclusion he decisively returns to the anthropocentric universe in which Derrida finds him dwelling. That return and reinscription of the privilege of the human is most complexly evident in the account of Bobby with which my remarks began, especially in his characterization as the "last Kantian in Nazi Germany." Let us return to the story that is on Levinas's mind from the beginning of his essay, but whose details are relayed only in its closing sentences. For a few weeks, "about halfway through our long captivity," Levinas writes, the Nazi guards allowed "a wandering dog to enter into our lives." The prisoners call him "Bobby, an exotic name, as one does with a cherished dog." "He would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us as we returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight. For him, there was no doubt that we were men" (Levinas 1990b, 153).

For recognizing the faces of the prisoners as *human* faces, rather than as mere instruments, the *technē* of the Nazi regime, Bobby is called a "Kantian," the last of his kind. What can Levinas's striking anthropomorphism mean in this context? The answer to that question is necessarily difficult since Levinas's conception of human obligations to the animal other is here mediated both by his complex relationship with Kant¹³ and by Kant's own conception of animals. Most obviously, however, it is Bobby's seemingly dutiful behaviour towards the prisoners that attracts Levinas's ostensibly well-meaning attribution. We might recall that, according to Kant, human beings elicit respect for each other out of a compelling sense that the other person is a rational agent; that is, an agent who is capable of operating freely and thus in a disinterested fashion under the aegis of the moral law. Bobby behaves in a manner that appears to meet Kant's expectations of an unconditioned goodness, a goodness that refers neither to personal qualities or strengths (such as temperament or character) nor to obedience to the particular customs or laws of a society. Moreover, he grasps this founding quality in the prisoners, which, according to the fundamentally anthropocentric axioms of Kant's discourse, is indistinguishable from perceiving them as "men." As Kant (1997b, 14) argues, in observing the comportment of the (human) other, we apprehend the sentiment of profound respect – which he describes as something like "inclination" and "analogous to 'inclination' and

‘fear’ – that subjects our “animalistic,” non-rational interests in maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain to the force of rational rule. Grasping the freedom in the other to act in a manner that can be universally willed or followed, we necessarily confirm and enact the same freedom in and for ourselves. Until the guards expel him from the slave camp, Bobby is, for Levinas, a living testament to the survival of this moral life, the life that accedes categorically to the imperative: “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as end, never merely as a means” (Kant 1997b, 38).

Levinas pays Bobby this high compliment but instantly qualifies it to the point of retraction. For all of the respect that the dog outwardly embodies in his delighted barking, “friendly growling,” and wagging tail, and, notwithstanding the palpable way in which Levinas is moved by this show of affection and understanding, Bobby remains inwardly deficient, “without the brains needed to universalize maxims and drives” (Levinas 1990b, 153). He is too stupid, “*trop bête*,” the French condensing idiocy and animality into one crassly anthropocentric expression. Bobby makes up for the absence of unconditional goodness in the human neighbourhood; indeed, he embodies the last stand of that goodness. But because he lacks the know-how and the liberty truly to stop himself from acting in a way that cannot be universalized, he is only a kind of simulation. In a land that is all but devoid of freedom and rationality, Levinas puts to us, Bobby is as good as goodness gets. But his actions are at best a moral addendum to and substitute for true dutifulness. Although he looks like a Kantian and sounds like a Kantian, and has a humanizing effect on the prisoners that is explicitly called Kantian, he is *not* Kantian. How could he be? “The dog is a dog. Literally a dog!” (152). Levinas is adamant that we not misinterpret Bobby, lest we fall into fanciful stories about the faithfulness of animals: this is not Ithaca, and I am not Ulysses, he flatly reminds us. By characterizing the ethical and ontological question that Bobby vividly poses as a hermeneutical problem, however, Levinas deflects attention from the discomfiture that prompts his austere claim that Bobby is a kind of depthless surface, the experience of which should not be confused with the apprehension of the moral law that Kant reserves for humans and humans alone.

