FLORENCE BURGAT

Facing the Animal in Sartre and Levinas

[The title given to this contribution exceeds its ambition. If these remarks concerning the concept of the animal as it appears in the work of Levinas are based on solid readings of cited texts, this is not the case for our Sartrian excursus.[1] In effect, here it is a matter of testing Sartre in three edifying moments. Such a presentation, however, cannot take the place of an in depth study of his thought concerning animals, in as much as it is possible to discover a complete doctrine on this subject. However, these moments forcibly illustrate Sartre's disinterest in animals *themselves* and his preference for a metaphorical usage of animals, or using them as a pretext to clarify a point of his thesis—in this instance, the question of freedom.]

FACED WITH ANIMALS, DOES SARTRE FEEL NAUSEA?

Eventually, but not always, nor only. Animals as such do not interest Sartre: Who are they? What are the moral issues concerning our treatment of them? All that does not interest the philosopher. But he appears indifferent rather than hostile, whereas Levinas, as we will see later, moves in a much more disturbing direction. The three moments, as we will call them, are as follows: (1) the "beasts" that populate *Nausea*; (2) bulls, this time very real animals in a bull-ring; and (3) the "humanized" dog in *The Family Idiot*.[2]

1. Both of the sections of this essay, on Sartre and Levinas, are slightly modified passages taken from Florence Burgat, *Une autre existence: La condition animale* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2012).
2. I am grateful to Enrique Utria for bringing this text to my attention.

YFS 127, *"Animots": Postanimality in French Thought*, ed. Senior, Clark, and Freccero,
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DO ANIMALS HAVE A PLACE IN THE DUALIST ONTOLOGY OF *BEING AND NOTHINGNESS*?

Before identifying these three very distinct moments, we are curious to know whether animals appear in the dualist ontology of *Being and Nothingness*. Are they located on the side of nature, the in-itself [*en-soi*], or on the side of existence, the for-itself [*pour-soi*]? Does Sartre question the way in which animals *exist*? If we remain within the conceptualization of *Being and Nothingness*, without examining the problem of phenomenological ontology in this essay, it would seem legitimate to advance the hypothesis that animals belong implicitly to the in-itself, or nature (endowed with the distinctive criteria of the in-itself). Certainly, just as we should not confuse man and *Dasein*, we will not confuse man and the for-itself, if the for-itself is consciousness's movement of opposition, "that by which nothingness comes to things." However, it remains that *Dasein*, as well as the for-itself, are determinations that, for both Heidegger and Sartre, are only applicable to man. Faithful to Cartesian ontology, Sartre seems to include in one and the same group living creatures other than man and inert bodies on the side of the in-itself—the Sartrian *res extensa*. We must consider how life is conceptualized, knowing that it has no place in Cartesian dualism. The notion of life appears, though rarely, in *Being and Nothingness*, in the chapter devoted to "The Body-for-Others."[3] Here, life means the unity of all of my actions, "the ensemble of meanings that are transcended toward objects that are not posited as *thises* on the ground of the world." Sartre adds that there is "no difference in nature between action and life conceived as a totality."[4] I therefore grasp the other as life to the extent that her body does not appear to me in the form of distinct elements (arm, nose, eye . . .). This body appears to me as a "significant form" or a "synthetic totality."[5] This is the reason why my perception of the body of the other differs fundamentally from my perception of things; if I focus my attention on a single organ, it makes sense "in terms of the totality of the *flesh* or *life*."[6]

Life, flesh, body: these notions are insufficiently distinguished to be able to rely on them. Besides, if the for-itself that designates

3. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 339–59; 344.
4. Ibid., 345.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

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"human reality" is broadly defined—it is the ontological determinations of the for-itself that occupy the some seven hundred pages of *Being and Nothingness*—the in-itself is scarcely treated. Seemingly related to both the Parmenidian sphere and the Cartesian *res extensa*, the in-itself appears to be a simple counterpoint to the for-itself. *Being is in itself [L'être est en soi]*, meaning that it *is* this *itself*, completely. The in-itself is opaque, deprived of both within and without, without secret, massive. It is full positivity that knows neither relationship with itself nor alterity, and never presents itself as other. Absolute immanence, it *is* itself, indefinitely. Is it not in these terms that "nature" is defined, to which animal and vegetable life are indistinctly relegated, as well as "simple life," which is never anything but the tautology of itself, indefinitely?

