

The Negative Animal

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Abstract

In this paper, I analyze some aspects of Hegelian and post-Hegelian thought in order to demonstrate how the concepts of animality and negativity intersect in philosophical reflections on nature. In the first part, I consider the figure of the animal in Hegel's work and show its necessary relation to negativity. In the second part, I return to Georges Bataille and Alexander Kojève's discussion of the end of history, where negativity appears with a human face, as something that leaves animals behind. Finally, in the third part, I justify the animal's claims on negativity as a force of transformation and change through a peculiar political ontology of the fish.

Keywords

animal, Hegel, immanence, Kojève, negativity.

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*In nature's malleable mirror,
The stars are a seine, we are fish,
The gods, ghosts by the darkness.*
— Velimir Khlebnikov

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When researching certain figures obviously repressed in the western philosophical tradition, especially animals and animality, one always encounters a quite specific style or strategy adopted by contemporary critics: to accuse thinkers of the past of treating animals badly. This particular form of philosophical projection is, of course, a necessary part of the Oedipal relationship with the fathers of philosophy, and a topic like animality provides ample room for that. The philosophers of the past, grounded in metaphysics, theology, rationalism or humanism, undoubtedly used to take anthropocentric, speciesist, sexist, racist or Eurocentric approaches, and all attempts at critical deconstruction of their thought come out as unequivocal verdicts. There is a kind of competition nowadays in blaming previous philosophers for their “maltreatment” of animals.

To paraphrase Lenin, I will try and take a different route. I would prefer to avoid the rhetoric of judgment and not take part in a trial, not because I want to acquit philosophers before the animal kingdom but because what is really interesting is each philosopher's ambiguity.

Hegel is a great figure within the philosophical tradition to which we are compelled to refer again and again, and within which animals are the object of the notorious disregard known as speciesism or anthropocentrism. Some works dealing with animality in Hegel emphasize, first of all, this precise moment of human superiority over animals, in many respects.

Andrew Benjamin thus pursues Hegel's anthropocentrism by investigating the question of disease as it appears in the *Philosophy of Nature*. Through the problematic of the Other, he shows how it is connected, in a quite complicated way, with racism and anti-Semitism (Benjamin 2007: 61–77). For Hegel, disease is the weakness of a concept's power, since a concept maintains the subject's unity, whereas disease is what threatens this unity and can destroy it through the exaggeration of some particularity. In this sense, animals are essentially weak, because they live in an environment full of danger, and (unlike humans) they cannot really oppose this danger and, finally, death with a certain power of self-constitution as unities. Benjamin emphasizes that for Hegel, the Jews, with their religion and tradition, are also a kind of particularity of the human that should be overcome in favor of humanity as a whole. (Should this not be compared with Adorno's famous statement (Adorno 1998: 80) that “[a]nimals play for the idealistic system virtually the same role as the Jews for fascism”?)

To take another example, Elisabeth de Fontenay marks out two contradictory tendencies in the Hegelian discourse on animality. The first tendency, which she mentions briefly in a single paragraph, is associated with the phenomenological tradition of regarding any living organism as a subjectivity, which, “through the exterior processes, always maintains a unity in itself” (Fontenay 1998: 533). The second tendency, to which she has dedicated an entire chapter on Hegel entitled “The Mouth Is without Spirit,” is Hegel’s idealistic disregard for animals. This second tendency is mostly expressed in the *Aesthetics*, where Hegel speculates about the deficiency of natural beauty. The beauty of the animal is insufficient, for it does not attain the Ideal, which is a concrete unity not only *in itself* but also *for itself* and for others (Hegel 1998a: 132).

One could say, therefore, that from an aesthetic point of view the problem of Hegelian animals is that they are not beautiful enough. Their interior remains immediate, imprisoned within their body, secret, concealed or unrevealed. (The idea of the animal’s secrecy will be later developed by Heidegger, who proposes *openness* as a criterion for differentiating human beings from simple living beings.) In Hegel’s writings, we see only the exterior of the animal body. And here, at the exterior level, the distinction between animals and humans can be determined with regard to some basic aspects.

First of all, we see the animal body covered with scales, wool, feathers, etc. And all those scales, wool, feathers, etc., indicate, according to Hegel, a certain *underdevelopment of the skin*. The skin is important: the stronger and the purer the skin, the more beautiful the creature. The development of the skin, the shedding of natural coverings and protections, accompanies an increasing spirituality, a spirituality that becomes “open.” But much more than the skin, the *eyes* attest to the spirit’s appearance. Only in human beings does the function of the eye, through which the soul manifests itself, dominate over regular natural functions; in animals, the main body part is the protrusive *mouth*. This is what differentiates a human *face* from an animal head (Hegel 1998b: 729). (We will see this motif of the face further developed, for example, in Levinas.) For Hegel, what is really and truly beautiful is a Greek profile, an artistic model that ideally combines the individual and the universal, and in which animal traces are almost erased, even in the mouth, for the spirit’s good (Hegel 1998b: 730). *Upright posture* is another criterion involved in drawing the line between human and animal bodies. On the one hand, it is closely related to the function of the mouth, which in the human being loses its priority as well, because this being literally raises its head (whereas, in animals, the mouth and the spine usually form a single line). On the other hand, it indicates, for Hegel, the free will, without which animals *cannot even stay erect* (Hegel 1998b: 739).

Of course, free will is needed not merely for staying erect. It is needed to possess and dispose of one’s own life. (For Fontenay, this is the point

where Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* and *Rechtsphilosophie* dramatically intersect.) What is involved here, in humans, is their awareness of death, which introduces the act of free will as the basic principle of human life. Since animals do not really own their own death, they cannot really possess their life, and an animal cannot therefore be the subject of law, as Hegel states in his *Philosophy of Right* (Fontenay 1998: 542). Animals cannot possess their life and death, but we can possess not only our own but also their deaths and lives. This is how, Fontenay concludes, the metaphysical machinery operates: it gives humans the full power to dispose of animal life as they see fit, according to their own needs and desires. After all, Fontenay's claim is thus to have finished off this "bloody tautology" (Fontenay 1998: 543).

