

Chapter 2

The Promethean Condition

To rediscover the non-human animal as a plural geography (which requires being aware of the many hermeneutical frameworks surrounding the concept of animal) it is therefore necessary to reflect on the human. To rediscover the non-human animal we must free it from the antinomic concept of animal, but to do so we must extract the disjunctive operator from the bundle of fractalic recursivities. I will dwell on the humanistic paradigm, considering it not so much a XV century line of thought but rather a philosophical mindset excluding nature in general and non-human animals in particular. In my reading, humanism was defined in philosophy and post-sophistry, then grew between the I century B.C. and the I century A.C. through stoicism and monotheism, later feeding on neo-Platonism and gnosticism and finally being definitively affirmed in Italian humanism.

Humanism is characterised by a strong anthropocentric tension requiring that one:

- (a) removes all that concerns the human—both in its ontological definition and in philosophical inquiry—any reference, contamination, overlap, contiguity or metamorphosis with non-human animal otherness;
- (b) removes any therianthropic element from any original mythopoietic¹ structure, from the image and expression of creator divinities and from the eschatological reflection.

All that concerns the human, both in the reconstruction of the origins and in the projection of a meaningful future—both on earth and in the afterlife—assumes an anthropomorphic image. On the other hand, precisely in the attempt to distinguish the human from the non-human animal, humanism tends to reduce to the idealised image of the anthropomorphic everything that might appear to be shared with other species. The outcome is that humanistic anthropocentrism does not place man (understood as a phenomenic unit) at the centre, but rather an *idea* or vision of man, which is paradoxically opposed to man in his natural characters. Thus organic features, motivational dispositions, the needs and pleasures of the body, perfor-

¹For “mythopoietic” see glossary.

mativity unmediated by a tool, the direct contact with nature—all these things are marginalized, hidden, ignored, neglected, if not completely denied. This happens by means of a hierarchization of predicates placing at the top everything that highlights the difference between humans and other species.

Humanistic anthropocentrism does not correspond to anthropocentrism proper as an anthropocentred dimension, because while the former focuses on the emancipatory idea of *anthropos* as opposed to *Homo sapiens*, the latter is based on founding man on man. Anthropocentrism proper aims at absolutizing man as such in a centripetal way, so that the human gravitates on the constitutive characters of *Homo sapiens*. Therefore, the two forms of anthropocentrism proceed in opposite directions. However, humanism manages to pull an amazing trick: it makes Epimethean shortcoming into the gyroscope capable of maintaining the orientation axis of emancipatory centrifugation despite the mutability of anthropocentric rotation. If the lack of predicates is the phenomenic realisation of man as the project of nature, then there is no incoherence between the emancipatory position (humanistic anthropocentrism) and the praiseful one (anthropocentrism proper). The lack of predicates is used to sustain the idea of human freedom and self-determination as well as to support the hypothesis of autopoiesis² and non-determinism. The Epimethean deficit, determining a lack of a specific placement in nature, is assumed and hypostasised by humanism *à la* Pico della Mirandola to turn man into:

1. a neutral, non-declined entity able to act as the measure of the world—hence anthropo-metrisms³
2. a virtual identity able to assume any performativity thanks to technopoiesis, therefore destined to be the container of the world—hence anthropo-plastics.⁴

If *De hominis dignitate* can be regarded as the manifesto of humanism, Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man is probably its best iconographic expression. The idea that the human being is an entity devoid of adaptive endowments (a kind of abortion of nature because devoid of those predicates that lead each species to excel within their own ranks) turns man into a virtual entity capable of assuming any form without being performatively declined. According to Pico, the human being oscillates in its magmatic and protean condition, able to reach the dimension of angels as well as to fall into the telluric realm.

What is proper of man is attributable to this keeping the distance from the world, maintaining a pure condition allowing him to reach the hyperuranium he is destined to. In this reading there is the obvious rejection of any form of pre-determination as the founding principle of an autopoietic conception of the human being. At the same time there is an evident need to construct an anthropo-poietic project through the comparison with the other species, so that humanism takes the oppositional category of the animal condition as its basis. This means that if the Promethean

²For “autopoiesis” see glossary.

³For “anthropo-metrisms” see glossary.

⁴For “anthropo-plastics” see glossary.

meta-predicate falls, then the whole humanistic building will crumble with it. That's why (contrary to Charles Darwin's continuative evolutionism, von Uexküll's *Umwelten* monadology, or Konrad Lorenz's ethology linking expressiveness to phylogenesis) the humanistic system always brings forward new meta-predicative characters aimed to keep the categorial dichotomy between man and animal alive. Animality is therefore a humanistic contraction with very variable boundaries, so that it can adapt to the human's needs to define its own identity.

2.1 A Second Nature

The *principium individuationis* of the human as found in Greek culture oscillates between:

- (a) the concept of logos, which unites rationality and language, leading to seeing the human being as "sapiens"—that is, different from the animal due to its ability of self-reflection;
- (b) the technopoiesis, i.e. the propensity to performative externalisation with the aim of outlining a being endowed with technical intelligence, who is a *faber*.

On the other hand, this very oscillation between self-reflection—Rilke's reversed eyes—and the operative distance made possible by tools in turn generates a further interpretative dualism, one that sees the human as:

- (c) lacking a rank and therefore exposed to the world and to pleasure—hence the Dionysian tendency;
- (d) virtual or tending to stay in an embryonic, sketched condition, thus potentially autopoietic—hence the characterisation as "creator" untied from any directive, free and fully in charge of its own destiny.

These four main points are adopted by humanism, which makes of ontological anthropocentrism its foundation. The animal is therefore relegated to the role of background against which the human emerges loosing the predicative dimension that was still present in Aristotle's definition (*zoon logon echon*) and definitively acquiring the meta-predicative function. The Epimethean predicate is regarded as a synonym of opacity, stiffness, limitation, restriction, rootedness. Therefore, affirming Prometheism means:

1. considering man in the light of "the human" as an elevated condition compared to the animal;
2. regarding human nature as transparent, plastic, virtual, released, eradicated. The image that humanism proposes oscillates between Botticelli's embryonality and Vitruvian projection seeing the human as ascending and autopoietic.⁵

⁵On the one hand, man tends to elevate and emancipate himself from the world using the animal as a representative of the latter, on the other there is a phagocytosis annihilating or removing meaning from everything that is not human, transforming it into a more or less usable object.