THE BEASTS OF *NAUSEA*

If animals scarcely cross Sartre's thoughts, "beasts" haunt the imagination of *Nausea*; objects sometimes assume the terrifying aspect of "living beasts."[7]

> I see my hand spread out on the table. It lives—it is me. It opens, the fingers open and point. It is lying on its back. It shows me its fat belly. It looks like an animal turned upside down. The fingers are the paws. I amuse myself by moving them very rapidly, like the claws of a crab which has fallen on its back. The crab is dead: the claws draw up and close over the belly of my hand.[8]

After the hand, then the face:

> My gaze moves down, in boredom, over this face, these cheeks: it encounters nothing firm, it gets stuck. [. . .]. When I was little, my Aunt Bigeois told me: "If you look at yourself too long in the mirror, you'll see a monkey." I must have looked at myself even longer than that: what I see is well below the monkey, on the fringe of the vegetable world, at the level of jellyfish. It's alive, I can't say it isn't [. . .]. It is glassy, soft, blind, red-rimmed; it looks like fish scales. [. . .] I draw my face closer until it touches the mirror. The eyes, nose, and mouth disappear: nothing human is left. [. . .] You might say—yes, you might say, nature without men.[9]

7. Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions, 1964), 10.
8. Ibid., 99.
9. Ibid., 16, 17–18.

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Nature without men: isn't this enough to demonstrate that, for Sartre, animals are implicitly included in all that vacillates between the viscous, the vitreous, the "it's alive," and "nature" as determinism—an imposed order where everything is always already given? What is the function of these beasts? Metaphors? Nature's most disgusting objects? An imaginary, where they never occupy an infra-human place—they are too repugnant for that. They are, in their crude state, *living*, but already engaged in a process of rotting. Beasts are unclean flesh.

SARTRE AT THE BULLFIGHT

In a letter to Louise Vedrine (August 1939), Sartre reveals the line he draws between humans and animals in an account he gives of a bullfight he attended in the Arenas of Prado in Marseille.

> Over breakfast, I explained to Bost at great length all the marvels of the corrida. But it turned out to be a bad show and made him queasy. "I was sure he'd be indignant, that Protestant," said Beaver [Simone de Beauvoir]. Bad bulls, bad matadors. I can hear you say that speaking of "bad" bulls is as shameful as talking about "lazy natives," since they actually demand nothing of us, and it is we who seek them out. Agreed, and that's just what made Bost indignant. "You told me the bull played a part in the contest. But he's totally uninterested." And it is a fact that the ideal toro, with whom the torero "does as he pleases," is a sort of bull version of a military cadet: irascible, heroic, stupid, forever charging this way and that. But the ones they produced for us retreated at the first flash of a red rag, raking the dirt with their hooves and bellowing lamentably. There was even one they couldn't manage to kill: he just kept dodging. So they brought a calf with bells into the arena and the calf peacefully led the bleeding bull along behind him. The matadors made the correct passes but they killed badly. The beasts bled all they had, and it took four tries to kill them. The ineffectual sword stuck in the back of their necks was yanked out with a cane ("Why not with an umbrella"? said Bost, furious), and another was plunged in, and so forth, until they fell. And at that, the beasts still had to be polished off with a knife. [. . .] It bore no resemblance to the bullfights in Spain, yet it was fun for us because it reminded us of Spain.[10]

10. Sartre, *Witness to My Life: The Letters of Jean-Paul Sartre to Simone de Beauvoir, 1926–1939*, trans. Lee Fahnestock and Norman McAfee (New York: Charles Scribner, 1992), 208.

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We will not dwell on the fascination that bullfighting holds for the "intellectual" world. If it is excessive to speak here of a fascination, Sartre's taste for bullfighting is strong and freely admitted, and it gives rise to a defense of "all the wonders of the bullfight." Nor will we dwell on Sartre's amused indifference to the slow massacre of the bulls, considering, like Simone de Beauvoir, its disapproval to be the prudishness of "the Protestant"! However, this indifference is disturbing: both in itself and in the blindness it betrays. There is, therefore, a lot to be said about this text. It could, paradoxically, be redirected and used as an indictment against bullfighting. Does it not provoke disgust for the sport, since all its "wonders" are exposed?