It is difficult not to agree with this fair demand, which emerges from the desire to give credit to animals and rehabilitate them after long centuries of repression, in all senses of this word. While I am in solidarity with this critical discourse, I must remind readers that it draws its legitimacy from the twentieth century's ethico-political emancipatory agenda and the general theoretical intention—from Heidegger and Bataille, through post-structuralism and deconstructionism, to contemporary post-humanism—to be done with the entire previous metaphysical tradition, to go beyond it. However, I cannot help absolutely agreeing with Lacan, who summed up this intention as early as 1955: "I don't much like hearing that we have *gone beyond* Hegel, the way one hears we have *gone beyond* Descartes. We go beyond everything and always end up in the same place" (Lacan 1991: 71).

I propose going back to the point beyond which we have gone (according to Lacan, we are still there) and search there for the other Hegel. We should go back to this before-the-beyond because, by following the abovementioned tendency of focusing exclusively on the human-animal distinction's repressive aspect, we can quite soon end up with a purely ethical concern. It does not lead us very far, since it is stuck on the surface of all-too-human self-consciousness or, worse, philosophy's bad conscience, where all traces of the animal have already been erased. Therefore, we can go back to the point that Fontenay, as I have mentioned above, briefly evokes as Hegel's first (phenomenological) tendency, only to hurriedly leave it behind, as if it were something less significant.

In Hegel's philosophical system, reason is invested with such force and will that it declares its ability to capture and absorb the entire realm of negative experience, including animality, madness, and even death. The end of universal humanity (in both senses, that of finalization and of having completed its principal task) is to help matter realize its proper spiritual content, to make it truly reasonable by deploying the system of science. Any substance should thus be an opportunity for the subject—in a negative movement, which is at the same time the totality of spirit—to pass through alienation and ruptures, and face finitude in order to over-

come it. And finitude has to be comprehended through nature, which is “the Idea in the guise of externality” (Hegel 2007: 418). Nature is a mirror of spirit, its negation, its objective, external, alienated existence, its existence in the form of otherness. In this mirror, spirit must recognize itself in order to acquire itself in its unity through the processes of mediation and doubling.

Hegel’s philosophy of nature passes through all the levels and forms of inorganic and organic matter. Geological nature, crystals, ocean, the atmosphere—everything seems alive and filled with sound, light, and the various shapes of existence. No one, nothing, not even the smallest mushroom or most trifling jellyfish can hide from the eye of Hegel’s omniscience. The philosopher is literally obsessed with including everything and everybody in the system of spirit and making every point of the universe participate in the process of becoming. It is as if we were witnessing a total stocktaking or inventorying of nature done in order to appropriate all its wealth. Nothing should be lost or, worse still, excluded; everything and everybody is welcome in the menagerie of spirit. Spirit’s unity and even its solitude are reflected in nature’s abundant multiplicity. Animals, too, are now a quite important element of totality and therefore must be thoroughly classified.

For Hegel, classification itself is a big problem, and this problem consists namely in the gap between external reality, or nature, and notion. As he writes,

In studying the classification of animals, the method followed is to search for a common feature to which the concrete forms (*Gebilde*) can be reduced, that is, to a simple, sensuous determinateness which therefore, is also an external one. But there are no such simple determinations. (Hegel 2007: 417)

Hegel is thus aware of the fact that “the variety and profusion of living forms does not admit of any general feature” (Hegel 2007: 417). There is no common ground in reality or nature itself; according to Hegel, one should search for it in another domain, which in no way coincides with nature, i.e., that of spirit and science. We must start from the theory, from the concept, from “general determinations.” And it is here we encounter his famous formula: if reality does not fit the notion, that is reality’s problem, not the notion’s:

On the contrary, therefore, it is general determinations which must be made the rule and natural forms compared with it. If they do not tally with it but exhibit certain correspondences, if they agree with it in one respect but not in another, then it is not the rule, the characteristic of the genus and class, etc., which is to be altered, as if this had to conform to these existences, but, conversely, it is the latter which ought to con-

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form to the rule; and in so far as this actual existence does not do so, the defect belongs to *it*. (Hegel 2007: 417)

The domain of the concept is thus not the one that should correspond to a certain reality of nature or reflect it, but the one that subordinates this reality, with all its particularities, in its capacity as the universal. As Mladen Dolar explains,

For Hegel facts cannot contradict theory not because of their lowly nature, but because they can only be facts if they are seized by the concept, a fact can acquire the dignity of a fact only by virtue of a theory which has selected it and presented it as relevant. (Dolar 2011)

In the meantime, let us note that the concept's universality requires a specific philosophical attitude, a kind of primordial *faith in the Notion*. Hegel establishes a certain ethos of truth, according to which if there is something wrong with a reality, in the sense that it does not fit the notion, does not conform to its classifications and general determinations, and therefore cannot be explained by it, it is not because the reality is inadequate to the notion, but because it lags behind the concept; and if that is so, we must believe that, in the end, the notion will not let us down and the reality will pull itself up:

One must start from the Notion; and even if, perhaps, the Notion cannot yet give an adequate account of the 'abundant variety' of Nature so-called, we must nevertheless have faith in the Notion, though many details are as yet unexplained. [...] The Notion, however, is valid in its own right; the particulars then will soon find their explanation. (Hegel 2007: 358–359)

In other words, nature is not an osseous and unchangeable given, but the reality which transforms itself according to the logic of truth, introduced by the spirit unfolding in history.

To restrict oneself merely to explaining this ethos of the philosopher by reference to his idealism means getting it wrong. Of course, Hegel himself explicitly characterizes his position as idealism. However, if we want to get it right, we must appreciate the radicalism of this faith, for it is only one tiny but quite significant, decisive, and, so to speak, voluntarist step from this to Marx's Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."