As we have seen, the humanistic revolution turns the human being into a Vitruvian *vir*, who enters the world and shapes it, dictating its metrics and morphology. Making the world anthropomorphous means interpreting it according to one's own measure units while re-projecting it according to one's own proportions. The non-human animal as a form, proportion, or measurement is thus declassified aesthetically, epistemologically and ethically. Humanism magnifies man as a morphopoietic principle: *kalokagathia*, that is, order, cleanliness, lightness, transparency, brightness, roundness, smoothness. On the contrary, the therianthropoc represents the opposite and has to be expunged. In this sense Pico della Mirandola's proposal places pre-humanistic mysticism in the body as the expressive and representative dimension of man. Pico's nine hundred theses in his *Oratio de hominis dignitate* (1486) are an exhortation, in addition to stating the superiority of humans over animals. The human is described by Pico as a virtuality that requires an effort of evolution through philosophical (that is, autopoietic) practice. It is interesting to recall the passage in which Pico della Mirandola explicitly defines the direct relationship between God and man and that between man and other animals.

We have given you, O Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgement and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature [...]. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine.⁶

As you see, human freedom basically lies in not being an animal. Another important scholar related to the humanistic proposal is Marsilio Ficino. For him, man is *copula mundi*: that is, the intermediate and connective term between the divine and the earthly, the place where the two meet. Man realises the mediation between earthly life and transcendence, thanks to a privileged position that grants him freedom. In Ficino we especially find the themes of Hermeticism and gnostic reverie appealing to a principle of revelation leading to philosophical and religious syncretism. In XV century humanism, human dignity and human superiority over other animals are at one, insisting on the oppositional dichotomy for which the non-human is determined, positioned, non-free and incapable of understanding and creation. Man's freedom from theocentric oppression requires an ontological scapegoat, which is the non-human animal crushed into the condition of brute—something to avoid and keep away from. The brute is completely immersed in the telluric that does not allow for any levitation and strictly binds it to a niche, while the human being aspires to free itself completely, becoming virtual so as to reach

⁶G. Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago 1956, p. 7.

another dimension. This is possible thanks to a different visualisation of its own form, which has to become diaphanous, light, and protean.

It should come as no surprise that Descartes sees animals as automata, as it is the humanistic view that triggers the antinomy between man and animal. Underlining the animals' complete immersion into nature, their incapacity to distance themselves from the "here-and-now", their bond to the contextual present, all of this inevitably produces a mechanical conception of the non-human. If it's true that the Copernican revolution, defeating geocentrism, opens the door to infinite spaces making the human a small part of the universe, it is also true that this very fact made it even more urgent to find a new gravitational centre for the human. The XVII century scientific revolution can therefore be interpreted in the light of this oscillation: on the one hand it questions the anthropomorphous reading of the world, on the other it confirms the role of man as it was depicted in the humanist manifesto (that is, the domination of the world through reason and *techne*). This confirms the idea of mathematising the non-human universe, which underlines the gap between the human being (as a free entity capable of inhabiting history) and the rest of nature as a whole (as an isochronic entity following linear and deterministic causes). Newton definitively marks this dualism: the human dimension progresses in the historical development, while the non-human is subtracted to the progress of time.

The Promethean spirit is confirmed by the frantic XVII century technical evolution which led humans to think they could explain mechanically the whole universe, feeling like demiurges of a second nature *in fieri*. Think of hydraulic automata adorning German gardens, clocks marking time and serving as a dualistic metaphor between being in time and having time, wind instruments and organs able to reproduce the voices of animals, the mills turning praxis into production: all these things confirm the idea that the animal is nothing more than a machine, more complex than human technology but still a machine. Their externality becomes therefore their casing, hiding their internal mechanisms—a metaphor of sensory deception as proof of the wound inflicted by the Copernican revolution. Prometheism thus means leaving the sense interface and finding shelter in an inner monologue, only believing in the echo of one's own thought, abandoning the last fragments of contiguity with the world.

On the other hand, the world is shaken by new rhythms and new horizons under the blows of the techno-scientific transformation. Promethean becoming is the realisation of history: a second nature laid open before modern man (a man who is in his time and has made his time his own). Prometheism is more and more synonymous with becoming, transformation, acceleration, history as a new salvation. Fire, which used to make the world malleable by conforming it to the *anthropos*, is not dynamicity, promised light, future. Thomas Moore's utopia, blending the prefixes *eu* and *ou* and therefore not necessarily projectable to another dimension, becomes exclusively outopic, turning the whole a-historical reality into

a dystopia.⁷ After all, ever since the XVII century, external references have appeared less and less stable and adventure in new Meccas becomes a common topic, a custom. History is thus the stage on which Prometheus is able to perform new distancing goals for the human lineage.

The stress on history as a human condition as well as knowledge is underlined by Giambattista Vico, who, while refuting the solipsistic principle of the Cartesian *cogito*, places history and human creativity in a relationship of mutual foundation. Making history and dwelling in history undoubtedly refer to Promethean recursivity, where *techné* assumes the role of flywheel in this self-catalysing process of disjunction. Outside the historical dimension, man appears both innocent and indecent, because he belongs to a total immersion in a progressive flow. The Enlightenment is also unable to distance itself from this reading, underlining man's childish dimension and aiming for the education to critical rationality. Prometheus takes the role of educator: he brings out the universal hidden inside the contingent. Prometheus is the enlightening reason, challenging the obscurantist divinity and its evil emissary Epimetheus is the capacity for abstraction. When reason is asleep it creates monsters, as in Francisco Goya's famous painting, and monsters are always therianthropic.

On the other hand, if infinity gives us vertigo it is also because (and especially because) it puts in check the Promethean light trying to illuminate it, then the need to focus on man becomes even more urgent. Besides, it is precisely in the XVIII century that the conditions arise to strengthen the anthropocentric vision that will find its greatest and deepest endorser in Kant. In his 1785 *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant emphasises the difference between a morality we could call "local", referring to the diversity of the people and contexts of life, and morality proper, based on rationally founded and therefore universal principles. In 1798 with the essay "Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view",⁸ Kant refines this concept by underlining the importance of focusing not on man as a physiological entity but on what man, being free, can/must do with himself. Even if Kantian cosmopolitanism sets him against Romanticism, the introspective and isolationist trend is the same, if not stronger, as the one emphasising humanistic anthropocentrism.

The two great industrial Revolutions of the XIX century (the first can be traced back to the steam engine, the second to electricity) support the idea of man's

⁷The problem with the humanistic paradigm lies in its anthropocentric project based on exalting man as the sole protagonist endowed with existential activity, as opposed to the inert and passive non-human. The humanist paradigm is grounded on a substitution that, respecting the canon of Medieval theocentrism, simply puts man in God's place. In this perspective, the human being can have an utopia: an ontopoietic goal placed elsewhere thus devaluing nature, regarded as dystopic with respect to human predicates. Thomas Moore's utopia, which blends *eu* and *ou*, is not necessarily placed elsewhere. But in being assimilated into humanist thought, it loses the suffix *eu* and becomes synonymous with Neverland (which demands from man an inevitably anthropocentric formalization). The utopia (henceforth "utopia") thus becomes a negation of nature or an urgency to get rid of nature.

