

To do what one ought to do: Reconsidering Heidegger's Thesis:

“the animal is poor in world.”

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This essay takes its point of departure from Section 63 of Martin Heidegger's *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* where, after a remarkable elaboration on the problem of the animal in relation to the question of world, he calls into question the accuracy of maintaining his guiding thesis on the animal: “the animal is poor in world.”¹ Heidegger himself is not only troubled by the manner in which he situates the animal within a duplicitous framework of having and not having world but also by the manner in which he situates the quality of being poor in world as specifically a being deprived of world. He proposes the following objection to his own thesis:

It is certainly true that in the case of the animal we find a not-having in distinction from the case of man. And it is equally certain that this not-having on the part of the animal is essentially different from that of the stone. But is this not-having on the part of the animal a deprivation of world, an essential poverty with regard to the world? For the animal could only be deprived of world if at least it knew something of world. But this is precisely what we have denied in the case of the animal – and indeed we must deny this all the more to the animal in view of the fact that *man himself*, to whose essence world-formation belongs, *at first and for the most regard, does not know of world as such*. However things may be in this regard, if the world is

essentially closed to the animal then we can indeed talk of a not-having, but we are never permitted to understand this as a deprivation. Consequently the thesis concerning the animal's poverty in the world goes too far.²

In what way is Heidegger concerned that his thesis on the animal exceeds what can be rightly said of the animal? For Heidegger insofar as the animal is determined as being deprived, the essence of the animal only ever comes about in terms of its negativity in relation to the positive determinations said to be of the essence of man and its relation and access to world. We should note here, and I hope to eventually come back to this at some stage, Heidegger also adds a statement of caution that inasmuch as the animal cannot be said to be deprived of world because it does not know world as such, we, at the same time cannot properly ascertain the manner in which man *knows* world either. To repeat from the same quotation: "[F]or the animal could only be deprived of world if at least it knew something of world. But this is precisely what we have denied in the case of the animal – and indeed we must deny this all the more to the animal in view of the fact that *man himself*, to whose essence world-formation belongs, *at first and for the most regard, does not know of world as such.*"³ Here, in a preliminary manner we ask how are we to distinguish between the use of the verbs *to have* and *to know* in relation to world and *how*, if possible, might this complicate the structure of Heidegger's three theses? What is the difference between *knowing* and *having* world? And how does the question of the stone, animal, and man operate within this difference? Which one of us could ever dare to say that they *have* or *know* world, and how could one explain this *possession-of* or *belonging-to*, if we could call it that or think of it in those terms? These are not easy questions, but nonetheless ones we should keep in mind. At this point, however, let us continue with Heidegger's objections to his thesis on the animal and bracket these concerns for the time being.

Returning to Heidegger's objection, we can see that for him this thesis is misleading because the animal's manner of being proper emerges and can only be maintained in and through a comparison with that which is understood to be the proper being of man. This thesis "encourages the mistaken view that the being of the animal in itself is intrinsically deprivation and poverty."⁴ Consequently, if we are to maintain the use of this thesis we must understand the way in which it is a "comparative illustration"⁵ of the animal in relation to man. For Heidegger, "this characterization of the animal by means of poverty in world is not a genuine one, not drawn from animality itself and maintained within the limits of animality, since the character of poverty in world is being conceived by comparison with man."⁶ We

can see then that this thesis never escapes a certain anthropocentric relation, and since Heidegger would like to determine and thus delimit the essence of animality from in and out of itself, it is in this regard that this thesis in Heidegger's words: "goes too far."

However, as much as Heidegger maintains in this instance that his thesis oversteps a proper delimitation of the essence of animality, at the end of Section 63 and subsequently the end of his discussion of the animal in this book he asks: "why are we concerning ourselves at such length with the character of this thesis? It surely suffices that the substantive examination of the thesis has led us to our destination in a practical fashion. In spite of everything it has brought us closer to an elucidation of the concept of world."⁷ It is here that we must remember that Heidegger's pathway into the question of the animal was by no means accidental. His attempt to delimit the essence of animality was actually an attempt to come closer to a more substantive unfolding of the question: What is world? What could be called Heidegger's circumnavigation of the animal and its relation to world was more importantly for him a way of *cutting away the edges of that which does not belong* in order to ascertain a more clear understanding of man as world-forming and subsequently unfold the essence of world. This led Heidegger to conclude that:

[W]e have no right now, or at least *as yet no right to alter our thesis that the animal is poor in world or to level it down* to the indifferent statement that the animal has no world, whereby not having is taken as a mere not-having rather than as deprivation. Rather we must *leave open the possibility* that the proper and explicit metaphysical understanding of the essence of world compels us to understand the animal's not-having of world as a *deprivation after all*, and to discover *poverty* in the animal's specific manner of being as such.⁸