THE DOG AS FAMILY IDIOT

In a brief passage in *The Family Idiot*, Sartre refers to the strange state, a sort of ontological contradiction, to which domestic animals are subjected by their foray into the human world: outside of nature without being part of culture, they float in a pitiful in-between that exiles them twice over. It "seems clear," writes Sartre, that household animals, those that live in our homes, experience boredom: "Culture has penetrated them, destroying nature in them without replacing it." Dogs also resent the "frustration" of not being able to speak; "a disturbing privation" inhabits them living in a universe of speakers.[11]

Dogs are implicated in something that nevertheless escapes them. The function of language is apparent to them, but its usage impossible. When humans talk about dogs in their presence, they are aware of it. Language is there, insistent, it penetrates them. It is only when they return to their dog solitude, below, in their beds, that they can forget about it for a time, but verbal power encircles them.

Sartre describes the state of a dog who understands he is being talked about, because faces are turned toward him, but in a way that is neither an order nor a call, generally accompanied by an urgent look or a gesture. This certainty of knowing he is being spoken about, but in a more opaque way than other more familiar usages (such as orders or calls, which elicit actions), disturbs the dog, who is confronted with something almost recognizable.

11. Sartre, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert 1821–1827*, 5 vols., trans. Carol Cosman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), vol. 1, 137.

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> I have seen fear and rage grow in a dog: we were talking about him, he knew it instantly [. . .] the sounds struck him with full force as if we were addressing him. Nevertheless we were speaking to *each other*. He felt it; our words seemed to designate him as our interlocutor and yet reached him *blocked*. He did not quite understand either the act itself or this exchange of speech, which concerned him far more than the usual hum of our voices.[12]

The humanization of such animals modifies their intelligence, extending it somehow beyond itself, "in the imbroglio of its presence and its impossibilities." From the world of nature to which it belongs, according to Sartre, the animal passes into culture. Culture, the simple environment in which the dog lives, becomes something quite different: it digs a sort of gap in the domestic animal, a "fission" that shifts the dog from the level of its ordinary comprehension, "raising him toward an impossible understanding even as his bewildered intelligence collapses into stupidity."[13] The dog's state of panic results from this sort of limitation that he would like to overcome: he understands that he does not understand what is being said, but that what is being said is being said about him. The dog then expresses his confusion by waking up (he was dozing on the rug), followed by an interrupted lurch, whining, agitation, then angry barking. "This dog passed from discomfort to rage, feeling at his expense the strange reciprocal mystification which is the relationship between man and animal."[14] This anger, Sartre continues, far from indicating a revolt, actually had a calming effect; the dog, by this display of anger, sought to "simplify his problems" and, in fact, left to go to sleep in another room and all was forgotten; he returned much later, continuing his interrupted "clowning."

In this strange state, immediate experience is "fractured," but the dog cannot make anything of this rift; he neither appropriates nor prevents it from happening. This is his new condition: floating in an in-between that no mediation can ever reconcile. A breakthrough seems to occur here in Sartre's text and invites us to review our initial hypothesis: "Peaceful immanence is changed into self-consciousness." Of course this mutation occurs because the human is implanted in

12. Ibid., 137.
13. Ibid., 138.
14. Ibid.

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the dog, "as a denied possibility." The key to the particular boredom that besets domestic dogs resides for Sartre in this lurch toward something that seems near at hand, but is not, because it is produced by culture, the humanized world.

> Without culture, the animal would not be bored—he would live, that is all. Haunted by the sense of something missing, he lives out the impossibility of transcending himself by a forgetful relapse into animality; nature reveals itself through resignation. The boredom of living is a consequence of man's oppression of animals; it is nature grasping itself as the absurd end of a limiting process instead of realizing itself as biological spontaneity.[15]

What annoys the domestic dog therefore is not being able to be human, a failure constantly renewed by the "desire to transcend itself towards the human." In other words, for Sartre, the animal is simply a living thing immanent within nature, but animality is not a determinate state that the dog could absolutely not escape. This half-entry into the humanized world makes the animal lose, without compensation, the easy innocence of "simply living." If it is through the human and according to the measure of the human that Sartre thinks the animal condition, his analysis nevertheless diverges from the usual ways of attaching animals to nature. In these animals, partly separated from nature and from the sole sphere of needs, life is lived differently; a distance is established in their hearts; man has ruined the equilibrium proper to mere living organisms; he has jammed the machine. At the conclusion of this page, we could ask whether Sartre might not have gone further in discovering that boredom, or other states, may affect animals so that, precisely, they are not simply living, and "that's all."