⁸I. Kant, *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

enclosure into a second nature created by Prometheism. Machines start proliferating, they gradually become new pets, in an evolution destined to surround the human universe like a sphere. The technosphere becomes paradoxically more human than man himself, because it adheres more to Prometheism, so that at the end of the XX century man dreams of turning into a machine. The machine judges the flesh, it establishes the standards to be met, inverting the old ergonomic paradigm. But in the XIX century these trends were still latent, even though this Golem appears as Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's book. The machine is what opposes the animal, overcoming the topos of St. George and the dragon—the machine is what wins over the animal by pushing it into its telluric abyss. Through the machine, the human being is taken to another world characterised by becoming and progressive projection, finally realising the scenario hinted at in Pico della Mirandola's manifesto. History gradually becomes ascensional.

For Johann Gottfried Herder, the analogical-correlative dichotomy between man and animal is based on the fact that, while the animal world is nature, the human world is history: a sort of autopoietic second nature. In his "Treatise on the Origin of Language",⁹ Herder states that every human idea is not an immediate product of nature, but rather represents man's own product. In this sense, the human being detaches itself from nature, producing his own works himself. Herder has the same conception of distance as Pico, so that man is realised in history, where he finds his habitat, his real dimension where art and language represent the most authentic expressions of the human, revealing the individual and the people. For Herder, the ability to distance oneself lies in the predicate of reflection understood as gathering and freedom to dwell on an image. Prometheism and narcissism—as self-referential mirroring, unlike animal epiphany which is a hetero-referred mirroring—converge.

Herder's celebrative view of man is made explicit in his *Outlines of a philosophy of the history of man*,¹⁰ where the philosopher restates the idea that the human being is not only the measure of reality, but also its goal, referring to it as the "flower of creation". Once again man must stand out from the green land of animality. Herder is the first to clearly notice man's biological shortcomings by relating them to Prometheism, as a compensation but also an opening to the world. This finds new strength in idealism, thanks to the importance given to the subject compared to phenomenic reality. Man is increasingly closed in his amnios, up to annihilating what lies outside of consciousness. The Kantian I-think is not just the transcendental incipit of knowledge, it is also the source of being, in terms of both form and content. The human being progressively identifies himself with Descartes' *res cogitans*, operating an isolation that nullifies any contiguity with the non-human and establishes the dualism (already latent in Descartes and then re-proposed by a series of dichotomies like nature-culture, instinct-reason, cyclic-progressive, facts-values) embodying the never-ending conflict between the Epimethean world

⁹J.H. Herder, "Treatise on the Origin of Language" in Herder. *Philosophical Writings*, ed., Michael N. Forster, publ. CUP.

¹⁰J.H. Herder. *Outlines of a philosophy of the history of man*, London 1800.

(centred on nature, instinct, cyclicity, facts) and the Promethean world (characterised by culture, reason, progress, values). Prometheus promises the human being completeness, a utopian horizon for which to sacrifice the animality left in the human: its flesh. And that's why, in the great ideologies of the end of the century, man is tied to the mountain and Prometheus is the one eating his liver.

The XIX century also witnessed great changes in the evaluation of the history of life. Once again, the relationship between man and animal lied at the centre of the discussion. If Linnaeus had placed human beings together with other primates, it is thanks to Lamarck that the bases were set for a continuist theory of the species, perfected in Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man*, as well as *Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871). Darwinism truly is embarrassing for humanism because it seems to question the distinct genealogy proposed in the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus. Consequently, soon people started to push the English heretic back into the humanistic frame:

1. one can reject Epimetheanism by considering it vestigial and turning contiguity into a risk of regression, as exemplified by Mr. Hyde and many other therianthropic characters (a narrative topos of the *fin de siècle*), or into an indicator of ancestrality (as in Lombroso's physiognomies);
2. one can amplify the gap between man and animal by rejecting the very principles of humanism, rejecting the latest areas of overlap, as does Heidegger in the *Letter on Humanism*;
3. one can reinterpret or assign a particular meaning to Darwin's evolutionism, for instance in a teleological anthropocentric sense (so that human beings are the final goal of the process); or one could regard the evolution of some human behaviours as lying outside of evolution, as Patrick Tort does.¹¹

To turn the common ancestry between humans and animals into an irrelevant acknowledgment, it is necessary for humanism to push it back to remote past up to hiding it completely. And yet the Darwinian wound still hovers like a ghost responsible for building a bridge between the human and the non-human, so that the latter, albeit theoretically, can now come back to life and contaminate the former. This is why the therianthropic is unable to re-establish the principle of non-human diversity and becomes a regressive polarity: the animal is a dark mirror, an ancient baboon that can re-emerge (mister Hyde or Conrad's Kurtz) or the beastly ancestral (Zola's Jacques Lantier or typology in Lombroso's physiognomy) and inaugurate new forms of racism.

The animal as a regressive symbol turns the non-human animal into something belonging to the remote past, a non-present presence, a living testimony of the (horrible or nostalgic) past. It nullifies, or claims to nullify, any contiguity, reference or dialogue between the human and the non-human. The animal thus doesn't manifest itself through the exhibition of a *quid*, but it is rather what man no longer

¹¹P. Tort, *L'effet Darwin, Sélection naturelle et naissance de la civilisation* (Editions du Seuil, Paris, 2012).

is—the animal is the fall. Once again, the humanistic paradigm refuses to think of the non-human animal, sticking to the antinomic categorisation of the animal as a background.

Existentialism goes in the same direction by denying the non-human's effective existence. Heidegger sees the concept of *Umwelt* in the animal world as a state of total absorption in the contextual here-and-now—hence the captivation characterising the non-human as opposed to the distancing and therefore the subjective expression qualifying the human being. Heidegger's reading of the concepts of *Umwelt* and openness are different from their proposals in von Uexküll and Rilke. As per the *Umwelt*, the bubble is the state of ontological conjugation of living beings (including the human being) even though there is a hierarchy or an emergence allowing the human to exceed it. However, this proposal becomes philosophically contradictory the very moment man claims to define the other *Umwelten*. Heidegger solves this inconsistency by freeing the human from the *Umwelt*. Like a player who realised he's about to lose—in this case, Heidegger realises that the humanistic predication is no longer enough to make man special—the German philosopher raises up with a sort of ontological bluff, denying any animality to the human and widening the gap with the non-human animal.