I mean to say that, with Hegel, theory, tired of trying to catch reality by the tail, declared its own pre-eminence. Contradiction was no longer a problem of theory not corresponding to reality, but of reality not corresponding to theory, of empirical reality not corresponding to its notion. Nevertheless, the lack of any desire to narrow the gulf between theory and

reality does not bear witness to whether the rule of general determinations are true or false as much as it does to the fact that reality, as such, has serious flaws and presents a problem; and however true notions might be, these deficiencies keep history and life from moving far enough to catch up to their notions the way Hegel would have wanted. Think about it: our reality, the one we deal with day in, day out, is neither an illusion nor the truth. This reality is real, but it is no less false, and thus theory should immediately abandon its autonomy and turn into practice (which is already a Marxian step).

One major argument could be that, before any proletarian does so, the figure of the animal brings us to this passage, but in order to get this point, we should first make a preliminary investigation of vulnerable moments where it is not notion that fails to follow nature, but nature that fails to follow notion. If nature is the mirror of spirit, then it is a distorting mirror, but looking at oneself in this mirror is something that nevertheless makes sense, because it is precisely from these distortions and dramatic non-coincidences that historical subjectivity emerges.

My preliminary investigation passes through the Hegelian classification of animals, which proceeds from the so-called most primitive to the most developed, from worms to humans. Hegel bases his classification on the tradition beginning with Aristotle, and then developed by Cuvier and Lamarck. In general, Hegel accepts the traditional division of animals into invertebrates (“worms, molluscs, shell-fish etc.”) and vertebrates (Hegel, 2007: 423). The further classification of vertebrates is based “more simply on the Elements of their inorganic nature: earth, air, and water” (Hegel 2007: 424), to which their bodies fit according to their notion. And thus we have land animals, birds, and fish: “The true land animals, the mammals, are the most perfect; then come birds, and the least perfect are fish” (Hegel 2007: 425).

I would like to draw attention to one detail, which seems marginal but is in fact quite important. In the further descriptions of mammals, we find a brief note on “reptiles and amphibians,” which are “intermediate forms which belong partly to land and partly to water,” and this is why, writes Hegel, “there is something repulsive about them” (Hegel 2007: 425). The question would be, why, in fact, does not he like them? If we carefully consider this question, it turns out that Hegel’s repulsion towards reptiles goes hand in hand with his crucial theoretical attitude.

As we know, intermediate forms are usually taken as proof of the idea of evolution. However, for Hegel, there is no evolution (or generation) in nature, nor can there be:

It has been an inept conception of ancient and also recent Philosophy of Nature to regard the progression and transition of one natural form and sphere into a higher as an outwardly-actual production which, however, to be made clearer, is relegated to the *obscurity* of the past. It is precisely

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externality which is characteristic of Nature, that is, differences are allowed to fall apart and to appear as indifferent to each other: the dialectical Notion which leads forward the *stages*, is the inner side of them. A thinking consideration must reject such nebulous, at bottom, sensuous ideas, as in particular the so-called *origination*, for example, of plants and animals from water, and then the *origination* of the more highly developed animal organisms from the lower, and so on. (Hegel 2007: 20)

The existence of the so-called intermediate forms, for Hegel, demonstrates not the evolutionary process of transformation, but merely the “impotence of Nature to remain true to the Notion and to adhere to thought-determinations in their purity” (Hegel 2007: 423). It is thus not arbitrary that he clearly prefers the “true animals” and has no special sympathy for whales, reptiles, amphibians, etc. The Hegelian amphibian is a mistake of nature, a defective individual that did not succeed in following the Idea, got stuck between air and earth, and therefore “presents a sorry picture”:

But the fact that in the Cetacea, the land animal falls back again into the water; that in the amphibians and reptiles the fish again climbs on to the land, where it presents a sorry picture, snakes, for example, possessing the rudiments of feet which serve no purpose; that the bird becomes an aquatic bird and in the duck-billed platypus (*ornithorhynchus*) even crosses over to the class of land animals, and in the stork becomes a camel-like animal that is covered more with hair than with feathers; that the land animal and the fish attained to flight, the former in vampires and bats, and the latter in the flying fish: all this does not efface the fundamental difference, which is not a common, a shared difference, but a difference in and for itself. The great distinctions must be adhered to in face of these imperfect products of Nature, which are only mixtures of such determinations. (Hegel 2007: 425)

Herein lies one of the central principles of the *Philosophy of Nature*, which shows clearly how the Hegelian system works—only as the totality of truth:

Animal nature is the truth of vegetable nature, vegetable of mineral; the earth is the truth of the solar system. In a system, it is the most abstract term which is the first, and the truth of each sphere is the last; but this again is only the first of a higher sphere. It is the necessity of the Idea which causes each sphere to complete itself into another by passing into another higher one, and the variety of forms must be considered as necessary and determinate. (Hegel 2007: 21)

The dialectic of spirit thus consists in the inner unity of truth; becoming is not a visible process of transformation: “The land animal did not de-

velop naturally out of the aquatic animal, nor did it fly into the air on leaving the water, nor did perhaps the bird fall back to earth” (Hegel 2007: 21).

In the case of nature, with its variety and multiplicity, one becomes “other” in itself, and spirit externalizes itself only through the individualization of beings in their singularity, not in their mixing. Nature, the distorted mirror of spirit’s unity, is the domain of difference. This is how it manifests itself as substance becoming subject, given that subject is not only what transforms itself but also what always remains the same within this transformation. The inner dialectic of becoming expresses itself in a given individual shape, that of a stone, flower, mineral, tree, horse or woman. All this can exist only in totality, the one being a truth for the other and coming to relate to it.