THE FACE "IS NOT OF THE WORLD," OR EMMANUEL LEVINAS'S CONFUSION WHEN FACED WITH ANIMALS

That which invites violence and simultaneously restrains it. The ethics of the face—the "shimmer of the infinite"—coined by Levinas, has, for several years, been appropriated and repurposed.[16] Although

15. Ibid., 139.
16. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 207.

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strictly limited to man, several philosophers consider this ethics to be the best way of extending our sense of responsibility to animals, since these philosophers are using Levinas's ethics for this purpose at the same time as developing a reflection in moral philosophy specifically devoted to animals, to our responsibility toward them, to their rights, to their moral standing, and so on. The ethical relationship as both asymmetric and non-reciprocal, the definition of the other as a vulnerability that makes demands on me, are themes central to Levinassian ethics. Are they so entirely lacking in the ethical reflection devoted to animals that we must go looking for them in the work of an author who has conspicuously excluded animals from his ethics?

Must this conceptualization be judged so rich a resource that it should be utilized *against* its author's thought, for not only did Levinas refuse to extend his ethics of the face to animals, he also categorized as "work" any killing that is not first directed toward a face. Killing for a purpose is work. Levinas asserts this at least twice: "Neither the destruction of things, nor hunting, nor the extermination of the living—are aimed at a face. They are still the result of work, they have a finality and respond to a need. [. . .] Some other person is the only one I might want to kill"; or again, "Violence only affects a being who is both perceptible and escaping from capture. Without the existence of this contradiction existing in the being experiencing violence, the deployment of violent force would be reduced to work."[17] If hunting clearly evokes animals, considered by Levinas outside the category of an otherness that makes demands, one might ask whether the other does not also fall under a similar menace, since the ethical status of that other depends on the gaze of the person who kills. This doubt is all the stronger since Levinas speaks of "the extermination of the living," without it being entirely clear that such extermination is necessarily targeted at animals. The project of extermination that would not seek to violate a face, but "simply" to delete from the map a group of living beings deemed undesirable, would thus be a an instance of work, of the banality of evil that does not see the face.

There would seem to be three categories to consider: 1) violence, defined by the perception *and* the transgression of the prohibition of killing coming from the face; 2) the work of killing that does not see the face and is, in this instance, merely a force that kills without committing murder; 3) the face that forbids me to kill, whose injunction

17. Ibid., 198, 223.

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I perceive and that makes me, infinitely, the voluntary hostage of the other. What is exceptional, we are told, is that the order not to kill can be understood. The law of evil for Levinas is that of being, such that the appearance of the face makes a break in being, interrupts being in its perseverance in existing. Ethics breaks the egoistical line of being that persists in its essence.

BEING MORE LEVINASIAN THAN LEVINAS

Does this ethics contain elements capable of displacing humanocentrism, to which it is, however, fundamentally attached? The attempt by philosophers who, in some fashion, seek to complete Levinas's thought, by making it give birth to a truth that it harbors but that remained beyond the understanding of its author—this attempt is interpreted as a perversion of his thought by his faithful followers. Barbara J. Davy argues,[18] for example, that the Levinasian face contains its own overcoming, and if her analysis is unfaithful to the letter of the text, it is faithful to the spirit. If the face is capable of interrupting me in the pursuit of my being and makes demands on me, if it is an injunction to responsibility without consideration of the other's capacities, and if I must admit that I can experience strong ethical obligations in the face of entities other than humans, then I have seen a face, *since to see a face is not at first nor essentially a matter of perceiving a face or a man, but of encountering an obligation*. If the face is the call to responsibility, it does not matter who is calling me; I respond to that appeal *prior to all thematization* of this other. Here is a position that, while remaining faithful to Levinassian ethics, remains infinitely open to those beings who call. Levinas

18. Barbara J. Davy, "An Other Face of Ethics in Levinas," *Ethics and the Environment* 12 (2007), 39–65. Others have commented at length on this text in which Levinas "thinks of Bobby" (the dog who always recognizes the humanity of men whose humanity has been denied by other men) in order to express their disappointment in Levinas as he seems to approach, openly and frankly, an expanded definition of the other, only to close this opening more decisively: David L. Clark, "On Being the Last Kantian in Nazi Germany," in *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History*, ed. Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior (New York: Routledge, 1997), 165–98; Alphonso Lingis, "Animal Body, Inhuman Face" in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 168–82; John Llewelyn "Am I obsessed by Bobby? Humanism of the Other Animal," in *Re-reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (London: Indiana University Press, 1991), 234–245; Christian Diehm, "Facing Nature: Levinas Beyond the Human," *Philosophy Today* 44 (2000): 51–59.