What are we to make of this conclusion? While Heidegger recognizes that his thesis is an improper delimitation on the animal, at the same time he claims for the time being we will have to make do with this statement insofar as we do not have an "explicit metaphysical understanding of the essence of world" that could allow us to properly delimit the animal and its relation to world. Thus for Heidegger when we say that that animal both has and does not have world, the problem is less the character of the animal and more so our own inadequate understanding of world. Carefully reading this passage we also note that Heidegger writes about poverty as the animal's specific manner of being as such, not its essential mode of being. Heidegger leaves open the question of essence pertaining to the animal. At the end of Section 63 Heidegger concludes his elaboration of the animal by

stating that his thesis: "*the animal is poor in world*" must remain as a problem."⁹ It is here, from what remains of this concluding point, that we find our beginning. In our unwillingness to accede to the same compromise as Heidegger we will attempt to work through what Heidegger himself admits to having left in suspension and thus bear the burden of his so-called "excessive" thesis on the animal, giving ourselves, as it were, the time to labour over its remnants. Thus we must begin, if we have not already, by finding a way out of the forest only to follow the trails of light back in.

Let us first recall Heidegger's three theses: "[1.] The stone is worldless; [2.] The animal is poor in world; [3.] Man is world-forming."¹⁰ Taking as his point of departure the intermediate thesis on the animal, Heidegger makes it clear that his thesis is a proposition about the animal, *all* animals, *every* animal. Even though this thesis forms part of a three-fold comparative analysis on the essence of world, it is meant to open up a way in which we can begin "to say something about animality as such, something about the essence of the animal"¹¹ irrespective of the designations of man and-or interpretations of life sciences. For Heidegger one must be vigilant regarding interpretations of animal life adopted from the human domain. To speak of, *on*, to the essence of the animal requires a perspective that is not dependent on a system of comparison for its basis. Hence when we ask, just as Heidegger does, "where does the proposition 'the animal is poor in world' come from?"¹² we concur with Heidegger that this thesis presupposes or delimits something in advance. It "ultimately involves an *antecedent determination* of what belongs in general to the essence of the animal, that is," he specifies, "a delimitation of the field within which any positive investigation of animals must move."¹³ As much as Heidegger's investigation works within and alongside the development of knowledges within life sciences, "it is not through these fields that its truth is to be determined." For Heidegger this thesis attempts to carve out a philosophical orientation to the question of the animal that negotiates with recent discoveries in the field of science while escaping the limitations of empirical analysis. For Heidegger, "science will not allow itself to enter into such crisis because it is already much too preoccupied with the realm of practical and technical serviceability."¹⁴ Life sciences presuppose access to the essence of the animal creature while the structures in which these essences can be unfolded do not open up that access.¹⁵ Thus, for Heidegger we must find new ways of unfolding the question of the animal outside the parameters of the scientific approach.

With this said, let us take a closer look at the structure of this thesis and in specific Heidegger's use of the terms "poor" and "world." Heidegger designates the term poor not in the sense of a quantitative or "hierarchical

evaluation”¹⁶ but rather in the sense of a “being deprived,”¹⁷ while world, we must understand, in a preliminary way here, as a kind of having access to things. It is important for Heidegger that we understand his designation of the term poor in the specific sense of being deprived, since poor, in the sense of having less, concedes to a logic of comparison with man that assumes certain capacities belonging to man as better or higher or more variable. For instance, how would we respond to one who states the following: “Is it not rather obvious that, for instance, if we take the case of a butterfly, it merely knows the plants of the garden it frequents, its forms of nourishment, the looming shadow of its predators and that is all? How can we hold that in comparison to the greatness of man who builds cities, navigates the ocean with ships, the sky with airplanes? Surely, we have yet to witness an animal that could this. It seems rather too obvious that man is greater than the animal.” To this one might argue: “In what sense can we say we are infinitely greater than the animal, for instance if we are to compare our eyesight to that of the hawk circling in the sky above, our sense of smell to the canine following prey through the forest or the cheetah moving across the Saharan planes. Could we not argue the opposite just as easily? Animals may access and move about the world in other ways but could we not just as easily characterize ourselves as the poor ones, in the sense of having less, with respect to the infinite variety of animal capacities to which we do not possess?” While this insight allows for a reconsideration of the assumed higher status of man with respect to animals, what it can say about the essence of the animal is disputable. Heidegger asks: “May we talk of a ‘higher’ and a ‘lower’ at all in the realm of what is essential? Is the essence of man higher than the essence of the animal? All this is questionable even as a question.”¹⁸ If we to attempt to speak of the essence of the animal from in and out of animality itself these comparative modes of evaluation must be foregone or at least reconsidered for the legitimacy, limits and usefulness they pose.¹⁹ Thus let us move away from characterizing the animal’s poorness in terms of measure or evaluations in order to see how Heidegger uses the term poor in the sense of being deprived.

