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From the Anthropological Machine to the Animal Crisis

Abstract
In this essay, I will reconstruct the biopolitical framework regarding human-animal relations, through the device of boundary production Agamben called the "anthropological machine". I will argue that the effects of the machine can be more extensively grasped on the constitutive outside of the human, namely animals and that the current status of institutionalised relationships with animals, gathered under the name of "animal crisis", can be framed as a direct effect of the separation.

Keywords
Anthropological Machine; Biopolitics; Non-human Animals; Human/Non-human Divide; Ecofeminism

1. Introduction

In this article I will reconstruct the bio-political framework regarding human-animal relations, firstly inquiring into the device Agamben called the "anthropological machine": the ontological device of boundaries production and reproduction. To clarify the practical and historical functioning of the machine, I will identify two different sub-devices that serve as a sacrificial strategy of protection of "the human" against "the animal". I will then argue that the effects of the machine, contra Agamben who exclusively focuses on the category of "the human", can be more extensively grasped in their complexity on the constitutive outside of the human, namely animals. My claim will be that the current status of institutionalised relationships with animals, which involves practices criticised as violent, oppressive and unjust from animal ethics scholars,

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Filosofia morale/Moral Philosophy, vol. 2, 2024 • ISBN: 9791222318318 • DOI: 10.7413/fmmp0056

can be framed as a direct effect of the anthropological machine, gathered under the name of "Animal Crisis". The aim of the article is not to draw an automatic moral or political condemnation of these practices, but to clarify the deep link between the bio-political separation between humans and animals and the animal crisis. The contribution that the bio-political framework offers to this discussion is, I argue, central, since it put at the forefront that the human/non-human boundary is not only a "product of detached reason", nor simply a reaction to special feelings as those Steiner (2024) calls "pathos of fear and arrogance", but rather the consequence of a political process of exclusion the branches of which form our present.

2. The Anthropological Machine

In the history of Western philosophical and scientific thought, animals have been intensely present as objects of study of particular relevance, since their characteristics shared with humans (firstly mobility, a spectrum of sensitivity, and abilities such as vocal communication, social structures, empathetic behaviours and many more) pose a challenge to the status of human beings. According to Piazzesi (2017, p. 161), "in front of them we experience an asymmetrical mirroring that evokes in us a mixed feeling of familiarity and monstrosity, which dooms them to an uncertain status with regard to *our* identity"[1]. The "definitional anxiety", generated by the necessity of creating a precise definition of "what is a human" with clear and sharp boundaries, made the animals at the same time privileged and troublesome objects of study. The development of new scientific fields only led to a perpetuation of this "uncertain status", showing that the challenge they pose to the preservation of a closed "human identity" was quite difficult to erase.

> Aprioristically excluded from the subjective knowledge of what were to become the "sciences of spirit" [*Geistwissenshaften*] first and the "cultural sciences" later, but difficult to incorporate at the same time, as living things, into the objective knowledge of the natural sciences, animals represent the uncomfortable guests of modern episteme (Piazzesi 2017, p. 162).

The reason behind this wobbly condition is that animals play a central role in the system of exclusion which still persists in our contemporary world, embedded in the political and societal structures of Western

[1] All translations from Piazzesi 2017, Mormino 2017, Colombo 2017, Pellegrino & di Paola 2018, and Pollo 2021 are made by the author.

industrial and post-industrial societies (and also in many non-Western cultures such as China and India). The human/non-human divide has been historically produced and reproduced through the severing between humans and animals, and many of the strategies and mechanisms of maintenance of the divide have used the human/animal boundary as a focal point. One of the foundational and most important ways of structuring and perpetuating the divide through centuries is the one Agamben (2004) called the "anthropological machine", a powerful device continuously producing and establishing the division between the human and the animal.

Agamben reconstructs the functioning of the fundamental and enduring division between humans and the other parts of reality, identifying the place of the most original severing in the human/animal divide. The broader boundary between humans and non-humans is produced through this narrower divide: if we manage to justify the sharp boundary between human beings and animals (especially the most similar to us) and to build on this boundary hierarchical forms of political dominion and social structures, *a fortiori* the scope of the exclusion can be extended to the enormous realm of plants, fungi, bacteria, all other organisms belonging to the tree of life and non-organic entities: the non-human.

The turning point for the origins of the human/animal divide in the Western tradition is placed by Agamben in the Aristotelian isolation of nutritive (or vegetative) life, as the most general identifiable way of "being alive". This strategical isolation is useful for Aristotle to structure the division and hierarchy between all the different forms of life, which are thus separated in virtue of their gradually higher faculties. This foundational division which made possible all other separations (vegetative/relational life, organic/animal, animal/human) is internal, it passes within the human and at the same time produces it: "What is man, if he is always the place—and, at the same time, the result—of ceaseless divisions and caesurae?" (Agamben 2004, p. 16). The effort of the Italian philosopher is thus to investigate the practical and political consequences of this separation, highlighting how, through history, the device of boundary production articulated different strategies, sometimes with terrible outcomes for both sides.