Heidegger proposes an overcoming of humanism through an anthropocentric acceleration that increases the distance between the human and the animal. After all, the *Umwelt* reminds one very much of the idea of the animal's Epimethean closure and can easily be assimilated to the humanist paradigm. Thus Prometheism becomes the dimension of living in the world, or being a “constructor of worlds”—an idea in which the autopoietic and performative principle of *techne* is evident. Heidegger's open signifies not being completely absorbed in the world's direct usability, distancing oneself from the object—which is the only way to see it as an object-in-itself.¹² Man differentiates himself from the non-human animal, because he is not animal, and every relation to the non-human animal, is lost because what appears is only the animal phenomenon—which, albeit in its biological

¹²Martin Heidegger writes in *The Issue Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Garland Publishing, New York and London 1977, p. 4: “We ask the question concerning technology when we ask what it is. Everyone knows the two statements that answer our question. One says: Technology is a means to an end. The other says: Technology is a human activity. The two definitions of technology belong together. [...] The manufacture and utilization of equipment, tools, and machines, the manufactured and used things themselves, and the needs and ends that they serve, all belong to what technology is. The whole complex of these contrivances is technology. Technology itself is a contrivance, or, in Latin, an *instrumentum*. The current conception of technology, according to which it is a means and a human activity, can therefore be called the instrumental and anthropological definition of technology.” This is an instrumental view of technology as a mere activity reifying any human production. However, Heidegger seems to imply that it also represents a dialogue between the outside world (to which being is open as being-in-the-world) and the subject itself, in a performative and binding relation. In this perspective, *techne* appears to be able to craft the human, modifying and hybridising its body, predicates and perceptivity of the outside world. The non-human partner, be it technological or animal, makes the human referable, in constant need of external support to define its predicates and its being-in-the-world.

multiformity, can be neither an interlocutor nor a mirror, as there is an ontological gap between us and him.

The third response to the Darwinian continuum is to differentiate the morphopoietic process of non-human animals from those that led to the species *Homo sapiens*. In this case it is believed that, while animals are the outcome of the continuous, inevitable and refined work of selection—understood as the law of the strongest—human beings are different. The evolution of social behaviours, which emerged through selection, has managed to save man from natural selection itself. There is no doubt that Darwinism has led to very problematic social applications.¹³ After all, today it is clear that these proposals were the outcome of a mistaken interpretation of Darwinism. Considering human predicates to be the outcome of selection, with the latter being interpreted as the law of the strongest, leads to believing that every action against such law will lead to a progressive worsening of the predicates.

However, some of the answers to these aberrations, based on the same hermeneutic specularity, lead to results that are just as wrong, by supporting the idea of man as predicatively indefinite. In other words, one takes shelter even more in the humanity paradigm by:

1. confirming the somatic-expressive non-specialisation of man implicit in the myth of Prometheus and in Pico's manifesto, taking it as the human *quid*;
2. believing that such lack of declinations is the result of our species not being subject to natural selection.

This inversion maintains, or claims to maintain, Darwinism within humanism by stating that the human being owes its qualities to the very fact of being sheltered from natural selection. In this case, Prometheus is interpreted as the tutelary deity that protected humans from the selection and Prometheism becomes the ability to break free from the selection mechanisms that would lead to a deadly specialisation.¹⁴ It is acknowledged that humans are particularly inadequate when they are born—still, compared to other carnivore puppies, the latter are much more immature than humans. Another consideration concerns small size of the human follicle mantle or the splanchnocranium but, as we shall see, it is much more plausible to think of these effects as the outcomes of a slip of selection than as masking and neoteny.¹⁵

As early as 1864 Alfred Russel Wallace underlined that, after the development of pro-social and intellectual faculties, physical superiority was no longer awarded

¹³Think of Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism or Francis Galton's eugenics.

¹⁴A hypothesis that goes in this direction is that made by Lodewijk Bolck, who believes that the human predicative primitivism can be attributed to neoteny, that is, a delay in the development process for which the foetal conditions persist until the adult age. Another similar proposal can be found in the concept of "proterogenesis" by Otto Schindewolf and in that of "domestication" by Konrad Lorenz. For "neoteny" see glossary.

¹⁵Patrick Tort precisely and accurately defined this view of masking in the concept of reversion effect operated by pre-social behaviours.

because the weak and the sick receive assistance. As is clear, even for Wallace it comes to defining a meta-predication for the human being, definable by the term “evolution of evolution”. Darwin also stresses the importance of the development of the social instincts that, associated to memory and remorse, allow human beings to pursue a different evolutionary path. As Patrick Tort notes, Darwinian anthropology does not manifest any break from evolutionary mechanisms, but rather a “braking effect”. In other words, one might posit the existence of an exception to performative selection—a suspension of the mechanisms of adaptive specialisation—by the virtue of the evolution of pro-social behaviours. Patrick Tort’s proposal has several weaknesses, but I will only underline three:

- (a) the idea that selection is a universal power like gravity, acting on all organisms as a struggle of all against all;
- (b) the idea that there can be a time without selection, excluding a species from the parameter of fitness;
- (c) the idea that the selective process should produce results concerning the organism’s ability to eliminate the others and win against competitors.

These legacies do not regard Darwinian thought, but rather the interpretation of Darwinism based on existing cultural frames. First of all it makes no sense to speak of natural selection as a singular entity, reducible to the Hobbesian image of the affirmation of the strongest: fitness, i.e. the capacity for differential reproduction, can only be referred to a single species. One must refer to a variety of selective pressures, where each shielding—but it would be more correct to speak of “slip-page”—does not cancel selective processuality, because the reproductive differential is always in force, but simply moves it on other predicates. In this sense phylogenesis is always the production of predicates. Finally, it is incorrect to think of evolution supported by selective pressures as the emergence of egoism, struggle, or oppression: in fact, in certain biofunctional contexts, fitness—the true parameter of the production of predicates—can be linked to opposite behaviours. One example is the evolution of parental care, where success is achieved by devoting oneself to the other.

2.2 The Sharp Separation Between Human and Non-human Animals in Philosophical Anthropology

In principle, however, up to the 1940s, Darwinism was widely rejected in favour of the idea of a totally different genealogy between humans and other animals. An example of this is the philosophical anthropology by Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner and Arnold Gehlen, which is also related to some philosophical currents such as hermeneutics, phenomenology and existentialism. This line of thought plays a particular role, a strategic one, with regards to the matter under discussion,

precisely because it is centred on a decidedly Epimethean view of the animal—which is enclosed in von Uexküll's *Umwelt*—as opposed to a lacking human being relying on Prometheus' kindness. As you can see, philosophical anthropology is much in debt with the humanistic manifesto, to the point that it is sometimes defined as "neo-humanism", as well as with Herder's Romantic theory.

The attempt to relaunch the humanistic idea of man as a special project while avoiding the manifestly creationist aspect of Pico della Mirandola's thought take place through a complex interdisciplinary process aimed at conciliating human science and philosophical reflection. Given the importance of authors like Scheler, Plessner and especially Gehlen to the topic under discussion, I believe it is indispensable to dwell—albeit not exhaustively—on these authors and, in general, on philosophical anthropology, which is still very popular today.

Philosophical anthropology invents nothing compared to the foregoing considerations on the relationship between animal Epimetheanism and human Prometheism. However, it is also clear that, dealing specifically with the human sciences and reconciling philosophical reflection with the latter, philosophical anthropology should be considered the true term of comparison in order to refute:

1. the autopoietic and self-reflexive (narcissistic) conception of man (and animal epiphany aims precisely at this, considering man as a hybrid and not as self-founded;
2. the discontinuist view of the phylogenesis of the species *Homo sapiens*.