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seems to have left the question open. Davy quotes "Name of a Dog or Natural Rights," where it is always a question of an open debt to the dog, and especially to Bobby, the pseudo hero of the text, the wandering dog who recognizes the humanity of men whose humanity is refused by other men.[19] It is Bobby, a dog, who broadens the community, but his fault in Levinas's eyes is that he does so spontaneously! This text, according to Davy, constitutes an "interruption" in Levinas's thought, the moment of doubt, an opening, yet quickly closed in the last lines of the text. No, Bobby is not the last Kantian of Nazi Germany, since he is incapable of universalizing his maxim! (But he does indeed universalize without a maxim!) Thus we find, here and there, mention of the "Kantian cyborg," in order to evoke, fundamentally, what this dog means for Levinas, whose role, however, was so essential. This animal with no brain, who seems unaware of what he does, recognizes any and every man as a member of humanity. Levinas, the great philosopher of responsibility to others, has not, any more than Kant, Heidegger, or Lacan, "taken into account, in any serious and decisive way, the fact that we hunt, kill, exterminate, eat and sacrifice animals, use them, make them work, or submit them to experiments that are forbidden to be carried out on men," so that we can ask ourselves, following the analysis of Jacques Derrida in this regard, whether there has been a real displacement of the subject in his philosophy.[20] For what does not change is the subject of enunciation, for none of these philosophers has considered the possibility of being looked at by the animal that they observed. The important point is not to restore to animals what has been taken from them conceptually, but to question ourselves more thoroughly about the axiom that allows giving to one what is denied to another, in this "mobile system of one discursive organization extended to several tentacles."[21]

Somewhat in the same vein as Barbara Davy, Matthew Calarco, who does not fail to recognize the position, in his words, "dogmatically anthropocentrist," of Levinas, considers that the underlying logic of his thought does not allow such anthropocentrism. Calarco goes on to show that he is more Levinasian than Levinas, by emphasizing that Bobby is a *wild, nomadic* dog, who is struggling to survive,

19. Levinas, "Name of a Dog or Natural Rights, in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Jadaism*, trans. Seàn Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990): 151–53.
20. Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 89.
21. Ibid., 91.

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without anything or anyone coming to his aid; he is welcome neither in the prison camp nor beyond. Thus Bobby goes beyond egotistical perseverance to welcome the prisoners in his own way and restore to them, in disinterested fashion, their stolen humanity; for Bobby does not come looking for food, which he doesn't find in the camp. He comes to *be with* the prisoners, offering them his vitality, his gaiety, his affection. Calarco questions whether Bobby is not therefore an example of something other than being, and whether we don't have the right to say that there is transcendence in the animal?[22] Calarco thus suggests "naturalizing" the transcendence . . . invoking examples of altruism in the animal world, formerly provided by Darwin and currently and notably by Franz de Waal. It is easy to imagine the extent to which Levinas would have shown his opposition to such a reading of his thought!

As for Peter Atterton, he puts Levinas's thought to the test in a face-to-face encounter with the animal conceived by Martin Buber.[23] Atterton refers to occurrences appearing in publications prior to *Totality and Infinity*. In "L'*égo* et la totalité" (1954), Levinas speaks of an "animal that is free, wild, faceless"; in "La philosophie et l'idée de l'infini" (1957), he writes, "a face [. . .] differs from the head of an animal in which a being, in its uncouth silence, is not yet in relation with itself." Atterton quotes yet another text written thirty years later, which we will consider later, "The Paradox of Morality," in which Levinas admits that one cannot completely deny a face to an animal. John Llewelyn has devoted several works to Levinas's thought. In "Am I Obsessed by Bobby?" he suggests opening a path to a "humanism of another being" in answer to the question asked: who is my neighbor?[24] In Levinas's profoundly Kantian world, Bobby barks, but does not say "hello." According to the distinction established by Levinas between saying *[dire]* (the force of a calling) and the said [*le dit*] (statements), the dog's calling is merely saying. However, this calling is not the same as saying, for the simple reason that it

22. Matthew Calarco, "Facing the Other Animal: Levinas," in *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 55–77.