Agamben describes two variants of the machine: the one of the moderns, and the one of people of "earlier times". Their functioning and results are homologous, but they structure the terms of the divide in two different ways. Both the machines work through a radical exclusion of some elements, and an inclusion of others, to protect and affirm the category of "human" in opposition to what is not human (the animal, or the inhuman). Since the purpose of the machine is to safeguard one of the terms of the opposition, its functioning is rigged, as "the human"

is an already presupposed category: "the machine actually produces a kind of state of exception, a zone of indeterminacy in which the outside is nothing but the exclusion of an inside and the inside is in turn only the inclusion of an outside" (Agamben 2004, p. 37). The ancient variant of the machine worked through the inclusion in the category of "human" of some elements of the constitutive outside via a "humanisation of the animal": those who were found in the zone of indeterminacy were captured inside the human sphere as "messengers of man's inhumanity, the witnesses to his fragile identity" (Agamben 2004, p. 30). The *enfant sauvages* (individuals who, from a very young age, were raised apart from other humans and never developed human social skills such as language, social behaviour or care) and the ancient figures of the slave and the barbarian, seen as animals in human form, are included among the protagonists of this variant of the machine. The anthropological machine of the moderns works differently: it produces the outside through the exclusion of elements of the inside. It operates an "animalisation of the already human", isolating the animal already inside the human life (this is reminiscent of the isolation of the vegetative life from which the functioning of the machine has begun). The feverish research of the late XIX century for the "missing link" between humans and apes, after the acceptance of the Darwinian theory of evolution of all species (humans included), is for Agamben a paradigm of the effort of finding a marker of the divide, making it tangible and incontestable. An element he emphasises is that, in contemporary times, the modern variant of the machine showed its brutality and dangerousness when, in lieu of "this innocuous paleontological find we will have the Jew, that is, the non-man produced within the man" (Agamben 2004, p. 37)[2]. While the machine of the ancients captures those found in the zone of indeterminacy inside the sphere of "the human", its modern variant excludes them in virtue of their "inner animality".[3]

[2] An extremely contemporary example of the same "animalisation" can be found in the words of the Israeli Defense Minister who defined "human animals" the Palestinians inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, while announcing the complete siege of Gaza on October 9, 2023: "We are fighting against human animals, and we are acting accordingly". (Fabian 2023)

[3] A parallel theory about the human/natural divide (or dualism) and its deep connection with modernity is Bruno Latour's idea of the "Constitution of Modernity" (Latour 1993), which prescribed the strict division between the human and the non-human world, the social and the natural world. The Constitution ultimately crumbled on itself since, while the modern narrative prescribed a strict dualism, a parallel modern practice continuously produced hybrids of the two worlds, which were, with time, impossible to contain while holding the Constitution valid. While Latour's idea is more focused on the process of modernisation and its sociological, anthropological and political meaning, it harmonises with some insights of Agamben's bio-political theory (I thank the anonymous reviewer for this point).

Agamben does not go further in detailing the practical functioning of the machine, he only schematises the fundamental ontological structure it operates to produce and protect the closed category of "the human" through the ontological and constitutive exclusion of the animal from it. I argue that we could identify two "sub-devices" historically employed by the machine in Colombo's discussion on human dominion over animals: the theory of "*Homo duplex*", and human exceptionalism. *Homo duplex* is the name of the view, largely shared in history by philosophers and scientists, that describes humans as organisms with a double nature: a material/animal one, and a spiritual/human one. Colombo (2017, pp. 99-105) reconstructs this view through the writings of the XVIII century naturalist Buffon, who openly speaks of this double nature in his *Histoire naturelle.* The belief in the existence of these two "spirits" inside each human individual, which are often in clash with one another, generates the narrative that to be "fully human", in the sense of fulfilling in the best way possible the human nature, it is a duty to defeat and abandon the internal "non-human" element, an idea that, indeed, dates back to the greek division of the soul. The greatness of humans, thus, would be in leaving behind, eliminating a part of themselves, to achieve full mastery of properly human faculties such as reason, freedom and language. The fracture between the human and the animal is internal, as Agamben argued: it is a constitutive element of the "human nature". The device of *Homo duplex* is coherent with what we have called the "animalisation of the human": to operate the divide, the machine excludes a part of the inside (the human) in virtue of its inner animality (or inhumanity). This research of the "animal" inside the "human" is a strategy historically used to establish hierarchies and structural exclusions and oppressions to the detriment of large numbers of humans who do not enter the "properly human" paradigm. To set the threshold too high is to exclude many humans from the concept of "humanity", in virtue of the lack of the relevant character. This has historically marked the creation of normative ideas of humanity (prescriptions of what a human is to be) from which a large number of humans could be, conveniently with the power structures in place, politically oppressed and excluded: racism, the exclusion of women from political and social life, of non-neurotypical and disabled people, and peculiar cultural or religious groups have found a powerful ally in these normative and exclusionary ideas of humanity. As Colombo (2017, pp. 101-102) argues:

> the idea of *homo duplex* contributes to clarify man's self-identity only at the cost of a continuous hierarchisation that affects both the individual and humanity itself. [...] [T]o set a purely natural or material dimension that must be overcome for the achievement of a higher dimension inevitably creates

hierarchies between children and adults, as well as between different individuals and peoples.