The difference between the human being and the animal is very significant in Max Scheler, who talks about a spiritual principle, complementary to the vital one—shared with animals—that makes man a unique and exceptional entity, radically different (again in a meta-predicative way) from all other living things. For Scheler the human being is characterized by living in a sort of connective agape, where the *ordo amoris* becomes in fact the *principium individuationis*. The element that connects the person to the world is therefore a state of openness that is revealed in values, i.e. proto-phenomena that direct the behaviour of human beings. Scheler makes explicit reference to the concept of "bildung" as a formative tension of the subject in culture, which is in effect the ecosystem that characterises the human being.

In this sense, also the tool in Scheler is not just a tool, because its ultimate meaning is attributable to its being a "way to culture", one that allows the human being to position itself in the animal-bodily totality in the dimension that is proper to it. In his 1928 essay *The Human Place in the Cosmos* Scheler claims that while the animals "always say 'yes' to reality (...) the human being is the 'Nay-sayer', he is an *ascetic of life*."¹⁶ In Scheler there is an evident tensional aspect—the same we found in Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino. Man is realised by escaping a purely functional or adaptive dimensionality, so even what at first sight could be explained in view of a merely functional end—the tool—becomes a kind of

¹⁶M. Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, Northwestern University Press, 2009, p. 39.

instrument of fitness that enables man to practice in the cultural dimension. The ascetic view of man as the nay-sayer—living within an agapic dimension, self-formed and exempt from Hobbes' *homo homini lupus*—needs the animal as a counterpart that, vice versa, has to follow its drives, deploying its individualistic and selfish aggressiveness in the struggle for life and being unable to act on itself as pre-constituted by the laws of nature.

Prometheism apparently takes the form of compensation when in fact it represents the banner of self-determination and the release from any outside contributions: the green light to a dimension of unconditional power of self-projecting. That's how the animal, represented as something external to stay away from, actually becomes a disjunctive operator called to erode humans from the human project. The disjunctive meta-predicate is identified by Helmuth Plessner in the concept of "eccentricity"¹⁷: while animals live at the center of their environment—bounded by von Uexküll's bubble—and therefore their lives are governed by a strict determinism, the human being is in ex-centered, by virtue of the self-awareness that allows it to deny, and move away from, the biological necessity which, on the contrary, the animal cannot escape.

In this sense the animal is seen as devoid of a self or of a self-awareness and, because of this, it is assumed that it cannot leave its bubble, thereby transcending the biological gravity of its nature. Therefore, for Plessner the human is the realm of freedom and choice, whereas the animal is entirely bound to necessity (it cannot do otherwise) and the determinism implied by reactivity and drivenness. The meta-predicate of eccentricity places the animal condition in *being* a body, while the human one coincides with *owning* a body—that is, being able to use it and think of it. For Plessner the human dimension is also a sort of original condition: a kind of primary detachment from organic life from which the gap between man and animal derives.

According to Plessner, the human being is inserted into his own bodily limits but, at the same time, is projected outside of them, opening up to the world and therefore acquiring an "ex-centred" position. However, precisely from this eccentric position the human being traces new poetic coordinates, that is, new artificial boundaries to embody. This being-a-body and being-in-a-body inevitably changes the human condition compared to the animal one, as in the psychic dimension projected outside (but it's unclear where) man is inevitably decentred from his body, so that he considers it one of the many things in the world. Human conscience is therefore interpreted as non-coincidence with the body: a laceration of the body, a fracture with respect to the bodily dimension. At the same time, human schizophrenia produces a reflection that amounts to self-reflection.

In Plessner, the break of unity is conscience but also disquiet, creative unbalance, process. There are undoubtedly some points in common between Plessner's conception of the human ex-centred position and my proposal of animal epiphany:

¹⁷Plessner, Helmuth. 1928. *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch: Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.

they share the idea that human evolution can happen under the aegis of anthropodecentralization. However, there are still obvious differences lying in:

- (a) the idea that ex-centration produces reflection, whereas in the concept of epiphany the reflection it is the therianthropie that produces the decentering process;
- (b) the autarchic idea of a process necessarily based on the leitmotif of the human scarce Epimethean endowment, which leads to conceive of reflection as self-reflection, whereas in animal epiphany only the encounter with otherness can realise a non-narcissistic reflection, and therefore an escape into the overhuman.

As you can see, both in Scheler and in Plessner, the *ab-origine* human diversity compared from other species is never questioned, and the humanistic notion of human autonomy in its self-construction is preserved. If we consider Pico's manifesto, we'll notice that even God is kept out of the anthropopoietic process, because His operation merely sets a starting condition for the human being, allowing for its own self-determination. The basic principle of humanist thought is ontological anthropocentrism, which does not contemplate any non-human interference (be it a divinity, the technosphere¹⁸ or animal otherness) in the construction of the human dimension.

Humanism can never do without narcissism (i.e. self-reflection), but any theory that tried to explain decentralisation starting from an isolationist ontopoietic conception is obviously bound to be weak. Therefore, even in Plessner reason falls within the usual meta-predicative dualism used to distinguish mind versus body and human versus animal. In 1928, the same year as Scheler's essay, Plessner's *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* also came out. In the book, Plessner compared the vegetal, animal and human dimensions based on their inner cohesion and autonomy, noticing a progressive graduality in their ability to distinguish themselves (i.e. their ability of self-decentralization). While the vegetal is completely absorbed in its position, the animal is capable of a certain autonomy that sets it apart from, and in opposition to, the environment. But while reacting to environmental stimuli, it is not aware of what it does because, unlike the human being, it remains anchored to its own center, thus not being able to "see itself from the outside."

However, Arnold Gehlen is surely the thinker that brings the metapredicative conception to its most complete formulation. For Gehlen, the human scarce predicative endowment deprives man of the screening that the animal has thanks to its full inclusion in its *Umwelt*. Thus, man is literally overwhelmed by stimuli, while the animal only follows those relevant to its life process. Also, the human being undergoes a flood of drives, and not only those that blindly and automatically lead

¹⁸For "technosphere" see glossary.

to adaptive behaviours.¹⁹ Human indefiniteness or incompleteness make us projected towards perceptual and pulsional exposition as well as to ontopoietic plasticity. In fact, the human being can distance himself from the world thanks to language, conscience, action and technology.

This is the concept of exoneration, which has common roots with Plessner's eccentricity and explicitly recalls Promethean language, which like the centaur is appointed to head towards what is far away—in time and in space—unlike Epimethean animals living the uniqueness of the here-and-now. Thus for Gehlen the human being lacks Epimethean predicates and is therefore characterised by adaptive shortcomings, ancestrality or primitivism, non-specialisation, so that it cannot live directly in nature. Unlike animals, man lives a second nature. Experiencing the world, where the excess becomes distance, basically means that, while the animal has a specialization living in a particular environment, man has access to the entire world, but he must necessarily change it through his work. Through cultural action, for Gehlen, the human being compensates for its organic weakness, creating instruments that become extensions of its body, but he also builds a second nature or dimension that is no longer qualified only by performative analysis. Technology, which is central to Gehlen's thought, becomes the compensation for human deficiencies and non-adaptations, as an integrating part of man's nature.