We ask: does an understanding of being poor as being deprived allow us to rewrite our initial thesis on the animal as: ‘the animal is deprived of world?’ If so, why was this not our initial thesis to start with? For Heidegger, as soon as we characterize the animal as being deprived of world, in the sense of not having, it is reduced to being on par with the worldlessness of the stone. But as the animal does indeed have some form of world, how are we to distinguish the animal’s deprivation of world from that of the stone? Although worldlessness and poverty both indicate forms of not having world the distinction is that worldlessness “is constitutive of the stone in

the sense that the stone cannot even be deprived of something like world."²⁰ It is without world insofar as it does not have access to any *thing*. In the case of the stone while it may form part of what we call the earth, whether it is pebbles lying on a footpath, the rocky edge of a mountainous cliff, "the earth is *not given* for the stone as an underlying support which bears it, let alone given as earth."²¹ Everything for the stone remains inaccessible to *it*. We cannot say that the stone is deprived of world because this would constitute a relation whereby the stone would somehow participate in the world but nonetheless have something withheld from it. The stone falls outside the possibility of participating in a having and-or not-having of world. Its mode of beinglessness does not allow for the possibility of its being deprived. It is without the without of being deprived. The impossibility of access, possession, givenness to world characterizes the worldlessness of the stone. As such, "having no access is precisely what makes possible its specific kind of being, i.e. the realm of being of physical and material nature and laws governing it."²²

Turning back to the question of the animal then, let us follow Heidegger's comparative illustration of the lizard basking in the sun in order to demonstrate how the stone and the animal are essentially different in their relation to world. For Heidegger, the lizard does not have an arbitrary relation to its surroundings like a stone lying on a footpath. If we were to pick up a stone and throw it into the river, it would fall to the bottom until another force came along and sent it elsewhere. "According to circumstance," Heidegger writes, "the stone crops up here or there, amongst and amidst a host of other things, but always in such a way that everything present around it remains essentially *inaccessible* to the stone itself."²³ Moreover its relation to the world is arbitrary and insofar as it is inanimate. It has no access to things whatsoever. However, if we consider the lizard lying on a stone in the sun, if we were to remove the lizard from its stone, it would not simply lie wherever we have put it but start looking for its stone again.²⁴ Unlike the stone it has a specific relation, its *own* relation to its surroundings. Thus we can see a distinction between "the specific manner of being pertaining to the lizard and to *animals*, and the specific *manner of being* pertaining to a *material thing*."²⁵ Since the lizard is not worldless like the stone, but indeed has a particular relation to things, then in what sense can it be said to be deprived? We have yet to resolve this question and can only do so by way of situating the lizard in relation to world-having man.

For Heidegger the deprivation of the lizard, which he further extends to all animals, is the lack of access to the "as suchness" of things. For example, "the rock on which the lizard lies is not given for the lizard *as rock*" or "the sun in which it is basking is not given for the lizard *as sun*."²⁶ "When

we say that the lizard is lying on the rock,” Heidegger suggests that “we ought to cross out the word ‘rock’ in order to indicate that whatever the lizard is lying on is certainly given *in some way* for the lizard, and yet is not known to the lizard as a rock.²⁷ While the lizard has specific relations to the sun, which we can only attempt to understand, at the same time it does not have access to the sun as sun or the rock as rock. For Heidegger the animal lacks this linguistic framework. The animal is deprived of this relation that is particular to man. And therefore, in a comparative manner, Heidegger is right to situate the animal as being deprived. Yet, inasmuch as this comparative illustration of the animal delimits the animal in terms of that-which-is-not-human, we would like to ask of Heidegger, as Derrida does, whether or not being deprived is an accurate way of speaking about the animal’s withheldness, or, on the other hand, if the animal indeed has an altogether *other* relationship to things. For Derrida it is not that “the animal has a lesser relationship, a more limited access to entities, it has an *other* relationship.”²⁸ Heidegger recognizes this other relationship but nonetheless does not characterize it in this manner. What remains for us is how to engage with this otherness, testify to it and at the same time not determine it within a human frame of reference. Whether or not this is possible is indeed our question. If “being deprived” always delimits the animal within a human frame of reference how do we move outside of this determination, or better, address the limit of this determination? How would it come to be manifest in language? If it is possible to think the alterity of the animal from in and out of the question of animality – as opposed to that which is merely not-human – might this allow us or force us to re-write, un-write, cross-through Heidegger’s thesis on the animal?