Because he is immured in his creatureliness, Bobby is putatively not at liberty to behave otherwise than according to his more or less craven interests. As such, he embodies Levinas’s (1988, 172) conviction that “the being of animals ... is a struggle for life without ethics.” Seen in this light, his reiterated desire to speak as literally and as unsentimentally as possible about animals takes on somewhat less flattering connotations: “the dog is a dog” is not

a benignly neutral description, still less a deanthropomorphizing attempt to let the dog be what it is, free from its human configurations but, quite to the contrary, a disciplinary action whose tautological form captures Levinas's desire to seal Bobby up in the prison of his species lest he say more or do more than what is anthropocentrically allotted him.

The most telling irony is that, in qualifying his claim that Bobby is the "last Kantian in Nazi Germany" on the grounds that he lacks "the brains needed to universalize maxims and drives," Levinas almost exactly reproduces Kant's estimation of animals.¹⁴ As Kant (1991, 237) argues, animals are not morally relevant creatures as such since they lack reason:

As far as reason alone can judge, man has duties only to men (himself and other men), since his duty to any subject is moral constraint by that subject's will. Hence, the constraining (binding) subject must, *first*, be a person; and this person must, *second*, be given as an object of experience, since man is to strive for the end of this person's will and this can happen only in a relation to each other of two beings that exist.

Without the *logos*, animals cannot directly oblige us, and, without obliging us, we are not bound to respect them in return. "But from all our experience we know of no being other than man that would be capable of obligation," Kant contends: "Man can therefore have no duty to any beings other than men" (1991, 237). Knowing full well how animals evoke warm sentiments in us and clearly concerned that we not purchase this pathos too cheaply, too uncritically, while we gaze into the eyes of our favourite horse or dog, Kant insists that we reflect more carefully on what it is we are actually doing when we show kindness to animals. If it appears that I have responsibilities to animals, he suggests, this is because I have failed to distinguish between two distinct kinds of duties: direct duties *towards* (*gegen*) an entity regarded as an end in itself, and indirect duties *with regard to* or *on behalf of* (*in Ansehung*) an entity regarded as a means to an end (237).¹⁵ According to this schema, Bobby cannot be "Kantian" except by a conceptual and rhetorical confusion that transposes what is properly due to the human *onto* the non-human. Kant calls this impropriety "amphiboly," but we might recognize it as the trope of prosopopoeia – the giving of a face to that which is faceless. As creatures of nature, Kant argues, animals are not ends in themselves and, as such, are closer to the category of things than to persons. This does not mean that we are free to be unkind towards them, but the argument for abstaining from cruelty is that it debases human beings, who remain the rule against which to measure all forms of respect. (Kant [1997a] thus applauds the English for

excluding butchers from jury duty; it was thought that their profession would induce a bloody-mindedness towards their human peers!) In so far as animals are thing-like, they do not oblige us directly; but insofar as they are *alive*, and in that quickness capable of mimicking the freedom that is the essential trait of humanity, animals do oblige us in an *indirect* fashion:

Animal nature has analogies to human nature, and by doing our duties to animals in respect of manifestations which correspond to manifestations of human nature, we indirectly do our duty towards humanity. Thus, if a dog has served his master long and faithfully, his service, on the analogy of human service, deserves reward. (Kant 1997a)

Like Kant, Levinas readily concedes that we have duties not to treat animals cruelly. But he is just as resolute in keeping these obligations from unsettling either a certain hierarchical order of life or the boundaries that institute the human subject. This, from the same interview in which he questions the face of the dog: “It is clear that, without considering animals as human beings, the ethical extends to all living beings. We do not want to make an animal suffer needlessly and so on. But the prototype of this is human ethics” (Levinas 1988, 172). It is unclear whether animals – without ethics and, for the most part, without a face – can be entities for which humans can have any sort of underived responsibilities, which is to say, responsibilities that would throw into question the primacy of the human neighbourhood. Bobby may be too preoccupied with his “struggle for life” to warrant the sort of obligations that are reserved for those creatures who think and have a “face” that one could turn *towards* rather than merely *regard*. As Llewelyn has brilliantly demonstrated, “in the metaphysical ethics of Levinas I can have direct responsibilities only toward beings that can speak, and this means beings that have a rationality that is presupposed by the universalizing reason that is fundamental in the metaphysics of ethics of Kant” (1991b, 57).