If it is true that the need to mark the boundaries between man and animal can be found in the whole of philosophy, mostly after Pico's manifesto, it is also undeniable that the philosophical anthropology proposed by Scheler, Plessner and Gehlen represents an important break, which should be considered as going hand in hand with philosophy on the one hand and descriptive sciences on the other. What characterises it is the need to grasp the overall human "specialness", joining scientific research and philosophical reflection, considering the human being as a synthetic being that should be identified in its entirety. Many authors underline the neo-humanist meaning of this project, understood as a need to:

- (a) synthesize the outcomes of the so called human sciences in the light of philosophical interpretation—hence the proximity to Gadamer's hermeneutics;
- (b) overcome the trauma of Darwinism, guilty of finding a despicable continuity between man and other species.

For philosophical anthropology, as underlined by Habermas²⁰ and Coreth,²¹ the human being cannot be reduced to a particular science, that is, no science can grasp

¹⁹In Gehlen's hypothesis, the original human lack makes man a foetal being devoid of protection and thus exposed to a number of expressive vanishing lights, which the philosopher interprets as ambivalent qualities. In fact, on the one hand they allow for the virtual action that underlies human creativity, on the other hand they represent social and adaptive dangers if they're not kept under control—hence the idea of Prometheus.

²⁰J. Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, Beacon Press 1975.

²¹E. Coreth, *Was ist der Mensch?: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Anthropologie*. Innsbruck, Wien, München: Tyrolia 1973.

the essence of man. Thus we need a philosophical interpretation of scientific data hiding the intention to redefine the boundaries between the human and the animal. The idea is to give back the human being its global image, one that cannot be reduced to the empirical data of single sciences or degraded to a merely phylogenetic aspect. More coherently we might say that, without the Cartesian ground taking the *res cogitans* to be the human essence and with the affirmation of Darwinism, the humanist paradigm was suddenly unstable (as noticed especially by Martin Heidegger). Hence the need for a solution. For philosophical anthropology, we must place man at the centre, starting from his meta-predicative characterisation—its being special in a global way, as a particular project of nature—ignoring the humiliation suffered because of the Copernican, Darwinian and Freudian revolutions.

Thus, while animals allegedly differentiate themselves through Epimethean characters (so that a jellyfish is different from a chimpanzee only in terms of predicative complexity, with the latter living in a richer bubble) the human being belongs to another condition defined by the meta-predicate of absence or non-declination. The Promethean dimension should be read, both in philosophical anthropology and in existentialism, as the universal *quid proprium* of the human being as a lack of boundaries and as emergence from the invisible bubble enclosing the animal. The adaptive perimeter defines the animal's captivation, its complete abandonment to the environment and hence its perceiving-operating only in the adaptive sense, contrary to the farsightedness of those who can have an absolute gaze on the world, looking at it from its peak, far away from the particular, both contextual and temporal.

2.3 Is the Human Condition Original or Produced?

While philosophical anthropology considers the human condition of absence/distance as an original prerogative—the outcome of a project of nature—so that human self-creation (anthropopoiesis) is understood as a compensation for the poor Epimethean endowments, in Heidegger's existentialism human becoming (anthropogenesis) is inherent in the separation itself, or failure-fault, in the biological functional flow inaugurated by the representation of being. Anthropogenesis is a process that makes mankind able to separate the subject from the object through language. Here, however, language does not complete the human being nor does it compensate for her shortcomings: man himself is called to create the distance and make the object emerge in the subject's perspective.

For Heidegger language is what allows man to grasp being as such, separating perception from action, accessing the beings in the world for what they are and not for their biological-functional value. Distance separates the being from its function: if the bee sees a flower as nectar, man (only man) can grasp the flower as such. The mediation of the word transforms the relationship with the object in a non-inclusive interaction: if the bee is absorbed by the flower as a transition to the biological

function, so that we cannot even speak of a real relationship between subject and object, the human being is capable of grasping the flower as a flower and not as a chance of finding nectar precisely because he distances himself from it. Distancing implies the recognition of the object as non-engaging: thus it is an object with respect to which one can show detachment or lack of interest, a neutral evaluation, as it is not “the implicit terminal of an action with a biological value.”²²

Heidegger’s position undoubtedly can be ascribed neither to the first position (*humanitas* as the original Promethean condition) nor to the second, that is, the idea of *animalitas* as onto-genetically overcome or hidden by the symbolic distancing achieved by language. However, Heidegger’s view is interesting because it deprives the non-human animal of a real perspective on the world, i.e. the ability to face the world as an observer who is not merely a user. In an almost opposite way, Derrida makes the cat emerge as a subject by feeling observed by the cat—when his nakedness becomes such because there is someone able to see it as such. The observing animal is exactly what is completely excluded by Heidegger’s interpretation of “poor-in-world.”²³ Thus Prometheus becomes the one who watches, the one who can observe because he has distanced himself from the world. Heidegger locates in language the principle of separation from the environment that marks both the human subjective existence and death as something beyond the end of biological functions. Language is therefore a mediating function between subjectivity and death—Derrida agrees on this.²⁴

At this point it might be interesting to better analyse the difference between:

1. an *ab-origine* meta-predicate (as in the philosophical anthropology of Scheler, Plessner and Gehlen) considering the human (incomplete, lacking, embryonic) condition as a background to culture, i.e., the symbolic, technical, linguistic act;
2. an *ex-post* meta-predicate (as in authors like Lacan, Cassirer, Dennett and others) for which culture is what inaugurated the human condition, domesticating man’s *animalitas* through the symbolic-linguistic system.

The difference, however, lies not in the metapredicative principle—*ab-origine* versus *ex-post*—but rather in the very meaning of *humanitas* operated by culture, which in the former case focuses on the process of a second adaptive space, while in the latter case focuses on the realization of the distancing. Plessner’s position is maybe the most intermediate of the proposed ones because, while accepting the lacking condition that nature allegedly imposed on humans, he introduces the fracture of being in the body and also outside the body as a principle of reflection.

To understand the Promethean element, after all, one must start from the devaluation of the non-human and the nullification of the non-human animal. In the

²²F. Cimatti, *Filosofia dell’animalità*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2013, p. 34.

²³M. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Here we also read “Not even the lark sees the open”, a metonymical expression indicating that non-humans cannot see beyond their *Umwelt*.