We should remind ourselves that Heidegger is not ignorant of these questions. Although they are never figured as such, let us return to a remarkable moment in Heidegger’s discussion of the lizard that we have already briefly touched upon, where like little hummingbirds we shall hover as if to have found some sort of bountiful nectar. The passage reads:

when we say that the lizard is lying on the rock, *we ought to cross out the word ‘rock’* in order to indicate that whatever the lizard is lying on is certainly given *in some way* for the lizard, and yet is not known to the lizard as a rock. If we *cross out the word* we do not simply mean to imply that something else is in question here or is taken as something else. Rather we imply that whatever it is is not accessible to it *as a being*.²⁹

First, I should add that we are not the first to discover this nectar. In chapter six of Derrida’s book *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the question* Derrida

draws attention to this specific passage and elaborates on the manner in which Heidegger writes that *we ought to* demonstrate the lizard's lack of access to the sun or rock *as such* by striking a line through the word rock or sun, *but* at the same time does not perform the very act which he says we ought to. For Heidegger since the lizard is withheld from the *as suchness* of things when *we write on* the lizard's relation to the rock, *it should* be crossed-out at the very same moment of its indication. *Not* in order "to imply that something else is in question here or is taken as something else,"³⁰ but rather because the lizard is deprived of the linguistic framework whereby the rock can be recognized as rock. To write that the lizard lies on the rock does not accurately characterize the lizard's own relation to the rock because the lizard does not know the rock as such. This is a linguistic ordering to which the animal cannot be said to have access. Crossing through rock would more properly testify to the lizard's in-experience of the rock as such, its impossibility of naming the rock as such and the manner in which access to the word marks a border of non-passage or non-recognition. As Derrida writes,

the erasing would mark in *our* language, by avoiding a word, this inability of the animal to name. But this is first of all the inability to open itself to the *as such* of the thing. It is not of the rock as such that the lizard has experience. That is why the name of the rock must be erased when we want to designate what the lizard is stretched out upon.³¹

While the word may circumscribe man and animal, the animal always-remains possessed by language but never a possessor, never a respondent. As long as its being deprived is a deprivation of the *as suchness* of things, the animal remains forever deprived of a linguistic order held in common with man. As Heidegger writes, "the sign of such exclusion "is that no animal or plant 'has the word?'"³² But nonetheless its exclusion remains and is always sign-ed. As negative as these determinations may read, let's not fly away just yet. Instead let us hover on this possibility of the crossing-through to see if perhaps *on* this point, on the oughtness of *rewriting, un-writing, writing-through, crossing-out* the word in reference to the animal, we can *mark-out* an intervention *on* Heidegger's thesis. Derrida asks: "What is signaled by this animal crossing-through, if we can call it that? Or rather, what is signaled by the word 'crossing-through' which we write a propos of the animal 'world' and which ought, in its logic, to overtake all words from the moment they say something about the world?"³³ "The crossing through," he adds, "recalls a benumbedness of the animal."³⁴

If *we* are to *name the* animal (which we have yet to consider) name *for*

the animal, speak of its relations to things in and through *our* language, what would happen if we followed through with Heidegger's ought-to? What would happen if every time we spoke of the lizard, the animal, every animal, all animals and their relations with things we always crossed-out the word in the very same gesture of its deployment; marking the word both as-is-and-as-not? What if, taking this consideration seriously, from now on we were to continually strike a line through any of our discourses on the animal as a mode of being responsible towards the animal and a manner of avoiding the catachrestic impulses inherent in the word, in naming? Where would such a process start, where would it end, what would happen to language *as such*? If the animal is always necessarily included in language without having access to it, might this naming and crossing-through of the name testify to a more proper designation of the animal's *place in* language as always included but never properly *signed* in terms of the exclusion proper to it?

We must admit however, one of the problems we instantly face with this crossing-through. How could this striking through of the word -which we must understand does not render the word unintelligible but rather leaves it intact to be read as something simultaneously as-and-as-not- become manifest in speech? Is this something the voice can never perform without a supplementary explanation or textual reference? Or is the act of crossing-through merely a textual project, something the voice can never accomplish in the same way or with the same economy as writing?

Are we bold enough to carry out this crossing-through whenever we address the 'as suchness' of things with respect to the lizard, the animal, all animals, every animal? But perhaps we should add: can we really delimit this project of the crossing-through to the question of the animal, does it not reintroduce language as a problem for world-forming man as well. For instance, would it not be the case that we could only use the word man if we knew without hesitation what this name designates *as such*? And yet, here we recall one of Heidegger's concluding concerns that we drew attention to at the beginning of this paper: "*man himself*," he writes, "to whose essence world-formation belongs, *at first and for the most regard, does not know of world as such.*" In what sense then can we maintain that this crossing-through begins and ends with the question of the animal? And what about the stone, how would we write of, on, as a stone and its inaccessibility to the possibility of inaccessibility of things as such? Since it is always without the without of the animal's so-called deprived relation, might we inscribe a double-crossing? Or are we "going too far," and perhaps all these differences cannot be manifest in crossing-through words at all but rather only in silence, the writing of the blank? But can silence or the writing of the

blank ever escape the linguistic frame, or is silence or the blank just as deceptive as the word?