Hegel proceeds with his classification of mammals by defining them according to their behavior “as individuals to other animals,” or according to the parts or tools with which animals come to relate to each other:

By opposing itself as an individual to its non-organic nature through its weapons, the animal demonstrates that it is a subject for itself. On this basis, the classes of mammals are very accurately distinguished: αα. into animals whose feet are hands—man and the monkey (the monkey is a satire on man, a satire which it must amuse him to see if he does not take himself too seriously but is willing to laugh at himself); ββ. into animals whose extremities are claws—*dogs*, wild beasts like the *lion*, the king of beasts; γγ. into *rodents* in which the teeth are especially shaped; δδ. into *cheiroptera*, which have a membrane stretched between the toes, as occurs even in some rodents (these animals come nearer to dogs and monkeys); εε. into sloths, in which some of the toes are missing altogether and have become claws; ζζ. into animals with *fin-like* limbs, the Cetacea; ηη. into hoofed animals, like *swine*, *elephants* (which have a trunk), horned cattle, horses etc. (Hegel 2007: 427)

Of course, among mammals and, generally speaking, among animals, man is the most perfect—and the above-mentioned monkey, which also has hands, “is a satire on man.” However, what is important, Hegel describes all organisms as subjectivities, and animals are also on the list, between plants and humans. As Sebastian Rand writes,

What it is for an animal to be a subject is just for it to do this: to sense, in this way, itself in sensing another, and to make this self-sensation into sensation of an other by tying the sensory activity to other activities of differentiation and unification. (Rand 2010: 19)

Animals are subjects insofar as they are negatively related to certain sensual objects, and if we want to find a perfect example of negativity we

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should go back to an almost insane passage in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where Hegel, criticizing self-certainty, compares the animal with an initiate of the Eleusinian mysteries:

In this respect, what one can say to those who make assertions about the truth and reality of sensuous objects is that they should be sent back to the most elementary school of wisdom, namely, to the old Eleusinian mysteries of Ceres and Bacchus and that they have yet to learn the mystery of the eating of bread and the drinking of wine. This is so because the person who has been initiated into these secrets not merely comes to doubt the being of sensuous things. Rather, he is brought to despair (*Verzweiflung*) of them; in part he brings about their nothingness, and in part he sees them do it to themselves. Nor are the animals excluded from this wisdom. To an even greater degree, they prove themselves to be the most deeply initiated in such wisdom, for they do not stand still in the face of sensuous things, as if those things existed in themselves. Despairing of the reality of those things and in the total certainty of the nullity of those things, they, without any further ado, simply help themselves to them and devour them. Just like the animals, all of nature celebrates these revealed mysteries which teach the truth about sensuous things. (Hegel 1979: 65)

In this sense, one might see in Hegel's Eleusinian animals a kind of subversive parody of the Cartesian cogito, the latter suspended between its own self-certainty and the armchair radicalism of its doubt about the sensuous world. It is not that these animals have "doubts" about the existence of sensuous objects. No, as Hegel argues, they despair of them (*Verzweiflung*), and in despair they negate those objects. Their animality resumes as subjectivity through the negative gesture towards reality by which they acquire their freedom. All Hegelian subjectivities do so, with the proviso that, from one level to another, their freedom becomes less individually restricted and more general and universal. The levels of freedom increase. For example, while plants are still attached to their places, animals have already acquired freedom of movement, and even though they cannot stand erect, they have begun to overcome gravity and freely determine their movements:

The animal has freedom of self-movement because its subjectivity is, like light, ideally freed from gravity, a free time which, as removed from real externality, spontaneously determines its place. (Hegel 2007: 352)

The particularization of place lies therefore in the animal's own power, and it is not posited by an other; it is the animal itself which gives itself its place. In any other thing, this particularization is fixed, because a thing is not a self which is for itself. True, the animal does not escape

from the general determination of being in a particular place; but *this* place is posited by the animal itself. And it is for this very reason that the subjectivity of the animal is not simply distinguished from external Nature, but the animal distinguishes itself from it; and this is an extremely important distinction, this positing of itself as the pure negativity of *this* place, and *this* place, and so on. (Hegel 2007: 354)

Moreover, Hegelian animals have a voice, that “high privilege [...] closest to Thought” (Hegel 2007: 355). Therefore birds, as beings that both freely fly and sing, provoke in Hegel a special perplexity:

The animal makes manifest that it is inwardly for-itself, and this manifestation is voice. But it is only the sentient creature that can show outwardly that it is sentient. Birds of the air and other creatures emit cries when they feel pain, need, hunger, repletion, pleasure, joyfulness, or are in heat: the horse neighs when it goes to battle; insects hum; cats purr when pleased. But the voice of the bird when it launches forth in song is of a higher kind; and this must be reckoned as a special manifestation in birds over and above that of voice generally in animals. For while fish are dumb in their element of water, birds soar freely in theirs, the air; separated from the objective heaviness of the earth, they fill the air with themselves, and utter their self-feeling in their own particular element. Metals have sound, but this still is not voice; voice is the spiritualized mechanism which thus utters itself. The inorganic does not show its specific quality until it is stimulated from outside, gets struck; but the animal sounds of its own accord. What is subjective announces its psychic nature (*als dies Seelenhafte*) in vibrating inwardly and in merely causing the air to vibrate. (Hegel 2007: 354)

What Hegelian animals definitely lack is free will, an incomparable freedom which, after all, allows the human being not only to stand erect but also to take risks, negating its animal life, which still remains hostage to the necessity reigning in the natural kingdom. In the meantime, the beast is still attached to the environment and depends on the external conditions of its natural existence. The deficiency of Hegelian animals, which should be overcome in humans, consists in their inability to freely create themselves as an internal unity in order to resist and counter external reality. The natural being of the animal, exposed to the contingency of the environment and dangers of life, with its perpetual violence, brings it to a state of the incessant “alternation of health and disease” and makes it essentially “insecure, anxious and unhappy” (Hegel 2007: 417).