²⁴J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

ab-origine conception, animality does not regard the human being because it was forgotten by Epimetheus to begin with. This is obviously a healthy forgetfulness for the humanist interpretation of humanity, because it allows for the freedom of action, self-construction and self-reflection that it couldn't have had otherwise. Therefore, for philosophical anthropology Prometheism is both freedom and uncertainty, power and insecurity, and yet Prometheus' legacy represents man's irreducibility to the animal. Animality is therefore a devalued condition, that is, minor, hierarchically inferior, notwithstanding the description of man as lacking. Animality is a counter-term to the protean form represented by Prometheus; it amounts to being closed in one's condition, while the human being is a person because it is plural: it is body, in the body, outside the body, able to reflect on every position it takes. If, on the other hand, animality is taken as a lost or hidden condition, then the devaluation lies in placing it in the past (an ancestral or infantile regression) taken away from the human by the symbolic, by the domestication operated by language and the irreversible fall into referentiality.

Starting from parental care, the human being is immersed in complex networks of semiotic mediation taking place through language and ranging from nominative emergence to prescriptive coordinates proposed by adults and introjected into ontogenesis. The very fact of assimilating social rules, definable in prescription resonances able to give directives to the body, understood as immediate expression of physiological and instinctual reactions (but does it still make sense to interpret behaviour this way?), transforms the human being into a schizoid entity because it creates a gap between the self and the body.²⁵ In this regard, quoting Cimatti, "transcendence appears in human life as the effect of language on the body, taking the subject away from the body, because saying 'I' means leaving the body and having the chance to see oneself from outside one's body—a chance that the tick seems not to have."²⁶

Beyond the differences between the two proposals, there is a convergence in the conception of *humanitas* as a Promethean principle: some believe that the original Epimethean shortage has revealed the Promethean need, others consider the Epimethean emptying as a result of the Promethean emergence. The result is the same: what characterises the animal is Epimethean fullness, what characterises the human being is the Promethean second nature. The devaluation of the heterospecific, however, lies not only in the contralateral conception of the non-human but also in a blunt denial of any intervention or even influence of non-human otherness in the construction of the human. The autopoietic arrogance of the human must rely on a real explanatory "stunt" to try to explain a decentring process. But how is it possible to decentralize oneself while remaining firm within one's ontological dimension? And how can one recognize oneself "from behind"—

²⁵Lacan makes human subjectivity emerge precisely from this gap in which mirroring is self-reflection of the human, as it is completely bound to the human itself. Thus the Promethean ends up defining he who looks at himself in order to emerge.

²⁶F. Cimatti, *Filosofia dell'animalità*, p. 40.

that is, in the sense of no longer what I was—if not through the emergence of a metamorphosis? Self-reflection inevitably closes the subject in what it is, namely in what remains. Only a non-narcissistic reflection, i.e. one that is not self-referred, is able to produce a decentring split and thus open up the human.²⁷

Before addressing in detail the issue of animal epiphany as the overcoming of autopoietic narcissism, it is useful to consider some weaknesses of the two above mentioned proposals, both based on the exclusivity of the Promethean foundation. The attempt of philosophical anthropology to explain the metapredicative origin blatantly clashes with evolutionary theory, so it is not possible to find accordance between the two, not even by using imaginative epicycles such as that of the shielding on natural selection caused by the evolution of social behaviour. As mentioned, philosophical anthropology transforms anthropopoiesis into a kind of human dimensioning—the advent of an autopoietic second nature inhabited by man as unfit to relate directly to the first nature—transforming culture in a kind of completion or useful crutch to make up for performative deficiencies. If the concept of the deficiency of human nature collapses, the backbone of the whole theoretical edifice ceases to exist.

The argument that such supposed deficiencies are yet to be proven is being progressively abandoned in the growing awareness of the performative complexity and specialization of the human: after all, what does a central nervous system consisting of 100 billion neurons amount to, if not an adaptive specialization? However, the weak point of Gehlen's proposal is the idea of a side project, that is to say, one that does not follow the phylogenetic coordinates proper of other animal species. To think that a totally unfit species lacking functional correlations might evolve all of a sudden, as you can see, requires moving away from the foundational principle of the bios based precisely on adaptation: that is, on the correlation of the species to a certain function. For Darwin's theory, it is the species that builds its rank and not the other way round, which would lead to a fixist vision of the living, so Gehlen's fixist legacy is evident.

But then we must wonder whether some form of inclusion between the theory of incompleteness and Darwinism is possible, albeit with some adjustments to Gehlen's hypothesis. A useful starting point comes from Charles Darwin himself. In the essay *The Descent of Man*²⁸ he aims to analyze the relationship between the development of prosocial behavior in humans—evolved in accordance with the principle of fitness—and the effects of these compared to further selective processes. But even in this case there would be too many inconsistencies with the theory of incompleteness; for that reason, Arnold Gehlen's rejection of the Darwinian theory is inevitable and consistent, not a hiccup. In fact, it would not

²⁷It then becomes clear that the most important aspect of Prometheism is the concept of human autarky I have already explained in *Post-human. Verso nuovi modelli di esistenza*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2002 and in *Il tramonto dell'uomo. La prospettiva postumanista*, Dedalo, Bari, 2009.

²⁸Ch. Darwin, *The Descent of Man*.

make sense to speak of original human incompleteness being in an evolutionary logic, for several reasons. Let's see some:

- (a) we cannot assume that primates, the most complex animals as per ethnographic articulation, would lead within a few millions of years to the most incomplete and deficient evolutionary line in the animal kingdom;
- (b) imagining the evolution and affirmation of a completely deficient being cannot be justified in the explanatory mechanism put forward by the Darwinian theory, based on the concept of fitness;
- (c) if we observe the morphology and structure of some human biological characteristics—such as the eye-hand coordination, the complexity of the cortex, the biomechanical structure enabling bipedalism—the high specialization of the human being appears undeniable.

On the other hand, as we shall see, it is much more likely to feel that the original deficiency proposed by Gehlen is actually a “perception of deficiency”: that is, a sense of lack or need attributable to the habit of performance mediated by technology, which sets standards of optimality that are unattainable without a tool. Similarly it is not enough to appeal to language as an entity that suddenly intervenes to realize the fault between the carnal body and symbolic body, or, more generally, between being and the body; one must try to understand—as Chomsky or Vygotsky do—why this process emerges in humans. However, the explanation given by these authors does not help support the metapredicative discontinuity they would like to argue in favour of. Language can increase the designation and therefore the distance from the entity, but it cannot inaugurate it from scratch. On the other hand, the metapredicative conception founded on human becoming-absent-separated-divided through the domestication of the human body (i.e. considering the anthropogenetic process as a distancing objectifying event that develops in the human experience when language comes into play) requires more attention.