23. Peter Atterton, "Face-to-Face with the Other Animal," in *Levinas and Buber: Dialogue and Difference* (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 262–81; see also Atterton, "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights: Ethical Cynicism," in *Animal Philosophy: Essential Readings in Continental Thought*, ed. Atterton and Matthew Calarco (London: Continuum, 2004), 47–61.

24. Llewelyn, "Am I obsessed by Bobby?" 234–45.

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comes from an animal. Thus, the distinction between saying and the said—which Levinas takes pains to establish in order to give importance to saying (the force of a calling), and not the declaration of what is said—if it is limited to human forms of calling, no longer has a reason to exist: What does it actually contribute to metaphysical humanism? John Llewellyn does not see a difference between Levinasian "metaphysical ethics" and Kantian ethics, to the extent that, in each case, I only have direct responsibility for beings who can speak (formulate statements), that is, beings endowed with a rationality capable of universalization.

SEEING A FACE

What then is the force of this so-called rampart—the face—whose fragility we are well aware of, as well as its paradoxical character and non-phenomenal status? Prohibition is not impossibility; it "even presupposes the possibility of that which it specifically forbids,"[25] and this possibility is contained in the face, whose exposed character would seem "to invite an act of violence,"[26] and forbid it at the same time. The face would be the expression of "Thou shalt not kill," and its resistance has the resistance of that which has no resistance. The face "is not of the world": it is not given as a being.[27]

The inclusion of the notion of the face at the core of ethics can be seen as a missed opportunity for going beyond humanism; for, after all, if the face consists of a composition of eyes, nose, and mouth, in that expressive triangle that contains the gaze, it is difficult to see how the evidence of animal faces can be denied.[28] But the face is abstracted from the field of perception, so that its empirical character no longer exercises control over its concept. The face, in as much as it "is not of the world," can thus cover a smaller space than that of the set of all living bearers of a face of flesh, an inclusion that does not coincide with its extension, nor anything else. Since the word "face," in current language, refers to a part of the body, one cannot entirely ignore its existence as a visible, perceived object; Levinas

25. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 232.

26. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 86.

27. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 198.

28. Françoise Armengaud, "Le visage animal: bel et bien un visage," in *Du Visage*, ed. Marie-José Baudinet and Christian Schlatter (Lille : Presses universitaires de Lille, 1982), 103–116.

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evokes moreover the bare skin of the face, always bare, and therefore more vulnerable than any other part of the body. Besides, the face is sometimes considered in a metonymic sense, as a part for the whole. But since this part is always already in excess of the whole, we must see in the face that (perceived) part that allows us to "facialize" [*visagéiser*] the other parts of this body that cries out to me. Thus the neck is given as an example of a part of the body that is not the face but reveals all the weakness borne by the face. It is because any individual has a face that she has a neck that speaks as her face would.

In response to the question of what "his phenomenology of the face" consists of, Emmanuel Levinas answers on several occasions that one cannot speak of a phenomenology of the face, to the extent that phenomenology describes what appears.[29] The face, as understood by Levinas, has a meaning prior to my conferral of meaning, and the meaning of the face is independent of my initiative and power. This face is not the perceived face. Its transcendence does not result from its expressivity. The face is what exceeds the idea of the Other in me, what exceeds the plastic image the Other leaves in me. The face is an appeal, an outstretched hand.

Shouldn't the more than secondary importance given to resemblances lead to an expansion of such a face to animals? Do they not address appeals to us? Are they not vulnerable given the fact they cannot speak? Are they not in a state of expectation before us without reciprocity? But this is not the case for two complementary reasons: On the one hand, if the fraternity uniting men owes nothing to their resemblance, it is, according to Levinas, in the sense that it owes everything to monotheism. On the other hand, the face is logocentric; Levinas states that the face and discourse are bound together, even if he distinguishes, as we have noted, the *said* (the field of statements) from the *saying* (the face's ability to speak to me and elicit a response). The face is disembodied; its odor of sanctity is not attached to a body, since it does not appear as a phenomenon and thus owes little to the fact of being perceived. However, it speaks or could speak. It is therefore necessarily perceived, but in a singular fashion; it breaks the calm and orderly web of perception; it summons me. We

29. Notably in two interviews: *Ethics and Infinity*, op. cit., 85–92; and "The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas, Tamra Wright, Peter Hughes, and Alison Ainley," trans. Andrew Benjamin and Tamra Wright, in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 168–80.