However, it is precisely the abovementioned disregard for animals, putting them at the full disposal of the violence wrought by both nature and humans, which in the Hegelian system finally leaves space for all

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these “subhuman” creatures, giving them a kind of very specific chance. Their very life, in its essential sickness, unhappiness and fissure, already contains within itself the force of negativity, which can express itself as anxiety or, as Hegel argues in the *Science of Logic*, unrest: “the *unrest* of the something in its limit in which it is immanent, an unrest which is the contradiction which impels something out beyond itself” (Hegel 1969: 128).

Not only the animal in its natural milieu, but every *something* knows and experiences this unrest, which Nancy describes as *the restlessness of the negative* or *becoming* (Nancy 2002). Every something at every moment is pushed beyond itself in its desire not to be what it is, the desire to leave the place it occupies. This is the desperate unrest of the animal or the slave, in their capacity of negating the world around them and their desire to experience greater freedom.

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How, then, has it come about that negativity is now associated exclusively with man in its creative activity? Why was subjectivity in its unrest only attributed to humans, and why was dialectics, especially in twentieth-century French thought, associated with the metaphysical circle of humans, being, and language, from which animals and other non-human beings were excluded? One important step was the anthropologizing of negativity by Alexander Kojève in his very influential misinterpretation of Hegel, whom he read particularly through the lens of Heidegger’s thought.

Alexander Kojève, a nephew of Wassily Kandinsky, escaped from revolutionary Russia, becoming a French philosopher and, later, an advisor on economic and trade diplomacy who helped lay the foundations for the European Union. From 1933 to 1939, he lectured on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* in his seminar at the École pratique des hautes études. During this seminar, Kojève read chapters from the German text of the *Phenomenology*, translating them into French and commenting on them. Kojève’s interpretation is full of confidence: he had great talent as a narrator. His phenomenology of spirit is like a huge philosophical novel, with vivid characters and dramatic episodes.

To make a long story short, the beginning of time, according to Kojève’s Hegel, coincides with the appearance of “man.” Before this moment, there is no time. There is only natural being or space, which is eternally at rest and immutable. There are animals that inhabit this space. History starts when, at a certain point, *one of those animals turns into a human being*. The appearance of man as an active, suffering, fighting, and laboring nothingness will introduce history and time in the process of negating the natural, given manifold of being for the benefit of man’s supernatural, ideal goals: “The real presence of Time in the World, therefore, is called

Man. Time is Man, and Man is Time [...] Man is negating Action, which transforms given Being and, by transforming it, transforms itself” (Kojève 1980: 138, 39).

The condition of the human being’s appearance is its biological reality as a being capable of desire. Even though Kojève acknowledges that all living beings are capable of desire, he thinks that man is the only one for which this capacity is absolutely fundamental. Desire pushes man to act, and this action negates the object of desire, transforms and assimilates it, thus creating a subjective reality. The Kojévian animal’s desire is related to the present; it desires something *that is*, that can be grasped immediately, whereas human desires are related to the future, to *what does not yet exist*; humans desire non-existent, supernatural, phantasmatic objects. Moreover, in the human, desire itself becomes an object of desire. Humans want to be desired by other humans, to be recognized by others in their human dignity; they fight for recognition or, as Georges Bataille would put it, for *prestige*. This is how people initiated history, which would be a history of struggles, wars, and revolutions through which humans actively changed the world in accordance with their desires.

This brief and somewhat muddled description could actually be longer, but the point, quite important for Kojève, is that the end of history should coincide with its beginning. This means that at the end of history the *human being should turn back into an animal again*. This point is quite ambiguous and at the same time crucial. Kojévian history makes its circuit only once, with no repetition, and it is the history of becoming human, which is already over. To finalize history, humanity has to create a universal, homogeneous state of mutual recognition, a state of the total satisfaction of all desires, and it is actually in the process of doing this.

Following Kojève’s logic, this point has already been achieved theoretically. All that remains is to fit it with a particular social reality, to find the political state that would be the right model for the further post-historical unfolding of the same. The struggle has been successful, and with the institutions of absolute recognition, history comes to an end. Nothing really new will ever happen. Insofar as such a totality has been achieved, historical time, with its projections for the future, is over, and we are now dealing with an eternal present where all projects are inevitably realized and all desires satisfied. At the end of history, man no longer needs to change the world, to work and to struggle; satisfaction is possible here and now.

Georges Bataille was the first to object to Kojève’s idea of the end of history. His objection appeared as a single and desperate voice, seemingly unheard by Kojève. In “Letter to X, Lecturer on Hegel,” written in 1937, Bataille writes,

If action (doing) is—as Hegel says—negativity, the question arises as to whether the negativity of one who has “nothing more to do” disappears

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or remains in a state of “unemployed negativity.” Personally, I can only decide in one way, being myself precisely this “unemployed negativity” (I would not be able to define myself more precisely). I don’t mind Hegel’s having foreseen this possibility; at least he didn’t situate it at the conclusion of the process he described. I imagine that my life—or, better yet, its aborting, the open wound that is my life—constitutes all by itself the refutation of Hegel’s closed system. (Bataille 1997: 296)

What remains after the end, according to Bataille, is thus the “open wound” of his life as negativity, which still persists but for which, supposedly, there is no longer any need—the humanity of a human being who has already been thrown away, the obscene trash of desire. Bataille predicts that for Kojève this leftover is just a “misfortune,” like one of those “underdeveloped” countries that lag behind historical progress: “What I am saying about it encourages you to think that all that takes place is just some misfortune, and that’s all. Confronted with you, my self-justification is no different from that of a howling animal with its foot in a trap” (Bataille 1997: 297).