As Vygotsky stresses, language is viewed as a means of distancing because it allows to refer to an entity in its absence. Language is itself capable of operating a split in the ontogenetic process and consequently making the object thinkable outside of contingency. The designation becomes a split because on one hand there is the signifier—the autonomy of the representation-symbolization from the entity—and, on the other hand, there is the entity itself, which for the first time may appear “as such” (that is, not as an extension-expression of the life drive of the animal). The world becomes a workshop for Prometheus, the educator that, through language, makes man the master of his own behaviour.²⁹ The entity as such maintains its presence both in the absence of the subject that it encounters and in the absence of a process of fruition. Language, in other words, would interrupt the flow of fruition that confuses the animal in the world, annihilating any form of subjectivity in it. The animal lives, it does not reflect on the entity: the bee does not relate

²⁹As we have seen, for Heidegger language is the house of being, the place that allows the environment to become world.

to the flower but to its own vital function of sucking nectar. According to this interpretation, while fruition is the status quo characterising the animal world, the reflexive and representational approach characterises the human.

Prometheus is the principle that allows human beings to be absent, to create a fracture between themselves and the world which saves them from the stunning of intoxication. Prometheus is a faraway look, while Epimetheus is stigmatized as a form of myopia that involves and overwhelms. The animal, as Epimethean, is a de-subjectivized entity who lives the continuum of the expression of the body, and whose presence (non-present and especially lacking a present) always corresponds to the vital function that the body activates in the here-and-now as urgency and as conjugation. Animality provides a bubble of perceptibles and, within it, a set of markings that indicate the different predicates of the usable, which results in a perception that is already action. Twentieth century neohumanism created a rift between the animal unable to recognize the object, and the subjectivity of the human being all based on competence in focusing things across the distance.

For the animal, the entity is not an observable but a functional predicate—graspable, suckable, edible and so on—and thus it can never appear in its objectivity. The meta-predicate is therefore an ontogenetic result: the emergence of the human thanks to the distancing operated by language, finally able to focus on the body as such. What's at stake is the emergence of the human as irreducible to animality and irreversible: it is the appearance of a subjectivity that looks at the world and at its own body by breaking away from it. The consequences of the emergence of language are relevant both to the definition of subjectivity and to the judgment of the entity as such.

Regarding subjectivity, authors like Agamben, Chomsky, Vygotsky, and Dennett, for whom the metapredicative difference between the human—as a fatal condition of those who are no longer included in the condition of *animalitas*—and the animal is based on language, tend to see the symbolic designation of being as:

- (a) the emergence of the self-that-speaks as an entity that owns the body, namely that is no longer a body, or that is capable of reflecting on its vital functions;
- (b) the emergence of the self-that-observes, which sees the body as a whole and not only as the usability and adherence to the living entity;
- (c) the emergence of the self-that-governs its own animality in relation with the outside world and bodiliness, that is, the self who is able to say 'no' to the stimuli coming from the markings of the world and to the impulses arising from its body;
- (d) the emergence of the narcissistic-self, which is separated from the world. It looks at itself and takes awareness of being an "I", establishing itself as a biographical and subjective singularity, that is, as an "autonomous perspective"—as knowledge and relevance of a self that is positioned in proximity to, and outside of, the latter;

- (e) the emergence of the self-that-dies, because only after dissociation can the subject be present and therefore die, while the animal positioned not in the present but in the singularity of the here-and-now can only stop living;
- (f) the emergence of the self-in-distress not only due to the awareness of death but also to the very distance of living, the lack of a position or, if you will, of an answer giving reason for its existence.

Again, what interests us is the alleged discontinuity between the human being and the animal that, stripped of any title and subjectivity, is not able to provide a form of otherness for the human being. This reasoning is flawed by some weak points; however, it seems more plausible than the *ab-origine* metapredicative conception proposed by Gehlen. In particular:

- (a) the idea that self-awareness and one's own biographical self, that is, individuality persisting over time, is linked to language and not simply perfected by it, since, especially in mammals, there is indubitable evidence of self-reference and self-recognition;
- (b) the idea that the non-human animal is not able to categorise, that is, that the processes of categorization and conceptualization depend on the presence of language, even though the use of general categories of reference to beings has been proven not only in mammals but also in other types of animals;
- (c) the idea that only language allows for self-control or the ability to cope with frustration and also the possibility of self-imposed limitations, even though it has been shown that parental care is a form of apprenticeship for social animals related to the implementation of processes of self-inhibition, such as bite inhibition in canines;
- (d) the idea that the animal is completely absorbed in the singularity of the here-and-now, even though many tests on birds and mammals show that the individual has goals and therefore looks to the future, planning its action based on strategies/tactics, making simulations and assessments based on the structural requirements of the problem, and reflecting on finding useful solutions (heuristics) choosing them on the basis of their consistency with the problem;
- (e) the idea that the animal is unable to assess beings as such: that it is unable to objectify reality, but only to use it driven by immediate urges, even though there is proof of the animals' ability to stock up objects even regardless of their immediate need for them.

But the most controversial aspect in assuming language as an anthropogenetic principle is that it makes the emergence of language itself inexplicable, as in any self-grounding claim one is always condemned to a *regressio ad infinitum*. If, however, we treat language as one of the many cultural expressions of the human—capable of educating the human being, but not an autopoietic and emanative product of the human—we can set language within the decentrative experience inaugurated by animal epiphany. Only when language emerges after the epiphany—for example in a zoo-mimetic act—as distancing from the merely species-specific expression, it introduces an ontopoietic dimensionality, for example the use of the

phoneme for phatic purposes, making man increasingly decentralized within the designation. The close relationship between the mime, the gesture, the prosody, and the camouflage—detectable both in anthropological field research³⁰ and in the analysis of neurobiological structures—actually make it plausible to posit a relationship of co-optative development between practices that differ considerably in their modes of expression, but all related to zoomimesis,³¹ and language development.³² Again, as we shall see, we must reverse the explanation: language was not born as a designative and symbolic tool, but its emergence has made its functional emergence available.

³⁰Consider the research by Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, clearly showing that the evolutionary legacy of *Homo sapiens* is far from deficient. In fact, our species is phylogenetically tied to a group of animals (anthropomorphous primates) that are some of the most complex ones in terms of ethographic structure. See Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, *Human Ethology*, Aldine Transaction, 2007.

³¹For “zoomimesis” see glossary.

³²This is the hypothesis underlying Merlin Donald’s. *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition* (Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1991). The idea is that the human mind evolved differently from the primates through adaptations that have led to a new representative system. Instead of replacing the previous modes, the latter has sedimented them, giving rise to a mosaic made up of different structures. For Donald the first transition happened with the passage from an “episodic” culture to a “mimetic” culture typical of *Homo erectus* and characterised by shared knowledge, rituality, the reproduction of events in writing, etc. The second passage would be from such “mimetic” culture to a “mythical” one present in all humans and identified by the use of verbal language and a highly developed semiotic skills. The last sedimentation allegedly took place with the advent of “theoretical” culture characterised by graphic invention, the formulation of theories and so forth.

Over the Human

Post-humanism and the Concept of Animal Epiphany

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