Like the biblical exemplar to which Levinas compares him, Bobby has “neither ethics nor *logos*” (152), and these absences have the curious effect of rendering him lifeless while still somehow remaining “alive.” Signalling dutifulness without actually knowing or speaking this obligation, without phenomenologically experiencing respect in the manner that Kant describes it, as “something” like “fear,” “something” like “inclination” (1997b, 14), Bobby is thus closer to a cyborg than to a sentient creature; he is not unlike an empty machine of the sort Descartes hallucinated when he looked at animals. But he is such a strangely attractive machine, fond thoughts of which haunt Levinas’s darkest recollections. “I am thinking of Bobby” means, after

all, “Witless creature though he is, I cannot forget him.” The dog’s declared moral status as a kind of animal-robot is strikingly at odds with the richly evocative details of his encounter with the prisoners, details that invite us – albeit against the grain of Levinas’s anthropocentrism – to think *otherwise* about the nature of responding and responsibility, and thus to unsettle the oppositional limit that would confine what are confusedly called “language,” “rationality,” and “ethics” solely to the human sphere.

Perhaps in dismissing the dog as *trop bête*, Levinas denies intellectually what he is compelled to acknowledge at an affective level. He may well disqualify Bobby as an authentic Kantian on “technical” grounds, but the brusqueness of his name-calling comes across as a defensive gesture made in the face of a danger it inadvertently reveals. For what *is* Bobby doing when, by Levinas’s own moving account, he so gaily greets the prisoners and recognizes them as “other” – that is, as “men”? More: what is “language” if it is not the wagging of a tail, and “ethics” if it is not the ability to greet one another and to dwell together *as* others? Levinas says Bobby is brainless, as if he were absent from his own actions, yet this claim only throws into relief the forceful and articulate enigma of the dog’s *presence* in the camp, the ways in which he obliges us to reconsider what we think we mean by *logos*, “animal,” and, of course, “we.” Notwithstanding Levinas’s desire to say “no” to the animal, Bobby’s face cannot be entirely refused, not because there is something residually “human” or “prehuman” about it but precisely because of its non-human excess, because that face, screened though it is through Levinas’s axiomatic discourse, constitutes a “yes” that is not a “yes,” a “yes” belonging uniquely to the animal, to *this* animal, and given freely to the human prisoners. It goes without saying that “gift” and “freedom,” like “animal” and “human,” are all figures put in question by the call of this enigmatic communication, always before us and beyond us. What then is the *logos* that it cannot account for Bobby’s languages, and for the multiplication of languages and the differences between languages across the oppositional limit dividing human from animal? Language is the implacable human standard against which the animal is measured and always found wanting; but what if the “animal” were to become the site of an excess against which one might measure the prescriptive, exclusionary force of the *logos*, the ways in which the truth of the rational word muffles, strangles, and finally silences the animal?

These questions are worth asking, it seems to me, because of the “audible” gap between what Bobby says and what Levinas hears him say. To his ears, the dog’s language sounds like silence, albeit a silence with an illustrious pedigree. As the essay’s concluding sentence confidently informs us, Bobby’s “friendly growling, his animal faith, was born from the silence of his

forefathers on the banks of the Nile” (Levinas 1990b, 153). In Exodus 11:7, to which Levinas is here referring, the dogs fall silent as mute witnesses to the righteousness of those who belong to the living God of Israel. While death moves across Egypt to claim all of its firstborn and an unprecedented outpouring of grief is heard across the land, Israel remains tranquil and safe. Even the witless dogs are compelled to recognize that fact:

A rabble of slaves will celebrate this high mystery of man, and “not a dog shall growl.” At the supreme hour of his institution, with neither ethics nor *logos*, the dog will attest to the dignity of its person. *This* is what the friend of man means. There is a transcendence in the animal! (152, emphasis mine)