However, we should not let ourselves be trapped by Bataille’s “me.” In fact, his over-present “me” is put into play as a conceptual persona for negativity. There is nothing really personal in this person, nothing individual. He says “my life” but explains, “Really, the question is no longer one of misfortune, or of life, but only of what becomes of ‘unemployed negativity’” (Bataille 1997: 297).

At first it seems that, in Bataille, negativity cannot be applied to animality, since he is among those philosophers who distinguish between humans and animals, and unemployed negativity is precisely what remains of human being after the end of history and what prevents the end of history from finally being reached or completed. Laughter, play, eroticism, the arts, religion, and other forms of activity associated with transgression and unproductive expenditure outside the labor-production machine are described by Bataille as intrinsically human moments of sovereignty and autonomy. This approach clearly derives from Kojève and definitely not from Hegel, for whom, as we have seen in the *Philosophy of Nature*, negativity, although very much employed, is clearly present not only in the animal kingdom, but in all of nature. (It is important to note here that Kojève in fact fully rejected the *Philosophy of Nature*, in which he saw only an “absolute idealism” and the spiritualizing of matter. Bataille here refers only to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as read by Kojève.) Yet, there is a way to turn Bataille on his head—by appealing to his understanding not of the end but the *beginning of history*.

First of all, Bataille’s “open wound” in human being is produced by the voluntary negation of its “animal nature.” Thus, when I speak about the borderline between human and animal in Bataille, I am focusing on such phenomena as eroticism, which goes hand in hand with the aware-

ness of death, language, and productive labor. Eroticism, he says, is essentially a sexual activity of humans, as opposed to animal sexuality, which is an ordinary biological phenomenon, the spontaneous, immediate behavior of the individual animal in the natural environment. Bataille claims that while humans encumber their lives with restrictions, rules, laws, rituals, and prohibitions, animals do not have the law to transgress; they just enjoy, shamelessly enjoy, their unlimited sexual freedom: "If there is a clear distinction between man and animal, it is perhaps sharpest here: for an animal, nothing is ever forbidden" (Bataille 1955: 31).

This mechanism for the production of human identity through detachment from animality (via prohibition), and this explanation of negativity as an exceptionally human phenomenon appear quite spiritualist, and the only thing that prevents Bataille from being trapped utterly in spiritualism is the fact that he considers this detachment, on the one hand, from a historical perspective, as something which has happened, and, on the other hand, as something impossible, as nothing but a fake, or as comedy. Paradoxically, in a way, this detachment, despite its fake character, is at the same time ontologically meaningful and, of course, quite painful, since the boundary between human and animal runs through the human body. In the beginning, according to Bataille, there was an event or separation from animality, which occurred in the old days. This is what Bataille calls the human's "first step." This first step is irreversible: we cannot "return to nature."

But the idea of the "first step" constitutes one of the greatest paradoxes in Bataille's anthropology, which was not fully understood, I gather, by Bataille himself: actually, it is not the *human* but the *animal* that negates itself as the subject of this supposed historical or rather prehistorical negation. Note how, in his *Tears of Eros*, he describes the first men who began to practice funeral rituals:

However, these men who were the first to take care of the corpses of their kin were themselves not yet exactly humans. The skulls they left still have apelike characteristics: the jaw is protuberant, and very often the arch of the eyebrows is crowned by a bony ridge. These primitive beings, moreover, did not quite have that upright posture which, morally and physically, defines us—and affirms us in our being. Without doubt, they stood upright: but their legs were not perfectly rigid as are ours. It even seems that they had, like apes, a hairy exterior, which covered them and protected them from the cold. (Bataille 1989: 25)

To become the only animal that negates itself as animal, this creature has first to be an animal that, suddenly, for some reason, rises, stands up, straightens its legs, and says, "I'm not an animal anymore." On this point, Bataille proves much more Hegelian than Kojève, without even being really conscious of it, since the Bataille's Hegel is still Kojévian. What

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he considers, following Kojève, as *human* in the human animal could actually be *animal*, that which emerges precisely as negativity.

There is another aspect of Bataille's thought that refers us to the animal's sovereignty and actual unemployment. Animals do not work, says Bataille; they are sovereign. In his article "The Friendship of Man and Beast," (Bataille 1988), he writes that while some of them work for men, of course, they are still not completely employed but rather pretend to be. I should clarify here that in fact not some of them but all domestic animals work for men: this entire army works; it is just that it is not paid. Our survival is entirely based on animal slavery, the animal body being the perfect subject of exploitation, a labor force in its pure bodily form.

For Bataille, however, even while doing their labor, animals remain strangely detached from it, preserving their sovereignty in themselves. They have a kind of potentiality for ceasing work at any moment, like a horse suddenly galloping off. If they get carried away, we will never stop them. The excess of sovereignty clearly brings Bataille's animals back to Hegelian negativity, which expresses itself particularly in the Eleusinian mysteries "of the eating of bread and the drinking of wine," as experienced by any subjectivity, including animals, that violently negate things by devouring them. It seems that unemployed negativity, which Bataille poses on the side of the human—laughter, eroticism, play, etc.—still emanates from this abandoned, desperate animal. Those who wish to finalize history should first of all send this animal away. Otherwise, they will get what Marx calls the subject of History—its highest, culminating point, its point of negation, and self-negation—the proletarian (first of all, as a labor force, as living labor, as a "slave" or, we might say, as an "animal").

However, we should keep in mind that this figure of unemployed animality results from my own partisan reading of Bataille against Bataille, since for Bataille himself there is still a quite important difference between the animal's immediate sovereignty and the human's restless negativity, even though sometimes this difference devolves into ambiguity or confusion. If we want to keep this difference in mind, we need to consider one more aspect of animality in philosophy, namely, the permanent association between animality and immanence.

3

"Animality is immediacy and immanence," writes Bataille in the *Theory of Religion* (1992: 17), thinking about the animal kingdom in general and opposing it to human being, which is all about mediation and negativity. At this point, he comes quite close to Heidegger, according to whom "throughout the course of its life the animal also maintains itself in a specific element, whether it is water or air or both, in such a way that the element belonging to it goes unnoticed by the animal" (Heidegger 1995: 292).