As such are we coming any closer to the essence of the animal or only casting a tightrope into the abyss? Let us go along with Derrida when he writes: "it would not be a matter of 'giving speech back' to animals but perhaps to accede to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, as something other than a privation."³⁵ The last part again: "the word otherwise, as something other than a privation." This is what we have been attempting, by way of and in the hope of being able to do what *one ought to do*, namely, *rewrite, unwrite, write-through, cross-out* Heidegger's thesis on the animal.

As much as the possibility of this crossing out would mark in *our* language the animal's being deprived of the *as suchness* of things, this act not only opens up the problem of the word but also the problem of the name and naming in relation to the animal. It is not enough to *write-through, write-on, write-over* Heidegger's thesis since the relation between what is said to be the animal becomes a problem in the very designation of the term. "Animal" circumscribes and condenses a large variety of different life forms within a single name. As a result we must go further than merely troubling ourselves with the animal's relation to the *as suchness* of things. Rather it is just as important to consider ways of rethinking the act of naming itself and how this designation acts as a kind of anthropocentric armour for the defining of man. Moreover, we must consider the very term animal and what it designates *as such*.

In "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," Derrida writes, "[T]he animal, what a word! The animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to another living creature [*a l'autre vivant*]."³⁶ For Derrida we should not assume a certain neutrality of power relations in the act of naming. The designation of "the animal," Derrida writes, is a "wrong" that "derives from the word or rather it comes together in the word animal that men have given themselves at the origin of humanity and that they have given themselves in order to identify themselves, in order to recognize themselves, with a view to being what they say they are, namely men, capable of replying and responding in the name of men."³⁷ Not only does the name animal designate all animals, every animal under the same name, but it also functions as a mirror of negative identification for the recognition of man. In order to identify *who* and *what we are*, we have designated the term animal in order to erect a single, non-permissible border between what-we-are and what-we-are-not. One comes to understand, recognize,

and identify oneself *as-man-as-such* by circumscribing that which is deprived of *our* particular mode of being in the general concept of animal. As such, what is said to be animal acts as a securing device for the survival and maintenance of the human, all humans, every human. According to Derrida,

[A]nimal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give. These humans found giving it to themselves, this word, but as if they had received it as an inheritance. They have given themselves the word in order to corral a large number of living beings within a single concept: “the animal,” they say. And they have given themselves this word, at the same time according themselves, reserving for them, for humans, the right to the word, the name, the verb, the attribute, to a language of words, in short to the very thing that the others in question would be *deprived of*, those that are corralled with the grand territory of the beasts: the Animal.³⁸

Here once again we are brought back to the problem of the animal’s deprivation. Yet insofar as “the animal” is deprived of language it cannot be said to escape a *relation-to*, and a place *within* language. Derrida notes that in the word animal there is an irresponsible designation that gathers together different life forms said to be not human under this single concept. Yet not only is there an irresponsible and reductive designation of the name animal onto all things perceived *as-not-and-therefore-as-such*, but as well there is the manner in which *we* bestow onto *ourselves* the right to name and make use of that right in relation to the animal which is deprived of a linguistic framework for experience. Therefore in addition to asking: what is it to speak *of, on, to* the animal, we ask what kind of power comes to operate in the act of naming? Is there a manner of rethinking the act of naming and what the name makes of “the animal” insofar as it has and does not have the word? And, if we are to proceed like Heidegger by attempting to think the animality of the animal from in and out of the animal ~~as-such~~, what is the relation between the name and an essence? And why, we wonder, does the question of the animal always bring with it the question of the human? Are these questions always inseparable? Is there a possibility for their separation, or will they always move within this pendulum where the one always necessitates a change in the other?