Levinas’s exclamation has several connotations here. It recalls the Talmudic scholars who are wondrously struck by the phenomenon of a creature who finds itself out of its place in the order of things: “the paradox of a pure nature leading to rights” (152). “Transcendence” also reminds us of Bobby’s function as a silent and surrogate witness. As Shoshana Felman (1992, 3) argues, for Levinas the “witness’s speech is one which, by its very definition, transcends the witness who is but its medium, the medium of the realization of the testimony.” This transcendence would seem literally and even parodically to be the case with the dog, who involuntarily attests to the dignity of “man” without grasping the significance of what it has done. But where the lacuna between the witness and the witness’s speech (or, we could say, between the performative and constative functions of the testimonial act) exposes the human to “the absolutely other,” to whom it is held “hostage,” in the animal this transcendent convocation serves the sole function of confirming the exemplarity of the human: it is the animal’s privilege not only unwittingly to be held hostage by the human other but also never to be *autrui* for “man.” According to an authoritarian logic that informs almost all of Levinas’s essay, by which the animal has in the mode of not-having, the dog is granted the power to be more than itself only insofar as it rigorously remains itself – *dans l’animal* – vis-à-vis “Man.” The terms of this paradoxical, and, as it were, one-sided responsibility are corroborated by Levinas’s uncertain pronoun reference – “This” – which makes it impossible to determine whether the dog is “the friend of man” in spite of or *because* it lacks “ethics” and “*logos*.” It may well be that, as long as animals are quiet, as long as they remain speechless and stupid, they will be allowed into the neighbourhood of the human – but always under the threat of deportation – to perform a certain supplemental witnessing work.

If the animal speaks, it will speak only silence, in deference to those who truly possess language and ethics.

What is important here, however, is the way in which the muteness of the animal resonates with Levinas's account of his treatment by his captors. In this silence, which is decidedly *not* a silence at all but, rather, articulate gestures and sounds peremptorily *figured* and denegated as silence, it is impossible not to hear an echo of the muteness to which Levinas is reduced by the Nazis. For Levinas, nothing captures the violence of anti-Semitism more powerfully than the Nazis' unwillingness to hear the suffering voices of their prisoners. The unspeakable Holocaust begins with an assault on the language of its victims, and, for that reason, Levinas's account of life in Camp 1492 is rich with semiotic metaphors and turns upon a series of thwarted, interned, and strangled speech acts. "The strength and wretchedness of persecuted people" resounds through the camp yet is reduced to "a small inner murmur" (Levinas 1990b, 153), heard only in the heart of the prisoners. Their richly diverse languages – written, gestural, affective – go perversely unnoticed, held in a kind of suspended animation: "our sorrow and laughter, illnesses and distractions, the work of our hands and the anguish of our eyes, the letters we received from France and those accepted for our families – all passed in parenthesis" (153). So important is the connection between language and responsibility that Levinas can only describe the heartless abrogation of the latter in semiotic terms as the sun-dering of significance itself. For him, Nazi racism "shuts people away in a class, deprives them of expression and condemns them to being 'signifiers without a signified'" (153). Summing up the experience of these silencings, Levinas asks: "How can we deliver a message about our humanity which, from behind the bars of quotation marks, will come across as anything other than monkey talk?" (153). Monkey talk? For the Nazis a languageless human is nothing more than an animal; but what is "animality" that it not only names the incoherence to which the Nazis reduce the Jews but also represents the figure that comes most readily to hand to describe what it feels like to live and survive that degradation?

Reading this bestializing figure, I am thinking of Bobby's barking and of the ancient assumption, against all intuitive evidence, that animal sounds are merely *phonē asēmos*, "signifiers without a signified." When we are told that Levinas and his fellow prisoners "were beings entrapped in their species ... beings without language" (153), we might be forgiven for recalling what this essay so matter-of-factly says about Bobby in almost exactly the same words. For a disconcerting moment, the prisoners and the dog threaten to exchange their differently silenced spaces – a crossing made all the more

troublesome in an essay that begins, as I have argued, by asking us to consider the butchery of animals against the backdrop of the extermination of the Jews. Can we find the words to answer for the contiguity of these silences? How *not* to speak of it? How to read the Nazi subjection of the Jews and Levinas's subjection of the animal *slowly enough*?