Bataille's animality knows neither negation nor rupture, and maintains itself in the continuity of life. As Benjamin Noys emphasizes, in Bataille "[t]he world of animals is a world without difference because animals know nothing of negativity, and thereby know nothing of difference" (Noys 2000: 136). It is alright, for Bataille, if one animal devours another, since it does not clearly differentiate itself from its prey (there is no Other here). Both when eating and being eaten, they share a pulsation and generosity of life easily transformable into death: "Every animal is in the world like water in water" (Bataille 1992: 19).

Does this metaphor not make us think of fish, almost imperceptibly gliding somewhere between the waves? As Carrie Rohman has pointed out, we might suspect that when he formulated this "reductionist definition of animal ontology" (Rohman 2009: 95), Bataille could actually have had in mind D.H. Lawrence's beautiful poem "Fish":

Fish, oh Fish,
So little matters!

Whether the waters rise and cover the earth
Or whether the waters wilt in the hollow places,
All one to you.

Aqueous, subaqueous,
Submerged
And wave-thrilled.

As the waters roll
Roll you.
The waters wash,
You wash in oneness
And never emerge.
(Lawrence 1995: 105)

As Rohman explains, "Fish have a privileged experience of immanence, since their milieu is contiguous, ubiquitous water [...] The fish is literally 'In the element, / No more'" (Rohman 2009: 96). This statement invites us to undertake a brief excursus into a kind of political ontology of fish, because, surprising or not, it is precisely the fish that almost invisibly, silently accompanies a large portion of philosophical reflection. The fish is, so to speak, negatively present in the margins of metaphysics. This creature has often been taken as a peripheral yet obscenely typical example of a being living in its own element or environment, namely water. The silent fish gliding through water appears as the very image of immanence, of the animal's conformity to its natural essence. Philosophers always speak of fish when they want to talk about the essence of animal

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being: a picture of water as the element par excellence with the fish stupidly swimming in it is entirely convincing.

One of the culminating points of the fish's immanence can be found in Deleuze and Guattari, for whom the unlimited becoming of elements is the very production of the cosmos's abstract machine. Deleuze and Guattari took the animal as a positive example of the ontology of affirmation, the very model for becoming, bringing it from the bottom of the subhuman to the apex of the philosophical universe. The chapter entitled "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible," in *A Thousand Plateaus*, contains the most beautiful and least banal fish example ever:

Becoming everybody/everything (*tout le monde*) is to world (*faire monde*), to make a world (*faire un monde*). By process of elimination, one is no longer anything more than an abstract line, or a piece in a puzzle that is itself abstract. It is by conjugating, by continuing with other lines, other pieces, that one makes a world that can overlay the first one, like a transparency. Animal elegance, the camouflage fish, the clandestine: this fish is crisscrossed by abstract lines that resemble nothing, that do not even follow its organic divisions; but thus disorganized, disarticulated, it worlds with the lines of a rock, sand, and plants, becoming imperceptible. The fish is like the Chinese poet: not imitative or structural, but cosmic. (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 280)

The "making world" or worlding of the fish seems like a peculiar inversion of the cosmic picture in Leibniz's *Monadology*. What in Deleuze and Guattari becomes "disorganized, disarticulated," in Leibniz is still "cultivated," the order of the universe of monads protected against all chaos or confusion:

Each portion of matter may be conceived of as a garden full of plants, and as a pond full of fishes. But each branch of the plant, each member of the animal, each drop of its humors is also such a garden or such a pond. And although the earth or air embraced between the plants of the garden, or the water between the fish of the pond, is neither plant nor fish, they yet contain more of them, but for the most part so tiny as to be to us imperceptible. Therefore there is nothing uncultivated, nothing sterile, nothing dead in the universe, no chaos, no confusion except in appearance. Just as a pond would appear from a distance in which we might see the confused movement and swarming, so to speak, of the fishes in the pond, without perceiving the fish themselves. (Leibniz 1890: 228)

Everything is alright, there is no reason for anxiety: this mantra should be repeated at the high point of thought, from where it is, perhaps, only one small step towards the abyss of insanity and ultimate confusion.

Not that Deleuze and Guattari recommend taking this step, but they proclaim that nomads should supersede monads. The elements of the world are no longer closed in on themselves but constantly moving, crossing borderlines, and becoming those very borderlines between themselves and themselves as others.

The image of water turns rather disturbing when Deleuze and Guattari pick a figure of the monster—Moby-Dick. Their Moby-Dick is “neither an individual, nor a species [...] but a phenomenon of bordering” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 245). It is “anomalous,” the thing through which the borderline between one “pack” and another runs, the point of affect where a certain multiplicity changes its nature. They quote Melville’s Ahab: “‘To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me.’ The white wall. ‘Sometimes I think there is naught beyond’” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 245). By his becoming-whale, Ahab tries to pass through this white wall of the animal becoming a color, “pure whiteness” (and we know that this becoming will lead him to death).