For some assistance with this matter let us turn to John Locke who in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* discusses the manner in which a name stands for and binds together the abstract idea of a thing *as such* with its proper essence. Locke states the following:

For the having the essence of any species, being that which makes

anything to be that species; and the conformity to the idea to which the name is annexed being that which gives a right to that name; the having the essence, and the having that conformity, must needs be the same thing; *since to be of any species and to have a right to the name of that species, is all one*. As, for example, to be a *man*, or of the *species man*, and to have right to the *name man*, is the same thing. Again, to be a man, or of the species man, and have the *essence* of a man, is the same thing. Now since nothing can be a man, or have a right to the name man, but what has a conformity to the abstract idea the name man stands for, nor anything be a man, or have a right to the species man, but what has the essence of that species; it follows, that the abstract idea for which the name stands, and the essence of the species, is one and the same.³⁹

For Locke there is no separation between the name and the essence of the abstract idea that it designates. To be and to have a word for this being "is one and the same" insofar as both conform to the abstract idea that the word represents. Following the same example of Locke, the designation of the term man is always bound and always corresponds to an abstract idea "for which the name stands" and which one has a "right to the name" *as such*. Returning to the question of the animal, let us re-cite Locke's example of man this time substituting man for animal, to see how it reads differently:

As for example, to be an *animal*, or of the species *animal*, and to have right to the name *animal*, is the same thing. Again to be an *animal*, or of the species *animal*, and have the essence of an *animal*, is the same thing. Now since nothing can be an *animal*, or have a right to the name *animal*, but what has a conformity to the abstract idea the name *animal* stands for, nor anything be an *animal*, or have a right to the species *animal*, but what has the essence of that species.⁴⁰

The logic of Locke's conclusion which might have *appeared* clear in his discussion of man becomes problematic in and through substituting the name man for animal. Why is that? How does the animal complicate Locke's argument? Let us start with this concern: if, as we have been stating, the animal is always deprived of the word *as such* but at the same time never escapes being named and consequently being marked by *our* language, *and*, since we are attempting to think the essence of the animal from in and out of animality itself, in what way is a determination of the essence of the animal possible given that the animal cannot bestow upon itself the very name animal? While I think this is clear, let us try and simplify.

For Locke, to be an animal, to belong to the species animal must also be comprised of a “right to the name” *as such*.⁴¹ *Animal Rights? A right to the name?* But it knows nothing of *it, itself, it-as-such*, therefore how can this arbitrary sign not merely name but testify to the essence and the idea of the animal as such? The name presupposes an intelligible essence as much as an essence is said to always accompany a proper name and a unity thereof a general idea for that name. If the animal can be said to complicate Locke’s argument we must ask: *can we speak of essences without naming? Is naming always bound to the determination of an essence? An essence-without-name?* If we are to believe that a name testifies to an essence or an essence to a name we must also factor in *our* central problem with the term “animal.” “The Animal” is not a term that arises from in and out of animality itself – whatever that is – but is rather of an anthropocentric determination. For Locke, to be of and belong to the term animal also requires the right to name. The animal, deprived of the right, receives its name from another being, a being which *gives* itself *other rights*, the incredulous naming beast, “Man.” But even this “figure,” does it know *who* and *what* it names? As such our problem is much more complex than working through the animal’s relation to world. Now we ask: what is named or contained within the very word “animal?” How does the word open-up and/or conceal for us its essence as such? We ask: is it possible to think and designate the name “animal” otherwise, and is it possible to find a way out of thinking the animal outside of an anthropocentric determination of privation?

Having taken this detour through Locke, let us return to some of Derrida’s concerns with the name, naming and the possibility of naming otherwise. Whereas we remember Heidegger suggests that we *ought* to cross-out the word that designates the animal’s relation to the thing *as such*, Derrida’s intervening gesture is not a crossing-out but rather a rewriting of the very word animal itself as *animot*.⁴²

First, within the word *animot* Derrida “would like to have the plural of animals heard in the singular”⁴³ in order to take into account not only a “multiplicity of heterogeneous structures and limits” within the living world but also to account for an “immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence and willful ignorance, within the category of what is called the animal or animality in general.”⁴⁴ The problem for Derrida is that the animal has come to stand as the sign of all living things that do not belong to the category of the human. The term “animal” has come to act as a common signifier in which we group everything that is not *us*. Rewriting the animal as such must also be thought alongside Derrida’s concerns with Heidegger’s thesis on the ani-

mal. For Derrida the major fault underpinning Heidegger's thesis is that it presupposes "that there is one thing, one domain, one homogeneous type of entity, which is called animality in general, for which any example would do the job."⁴⁵ *Animot* is an attempt to disrupt this simple distinction.

The second element of *animot* emphasizes the suffix *mot* contained within the word, and *as such* "brings us back to the word, and namely the word named a noun."⁴⁶ Bringing together *mot* – the French term for word – with the animal is Derrida's attempt to re-sign the animal as *animot* and its duplicitous relation to the Word. *Animot* maintains *our* vigilance over the limits which place the animal, all animals, every animal, as always on the other side of the word. Instead the word functions as a testament to this limit, acting as a reference point where "one has always sought to draw the limit, the unique and indivisible limit held to separate man from animal, namely the word, the nominal language of the word, the voice that names and that names the thing as such, such as it appears in its being."⁴⁷ The third element contained within the common signifier of *animot* testifies more to a responsibility towards the named and the future of naming. *Animot* is not an attempt on Derrida's behalf, as we have said earlier, to 'give speech back' to animals but rather consider "thinking the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, as something other than a privation"⁴⁸ whenever we discourse *of, on, in* the direction of the animal.