Levinas naturalizes his anthropocentric projections on Bobby by seeing them from the reverse angle: the prisoner watches the dog watching the prisoners and, in watching, ostensibly witnessing the truth of their humanity. Simultaneously welcomed, regulated, and expelled, Bobby traces and retraces the oppositional limits that configure the human and the animal. Surviving "in some wild patch in the region of the camp" (Levinas 1990b, 153), he is the subaltern who, for a time, moves freely from the untamed margins of Camp 1492 into its closely surveilled and policed interior. He is the outsider who accidentally befalls Levinas's world, yet the very fact that he instantly recognizes the men *as* men reminds us that he is a domesticated creature and, thus, already a dweller *inside*, with and among humans. As befits the savagely dystopic conditions of the slave camp, the dog reverses the function of the scapegoat and is received *into* the polis to perform a certain purifying work, only to be cast out by the guards after "a few short weeks," thereby returning the camp to its savage "integrity." The introjection of Bobby's (simulated) goodness restores a minimal health to the camp, yet his inclusion is also inseparable from his summary exclusion from the neighbourhood of human freedom and rationality. *Mon semblable, – mon frère*: at once beneficial, inasmuch as he augurs the last remnants of a Kantian dutifulness (and, for that is named and cherished), *and* risky, insofar as he provisionally substitutes for the human, speaking out of turn when no one else speaks (and, for that, carefully treated with unsentimental caution). He is the good medicine whose salutary effects are powerful enough to reach far forward into Levinas's future; but his impact is finally only a placebo effect, or perhaps a form of animal triage in a time of terrible need. Bobby performs a limited testimonial function, speaking for the other without the *logos*; but this role is a temporary measure, in earnest of the true human witness whose account – in the form of Levinas's essay – has always already usurped Bobby's place in our reading of it.

Notes

- 1 Versions and portions of this chapter were presented at the meetings of the Modern Language Association (San Diego 1994), the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism (Durham 1995), and the Kentucky Foreign Language Association (1996). For listening to and commenting upon this chapter, I am very grateful to Peter Babiak, Stephen Barber, Rebecca Gagan, Jennifer Ham, Alice Kuzniar, Matthew Senior, Patricia Simmons, and Tracy Wynne. This chapter was prepared for republication with the able assistance of Naureen Hamidani and Lisa Devries. Research for this project was partially funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and by the Arts Research Board of McMaster University.
- 2 "Beyond Pathos" is the title of the opening section of *Difficult Freedom*.
- 3 The homelessness of this "home" is brought out by Levinas (1990b, 152), who remarks upon the "extraordinary coincidence" of the "fact that the camp bore the number 1492, the year of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain under the Catholic Ferdinand V."
- 4 And yet one way of instantly complicating this point would be to consider more carefully the telling ambiguities and strange torsions characterizing conceptions of animality in Nazi Germany. "Virtually nothing has been written about the Nazis' bizarre attitudes towards animals," Goldhagen (1996, 566) points out (but see Arluke and Sax 1992). By way of initiating the important task of that history, Goldhagen documents the dutiful attention that Germans paid to animals. Police battalions were regularly issued orders compelling Germans to provide dogs with good veterinary care - this, of course, while Jews were barred from medical attention or were summarily executed for being sick or being characterized as sick. Goldhagen rightly asks, "Did the killers ... not reflect on the difference in treatment they were meting out to dogs and Jews?" (268).

The orders concerning dogs might have provoked the Germans to think about their vocation if their sensibilities had remotely approximated our own; the comparison in their expected treatment of dogs and their actual treatment of Jews might have fostered in the Germans self-examination and knowledge. Yet, however much the reading of these orders about dogs would have evoked disturbing comparisons in non-Nazified people, the effect of the series of orders sent out regarding "cruelty to animals" (*Tierquälerei*) would have likely been to the non-Nazified psychologically gripping, even devastating. (269)

Does Levinas's essay spring from such devastating knowledge? That is, does his reflection upon "Bobby" and upon animals emerge in part from the realization that it is the Nazified Germans who are being urged to be "Kantians," according to animals the fundamental respect that is denied to the Jews?