Deleuzian animals are immanent to such an extent that they know death in a way that is totally different from that of humans: “In contrast to what is said, it is not the human beings who know how to die, but the animals” (Deleuze 1989/1995). We find in Andrei Platonov’s work a brilliant illustration of human jealousy of the animal, supposed to know how to die, supposed to possess the ultimate wisdom of life and death. The human being, in following an animal, tries to realize its immanence as a zone of indistinction between life and death:

Zakhar Pavlovich knew one man, a fisherman from Lake Mutevo, who had questioned many people about death and who was melancholy from his curiosity; this fisherman loved fish not as food, but as special beings that probably knew the secret of death. He would show the eyes of a dead fish to Zakhar Pavlovich and say, “Look—true wisdom! A fish stands between life and death, and that’s why he’s mute and stares without expression. I mean even a calf thinks, but a not a fish—it knows everything already.” Contemplating the lake through the years, the fisherman always thought about one and the same thing—about the interest of death. Zakhar Pavlovich tried to talk him out of it: “There’s nothing special there, just something cramped.” A year after that, the fisherman couldn’t bear it anymore and threw himself into the lake from his boat, having tied his feet with a rope so that he wouldn’t start to swim accidentally. In secret he didn’t believe in death at all, the important thing was that he wanted to look at what was there—perhaps it was much more interesting than living in a village or on the shores of a lake; he saw death as another province, located under the sky, as if at the bottom of cool water, and it attracted him. Some of the muzhiks the fisherman talked with about his intention to live with death for a while and return tried to talk him out of it, but others agreed with him: “True enough, Mitry Ivanich, nothing

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ventured, nothing gained. Try it, then you'll tell us." Dmitry Ivanich tried: they dragged him from the lake after three days and buried him by the fence in the village graveyard. (Platonov 1990: 26–27)

The becoming-fish of a fisherman aims to take him across the border of the death (almost like the white whale for Captain Ahab). But the fisherman cannot divide himself in two parts—one meant for death, the other for survival—in such a way that somebody, an inner “human being,” would still exist in order to observe his animal body dying. The fisherman can only remain a quite human animal. The immanence of fish is clearly not his environment.

But in fact, it makes no difference whether the fish does or does not know the difference between life and death: such is its way of existence, which philosophers usually call “immanence.” Imagine a fish suddenly getting jealous of humans sitting on the beach and talking about the politics of animal liberation, and its attempting to come ashore and join the conversation. One person argues that the process of evolution cannot run so fast, even though something like this is always really happening in the history of nature, and some fish really do leave the water, creeping out and getting the feel of the earth (the case of Darwin). Another argues that evolution cannot take place at all (the case of Hegel).

For Hegelian fish, it is just better to stay in the water if they want to correspond to their notion and not present “a sorry picture,” like those whales, reptiles, amphibians, and aquatic birds suspended between water, air and earth. However, Hegelian immanence is ambiguous or rather self-contradictory. As we have seen, as a subjectivity, the Hegelian animal manifests its freedom in its own way, in its anxiety, unhappiness, and unrest. Yes, whales and other monsters are all sorry pictures and shameful mistakes of nature, but we can discern the great demonic figure of Moby-Dick rising up behind Hegel.

I would like to take one more step here and argue that this subjective perspective is not enough to describe what I call the negative animal. The unrest issuing from within the living being is still insufficient to really push the animal beyond itself. A fish can become anxious yet still stay in the water: water remains water, and the fish remains a fish. Even a fundamental anxiety cannot prevent the animal's reconciliation with reality. A fish will hardly leave the water just because it wants to express itself in a way other than swimming, such as joining a human conversation. But there are certain conditions, let us call them “external” or “objective,” in which immanence becomes impossible. In this respect, I need to quote *The German Ideology*:

As an example of Feuerbach's acceptance and at the same time misunderstanding of existing reality, which he still shares with our opponents, we recall the passage in the *Philosophie der Zukunft* where he develops

the view that the existence of a thing or a man is at the same time its or his essence, that the conditions of existence, the mode of life and activity of an animal or human individual are those in which its “existence” feels itself satisfied. Here every exception is expressly conceived as an unhappy chance, as an abnormality which cannot be altered. Thus if millions of proletarians feel by no means contented with their living conditions, if their “existence” does not in the least correspond to their “essence,” then, according to the passage quoted, this is an unavoidable misfortune, which must be borne quietly. The millions of proletarians and communists, however, think differently and will prove this in time, when they bring their “existence” into harmony with their “essence” in a practical way, by means of a revolution. Feuerbach, therefore, never speaks of the world of man in such cases, but always takes refuge in external nature, and moreover in nature which has not yet been subdued by men. But every new invention, every advance made by industry, detaches another piece from this domain, so that the ground which produces examples illustrating such Feuerbachian propositions is steadily shrinking. The “essence” of the fish is its “being,” water—to go no further than this one proposition. The “essence” of the freshwater fish is the water of a river. But the latter ceases to be the “essence” of the fish and is no longer a suitable medium of existence as soon as the river is made to serve industry, as soon as it is polluted by dyes and other waste products and navigated by steamboats, or as soon as its water is diverted into canals where simple drainage can deprive the fish of its medium of existence. (Marx and Engels 1976: 58–59)

As we can see, even Marx and Engels could not escape the fish metaphor. But something completely new appears in this example, something that makes a connection between animals, proletarians, and communists. Essence does not coincide with its being, nothing coincides with itself—this is already a Hegelian lesson. History creates itself from this non-coincidence, and this shift can be read not as an “unhappy chance” but as a necessity (and here Marx intervenes with his critique of Feuerbach’s idealism). If there is something wrong with Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature*, then it would be his prescribing that all natural forms stick to their notion, and this prescription in fact keeps nature out of history, so that the contradiction between the two tends towards the “bad infinity” of mutual distortion. A silent riot of Marxian fish denotes the urgency of revolution as a change in the universal. The uneasiness of a single creature in the world is not only a problem for this creature, but for the world itself, insofar as it has become unbearable. We might object that fish cannot make a revolution, but do we really know whether proletarians can? The very topic of revolution is all about impossibility, which itself is never absolute, but recognizes itself as possibility only retrospectively, by imparting meaning and necessity to a certain contingency of “what was before.”

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Overcoming impossibility as a historical necessity—that is what is already inscribed in the logic of Hegelian becoming. As far as we look back, we see that the menagerie of spirit is ready to explode at every moment, since it is inhabited by the multiplicity of all those unhappy, anxious, and negative creatures. The only problem is that its always already too late, and we can only recognize this chance as lost.

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