Animot brings together these "three heterogeneous elements within a single body" as to reconsider the very word we use to designate the so-called animal, our responsibilities in naming and the possibility of thinking the supposed "unilinear and indivisible"⁴⁹ limits of "the Human" on one side and "the Animal" on the other. *Not*, as it were, to "ignore or efface everything that separates humankind from the other animals, creating a single large set, a great, fundamentally homogeneous and continuous family tree going from *animot* to the *homo* (*faber, sapiens*, or whatever else)" but rather to take into account "a multiplicity of heterogeneous structures and limits" that have become blurred within the said limits that secure understanding and difference between Man and Animal.⁵⁰

Yet as much as we want to consider these limits said to separate man from the animal, what interests Derrida is not so-much accounting for or testifying to an abyss always at work between man and animal but rather considering the way(s) in which the "multiplicity of heterogeneous structures and limits" within the living world stand in relation to the abyss. Derrida asks: "what are the edges of a limit that grows and multiplies by feeding on an abyss?"⁵¹ In what ways does a limit survive insofar as its means of survival is the limitless; how does a limit negotiate such a survival? Instead of imagining like Heidegger and concluding that an abyss operates

between man and animal: if *the* animal “cannot apprehend something as something, something as a being, at all... then the animal is separated from man by an abyss.”⁵² Derrida questions: “what happens when one attempts to think what a limit becomes once it is abyssal, once the frontier no longer forms a single indivisible line?”⁵³ Subsequently we ask what happens when the distinguishing marks of these limits between what is said to be man and animal no longer remain *as such* and consequently dissolve into the abyss? What happens when the very site of the limit and what we assume of its “unilinear and indivisible” structure not only allows for a certain porosity but “feeds” off it, and as such the limits become open to their undoing and the possibility of no longer remaining distinguishable as such? What happens if our analysis of the limits admits to a certain seepage of the abyss, when the abyss comes to cohabit the dissolving recesses of the limit, expanding the limit outwards as it were, into non-distinction; what happens to our understanding of man and animal as a result? Consequently, if the limits *become* the abyss, we are left to ask: *where* do we stand with the question of the animal? *Ourselves*?

Returning to *Of Spirit* again, if we conclude with Derrida that “one no longer knows what modality of Being to reserve for the animal – for itself and for us, for the human *Dasein*,”⁵⁴ has everything fallen into the abyss, *ourselves* included? Why did we ever assume we were secure? *How* and *what* are we to conclude with these two intervening gestures – one a crossing-through, the other a disfiguring of the name as such – on the discourse on the animal? *Animet*? Have we come any closer to an elucidation of an essence *on, of* the animal, or must we admit to the impossible, the abyss before, within, against us? For Heidegger, “the difficulty of the problem lies in the fact that in our questioning we always and inevitably interpret the poverty in world and the peculiar encirclement proper to the animal in such a way that we end up talking as if that which the animal relates to and the manner in which it does so were some being, and as if the relation involved were an ontological relation that is manifest to the animal.”⁵⁵ Perhaps we must accede as Heidegger does to *our* own unknowingness before the animal’s world; the impossibility of being able *to be* present to the animal’s world *as-such* without a comparative framework, while refusing to ground this human withheldness from the animal’s world *as-such* in pathos,⁵⁶ even though we are open to the possibility that it may “possess a wealth of openness with which the human world may have nothing to compare.”⁵⁷ Here again we are back with the problem of how to escape an anthropocentric determination of the animal; how to navigate the abyss otherwise without anchoring our conclusions in pathos; and how to negotiate the alterity of the animal, all animals, every animal at, on, as the limit of the onto-

logical frame.

Animot? Are we "going too far?" As much as we have mobilized two intervening gestures into the discourse on "the animal," and specifically on Heidegger's animal thesis we will *conclude*, if we dare, *in-the-hope-of-being-able-to-do-what-one-ought-to-do*, by *rewriting, unwriting, writing-through, crossing-out* Heidegger's thesis on the animal in order to have it written *as such: the animot is poor in world.*

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NOTES

¹ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 184.

² *Ibid.*, 270. My emphasis.

³ *Ibid.*, 270. My emphasis.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 272.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹² *Ibid.*, 186.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida. *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 50.