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can understand a little better now how violence also becomes disembodied: if the murderer does not aim at this impalpable otherness, he does not kill, he works. If it is possible to show that the power of the Levinasian face comes from its abstract, non-phenomenological character, which owes nothing to its constitution, it could also be shown that this is the source of its weakness.

The weakness of the face can therefore be linked to the fact that it is not a phenomenon (the face is not that expressive bodily part through which I encounter a singularity); on the other hand, however, taken in its empirical sense, one can question the efficacy of the face in protecting *all* men. Thus Elisabeth de Fontenay observes that every face can one day be struck by deformity.[30] We must then ask ourselves whether it is so easy to cross the barriers of deformity and ugliness, whether it is not precisely by our focusing on the face, read according to more or less ethnocentric canons, that we are led to exclude certain individuals from the rest of humanity. Does metaphysical humanism—be it that of the other man—really need such a notion? Certainly, for Levinas, it is a question of making a radical philosophical shift at the heart of a concept of being in favor of a concept of the other, a matter of shattering a subjectivity occupied first with itself. But doesn't the face present serious weak points, evident, on the one hand, in the oblique uses it is put to (the neck), and, on the other, in the ambiguity that haunts it (it is perceived without being a phenomenon)? The face's weakest point in our eyes is that it is "not of the world," because one can see it wherever one wants to, where one has already decided to see it. It is a weak point at least in the sense that such a usage cannot, through the *encounter*, be extended to other living beings thanks to an understanding that would render its reach truly infinite. It must be said that the ethics of the face represents a backward step with regard to the ethics of compassion that, intrinsically, is inscribed in the perspective of an infinite responsibility toward sentient beings in general. Why does the concept of the face ultimately protect so little? Why is it so narrow, so humano-centric?

DO ANIMALS HAVE A FACE?

The question of knowing whether animals have a face was clearly addressed to Levinas in an interview given to three students in 1988,

30. Élisabeth de Fontenay, *Le silence des bêtes: La philosophie à l'épreuve de l'animalité* (Pars: Fayard, 1999), 683.

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for which—and this is important—he had been sent the questions in advance.[31] "One cannot entirely refuse the face of an animal. It is via the face that one understands, for example, a dog."[32] But it is because we have first had access to a human face, Levinas states, that we can carry out such a transposition. The animal face is, itself, reduced to the rank of a "phenomenon," and this phenomenon "is not in its purest form in the dog," for we are given other characteristics at the same time, such as the vitality of the dog. Levinas is asked: "Is it necessary to have the potential for language in order to be a 'face' in the ethical sense?" He responds: "The beginning of language is in the face. In a certain way, in its silence, it calls you."[33] This call is one of responsibility toward another entity; it does not depend on difference but on transcendence, the most important element of which is vulnerability. Understandably, we might want to draw Levinas over to the side to which he seems quite close, notably on account of the importance he accords to the idea of vulnerability and thus to asymmetric relations.

Let us return to this discussion. It is strange that Levinas has not recognized that his questioners are trying to get him to specify the ethical status that he seems to give to animals. He dodges the problem, and the questions become ever more precise and insistent. "According to your analysis, the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' is revealed by the human face; but isn't the commandment also expressed in the face of an animal? Can an animal be considered as the other that must be welcomed? Or is it necessary to possess the possibility of speech to be a 'face' in the ethical sense?"[34] Emmanuel Levinas admits his hesitation in determining the moment when one can speak of the face in the way he understands it. "I cannot say at what moment you have the right to be called 'face' [. . . .] I don't know if a snake has a face," but in any case Levinas reaffirms the absolute singularity and precedence of the human face.[35] The choice of the snake is no accident; it is the image of temptation or evil, and this makes it particularly difficult to attribute a face to a snake. But above all, this example allows Levinas to avoid other more troubling examples. We are reminded of Heidegger, in his seminar on animality (1929–1930),

31. Levinas, "The Paradox of Morality."
32. Ibid., 169.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 172.

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judging it prudent to "stop with the bee"! In regard to evolution, as is to be expected, Levinas takes up an anti-Darwinian position in radically separating man from the rest of living creatures, and, as we have seen, even from the happiness of enjoying life. The animal struggles for its life, whereas man struggles for the other's life to the detriment of his own. . . . Levinas admits, however, that "a more specific analysis is needed" to truly respond to the question of the animal face.[36]