A history of the Nazis and animals would undoubtedly need to include a discussion of the phenomenon of keeping animals for viewing and for pleasurable entertainment *within* the death camps. What, we might ask, is the mirroring status of a "camp" devoted to the incarcerated preservation of (animal) life *inside* a camp whose function it is to annihilate (human) life? See, for example, the extraordinary photographs of the zoo caged within the confines of Treblinka in Klee, Dressen, and

Reiss (1988, 226–7). Others who have written tellingly about the Nazis and animals include Ferry (1995) (see especially the chapter entitled “Nazi Ecology: The November 1933, July 1934, and June 1935 Legislations” [91-107]). Examining the legislation regarding the treatment and protection of animals drafted out at the behest of the National Socialist party, Ferry makes the fascinating point that the Nazis were radically original in “that, for the first time in history, the animal, as a natural being, is protected *in its own right, and not with respect to men*. A long humanist, even humanitarian, tradition defended the idea that it was indeed necessary to prohibit cruelty toward animals, but more because it translated a bad disposition of human nature, or even risked inciting humans to perform violent acts, than because it was prejudicial to the interests of the animals themselves” (99). In other words, the Nazis urged Germans to accord animals the respect that they categorically demanded by virtue of being *alive*. From the point of view of the *Tierschutzgesetz* (laws providing for the protection of animals), the Kantian notion of respect is lacking because it confines dutiful obligation only to other human beings. And as Ferry points out, the argument for the sanctity of animal life is made at the same time as “Jewish barbarity” involving “ritual slaughter” of animals is condemned, and while pages are devoted to ensuring the safe passage of animals “by train” across Germany and German territories (101).

- 5 Matthew Senior has reminded me that Eugène Ionesco “animalizes” the Nazis in *Rhinoceros*.
- 6 The phrase is from Jacques Derrida and is discussed at length later in this chapter. See Derrida (1995, 280).
- 7 Nancy uses this phrase in one of his questions to Derrida. See Derrida (1995, 285).
- 8 I follow the translation of Sheehan (1988). Part of the German text is found in Schirmacher (1983, 25).
- 9 Derrida discusses the “contradictory and impossible” logic underwriting Heidegger’s claim (in *Sein und Zeit*) that “the animal has a world in the mode of not-having” (Derrida 1989, 47-57).
- 10 I am thinking here of Heidegger’s use of this phrase in *Being and Time*. See Heidegger (1972, 50).
- 11 I borrow and modify David Farrell Krell’s (1992, 8) insight into Heidegger’s vexed view of animal life: “Unfortunately, the clear division of ontic from ontological, and biological from existential, depends upon a scission in being that ostensibly would divide Dasein from just-plain-life without making such life absolutely inaccessible to it.”
- 12 William Spanos (1993, 196), whose work on Heidegger and on the technological perspective of the West *after* Heidegger powerfully informs this section of my chapter, points out that “to cultivate and bring to fruition” means “‘to colonize’ in the Roman sense of the word.”
- 13 Space prevents me from addressing the important question of how Levinas’s critique of Kant colours the argument of “The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights.” We should recall that, for Levinas, Kant’s understanding of “obligation” is insufficiently scandalous. As Jean-François Lyotard (1988, 112) argues: “If I am obligated by the other, it is not because the other has some right to obligate me which I would have directly or mediately granted him or her. My freedom is not the source of his or her authority: one is not obligated because one is free, and because your law is my law, but because your request is not my law, because we are liable for the other. Oblig-

ation through freedom or consent is secondary.” Perhaps one way in which Levinas signals the “secondariness” of Kantian obligation is by ambivalently attributing it to an *animal*, indeed, an animal whose kind is on the verge of extinction. The fact that respect has, as it were, gone to the dogs, may say as much about the inherent limitations of Kant’s conception of obligation as it does about the exterminating violence of “Nazi Germany.”

- 14 For a useful summary of Kant’s position with respect to animals, see Broadie and Pybus (1974) and Naragon (1990).
- 15 For the German, see Kant (1912–23, vol. 7, 256).
- 16 Levinas (1981, 125): “The responsibility for another, an unlimited responsibility which the strict book-keeping of the free and non-free does not measure, requires subjectivity as an irreplaceable hostage.”

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