¹⁶ M. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 194.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 194. It is here that we might also consider the problem of thinking animal and man and their mutual deprivation from *sharing the world in such a way* within a framework of pathos. In an interview with Jacques Derrida "Eating Well, or Cal-

culations of the Subject” Jean-Luc Nancy claims that Heidegger attributes sadness to the animal, “a sadness linked to its ‘lack of world’” (277). Nancy then goes on to ask Derrida if Heidegger is contradicting himself. He asks: “how could sadness be simply nonhuman? Or rather, how would such a sadness fail to testify to a relation to a world?” (277). Although Derrida is very careful in illustrating the Heideggarian schema of the animal having and not having world, my reservations are not with Derrida but rather with Nancy’s questions. First, as much as Nancy claims to be working from memory in the interview (in posing his question the text reads: “if I remember correctly”), in Heidegger’s discussion of the animal in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* there is no mention of the animal *being taken* with sadness and therefore Heidegger is not contradicting himself because to my knowledge Heidegger never writes of an animal sadness *as such*. Second as much as Heidegger does not write on the animal’s sadness it nonetheless allows us to consider the effectiveness of a mode of questioning that circumscribes the animal within a framework of human ontology. To think of the animal *being taken* by sadness is an improper unfolding of the question insofar as Heidegger is attempting to think the question of the animal outside of human ontology. A projection of pathos for the alterity that is particular to the other (whether it be projecting an irrecoverable deprivation onto the animal, or imaging the impossibility of a human return to what we imagine of “animal life”) always considers the animal within a comparative ontological framework as if one were always desiring a return or awakening to the otherness withheld from it *as such*. For I would argue, using Heidegger’s words that “all this is questionable even as a question” (Fund. Concepts, 194) since “we end up talking as if that which the animal relates to and the manner in which it does so were some being, and as if the relation involved were an ontological relation that is manifest to the animal.” (Fund. Concepts, 255) Why does the problem of translation, negotiation between what is said to be animal or human always fall into depicting one or the other as necessarily being taken with pathos? How do we steer ourselves away from this point of navigation, and, *as such* why do we keep coming back to it? Our concern is how to unfold the question of the animal *in such a way* that we avoid situating the animal or ourselves within humanist enshroudings of pathos while also avoiding thinking the animal’s so-called deprivation as a necessarily negative mode of being, even though the term “deprivation” never escapes a qualitative relation to what is comparatively identified as human. For the specific discussion between Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida on Heidegger’s question of the animal see: “Eating Well, of the Calculation of the Subject.” Jacques Derrida, *Points: Interviews, 1974-1994*. Trans. Peter Connor and Avital Ronnell. Stanford University Press, 1992, 255-287.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 194.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 196.

²² *Ibid.*, 197.

²³ *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 197.

- ²⁶ Ibid., 197.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 198.
- ²⁸ Jacques Derrida. *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, 53
- ²⁹ M. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 198. (My emphasis.)
- ³⁰ Ibid., 198.
- ³¹ J. Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question.*, 53.
- ³² Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. Andre Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1992), 160.
- ³³ J. Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, 54.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 54.
- ³⁵ J. Derrida. "The Animal That Therefore I am (More to Follow)" *Animal Philosophy: Essential Readings in Continental Thought*, (Continuum, 2004 113-128), 126.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 118.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 125.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 125.
- ³⁹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Understanding: Volume Two*, Coll. & Ann. Alexander Campbell Fraser (New York: Dover Publications), 22-23.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 22-23. My substitution of the term "animal" in italics.
- ⁴¹ It is useful to recall a passage of Derrida on the Heideggerian conception of the animal and the inability to name: "this inability to name is not primarily or simply linguistic; it derives from properly the phenomenological impossibility of speaking the phenomenon whose phenomenality as such, or whose very as such, does not appear to the animal and does not unveil the Being of the entity." Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question.*, 53
- ⁴² J. Derrida, "The Animal therefore I am (More to Follow)", 125.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 125.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 125.
- ⁴⁵ J. Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question.*, 57.
- ⁴⁶ J. Derrida, "The Animal therefore I am (More to Follow)", 125.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 125.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 126.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 124.
- ⁵⁰ A passage from Locke that testifies to a similar concern reads: "[S]o uncertain are the boundaries of species of animals to us, who have no other measures than the complex ideas of *our own collecting*: and so far are we from certainly knowing what a *man* is; though perhaps it will be judged great ignorance to make any doubt about it. And yet I think I may say, that the certain boundaries of that species are so far from being determined, and the precise number of simple ideas which make the nominal essence so far from being settled and perfectly known, that very material doubts may still arise about it." Locke, *An Essay Concerning*

Understanding, 78. My emphasis.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵² M. Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 264.

⁵³ J. Derrida, "The Animal therefore I am (More to Follow)", 123.

⁵⁴ J. Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, 56.

⁵⁵ M. Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 255.

⁵⁶ See endnote 17, for discussion of pathos.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 255.