USELESS SUFFERING

The admission of not knowing "at what moment you have the right to be called 'face,'" is considered by Derrida to be an extremely risky proposition, for it is nothing less than "confessing that one does not really know what a face is," so that Levinas, without considering the consequences, runs the risk of ruining his whole edifice, of "calling into question the whole legitimacy of the discourse and ethics of the 'face' of the other."[37] Levinas doesn't weigh the consequences, for how could such a danger come from what in his eyes, in his thought, is the most insignificant and indigent from an ontological point of view—an animal? However, his interviewers press him to clarify his position: "If animals do not have faces in an ethical sense, do we have obligations towards them? And if so, where do they come from?" "The ethical extends to all living beings," Levinas declares, which means, "we do not want to make an animal suffer *needlessly* (my emphasis)."[38] This "needlessly" is all the more remarkable considering that in a beautiful text entitled "Useless Suffering," Levinas insists on the fact that suffering, in its essence, is useless.[39] No theodicy justifies suffering. And Levinas writes this crucial sentence that makes all suffering unjustifiable, that makes the criterion of "useful suffering" a monstrosity and a scandal: "For an ethical sensibility [. . .] the justification of a neighbor's grief is undoubtedly the source of all immorality."[40] Who is my neighbor? As soon as any statement whatsoever is made that justifies suffering, we should be seized by the greatest anxiety. Who is this other who is sacrificed for me and who I dare not call my

36. Ibid.
37. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 109.
38. Levinas, "The Paradox of Morality," 172.
39. Levinas, "Useless Suffering," trans. Rcihard Cohen, in *The Povocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 156–67.
40. Ibid., 163.

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neighbor? Is the reason for this precisely because I have decided *in advance* not to call him my neighbor, in order for him to endure this suffering that I don't want? What I want are the benefits his suffering brings me. At first Levinas does not consider suffering a given of consciousness, but rather a lived sensation. This is a fundamental point. It breaks with the long tradition that establishes a fallacious distinction between physical pain and moral suffering, thereby upholding the distinction between "animal pain" and "human suffering." We might ask ourselves whether Levinas is not very close to seeing the suffering of animals when he finally evokes the "pure suffering of psychically disinherited beings," who cannot distance their suffering, who cannot deal with it as an object of reflection, nor name it in speaking. Let us consider this passage in its entirety. These mentally disinherited beings are still called

> backward, handicapped in their relational life and their relationships to the Other, relationships where suffering, without losing anything of its savage malignancy, no longer covers up the totality of the mental and comes across novel lights within new horizons. These horizons, none the less remain closed to the mentally deficient, except that in their "pure pain," they are projected into them to expose them *to me*, raising the fundamental ethical problem posed by suffering "for nothing."[41]

When I say that Levinas is closest here to seeing and understanding animal suffering, it is not because I consider animals to be psychically disinherited beings, but rather because their situation, in regard to suffering, is comparable, as far as we can judge, and to the extent that we can judge any suffering that is not our own, to that of humans who cannot speak of their suffering. This analogy rests on the impossibility of distancing or objectifying suffering, of taking it on—as a result of which it becomes "*pure* suffering," suffering "for nothing," which the subject can't do anything about, except endure it, because "its savage malignancy" makes it untamable. We can go even further concerning Levinas's closeness to what he has nevertheless distanced himself from; for in the following text, it is a question of an opening that allows for "a moan, a cry, a groan or a sigh, an original appeal for help."[42] How can we both limit the domain of the neighbor to the human while seeing in this *saying* without *the said*, in the moan, the

41. Ibid., 158; slightly modified.
42. Ibid.

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groan or the cry (!) the original call of a humano-centric ethics? This ethics—is this the right word?—of useful suffering, good for animals, and for which one measures all the distance that separates it from that which I owe to the other man, is, Levinas argues in this discussion, an extension of the prototype that constitutes human ethics. Thus vegetarianism is also, according to Levinas, based on the transfer to animals of our idea of suffering.

Thus Levinas never considered in his philosophy the possibility of including animals in his ethics; he never saw that the relationship with animals offers the perfect prototype of a asymmetric relationship at whose heart the other is at my mercy, nor did he ever see that the animal is in an extreme state of vulnerability that calls to me all the more because it is deprived of language. We would conclude by saying that an ethics limited to an invitation to "not cause useless suffering to animals," is not an ethics, but a rule of "good practices," prescribed rules, that workers whose job consists in killing domestic animals (workers in slaughter houses and laboratory technicians) are asked to observe.

—Translated by Yvonne Freccero

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