In the *Homo duplex* narrative, widespread and largely adopted and accepted still today, it is already embedded the idea of "human exceptionalism"[4]: from the claim of the existence of these two heterogeneous natures, it follows that there is something, some element, some capability, that is "uniquely human", and that serves as a boundary. The divide has been historically marked in different ways, and many different strategies of justification have been deployed, isolating one or more characters as the signs of "human exceptionality". One of the most enduring has been the idea of a *scala naturae*, a natural hierarchy that placed humans ontologically above animals (and thus also above plants and inorganic entities), because of their proximity to God, who created humans (and only humans among material beings) in his own image. Humans are exceptional, among material beings, because equipped with a spiritual principle which, providing them the capacity for language, reason and love, brings them closer to God, and justifies the animal servitude to them. This fundamental ontological ranking of beings, developed by Greek Neoplatonism and Christian Neoplatonic scholars, provided an image of humans as "suspended" between the spiritual world of perfection, and an animal material world of death and impurity, as in the theories of Pico della Mirandola. In this way, the divide between humans and animals was defended through a divine spiritual principle which was uniquely proper to humans. With the progressive secularisation of culture and science the "spiritual principle" was substituted by other

[4] The concept of human exceptionalism has a long and branched out history, which led to an idea of humanity as radically separated from its natural environment. One of the branches of its history (and one of the most long lasting and persuasive) can be identified in the Promethean myth. This narrative describes human history as a progressive emancipation from Nature: from a world dominated by necessity and instincts, death and suffering, toward the erection of a parallel world completely designed by human hands, where culture, religion, morality, technology and arts could emerge – as the gift of fire by the titan symbolises (Aeschylus, vv. 108-111). The history (and perhaps the destiny) of humankind is, for the Promethean narrative, one of ascent through emancipation from Nature, toward an Earth shaped in our image. According to some scholars, the concept of Anthropocene (as the proposed name for the current geological epoch, marked by the extensive and global human interference with the planet's biological, chemical and geological cycles) marks the moment in which humans and nature definitively part company – according to eco-modernists, for the better, since the ultimate source of the ecological crisis is the "over-reliance" on ecosystems (Asafu-Adjaye et al. 2015). The Anthropocene is, for this narrative, the apex of our species' exceptionalism, the evidence of our superior capability of managing (for the better of for the worse) the entire planet, changing its history. Either a God, or a cancer, humankind is no longer a natural entity because of its exceptionalism.

characteristics such as language (as in Hobbes), reason (as in Descartes), cooperation (as in Durkheim), and many more, creating the effort for the defence of a boundary which was progressively more unstable the more the knowledge of animals and nature evolved. Darwin's revolution in the mid XIX century has been a turning point for the discourse on "human exceptionalism" because of the scientific assertion and assessment of the common ancestry of all animals and their complex patterns of evolution and modification from previous species. After the acceptance of Darwin's theory of evolution, to claim the radical heterogeneity of the human nature from the animal was impossible, since it meant that the boundary between humans and their closest "cousins" was historical, not ontological, going back to the last common ancestor between humans and their closest living relatives: chimpanzees and bonobos[5]. With the discovery and study of other extinct species of *Homo* that predates the advent of *sapiens*, the idea of placing a close boundary between human and non-human life gets even more difficult.

Homo duplex and human exceptionalism are sophisticated and variegated instruments deployed by the anthropological machine to continuously produce and reproduce the boundary, which "decides each and every time in favor of the human" (Broglio 2013, p.1). The interior nature of the divide shows its being a foundational human fact, constitutive of the category of "the human", and consequently, in opposition, of "the animal".

3. *Homo nosce te ipsum*

Agamben highlights how the anthropological machine emerged in its fundamental structure in history recalling, among other examples, Linné's work, the founder of scientific taxonomy. More than a century before Darwin, Linné already expressed strong doubts about the sharp boundary between humans and apes defended by the mainstream culture of his time. His observational work on apes led him to neatly reject Descartes' philosophy that relegated the animals to the position of *automata mechanica*, efficient self-propelled machines lacking of *res cogitans* (the metaphysical substance of reason, feelings and language), with the famous ironic sentence "*Cartesius certe non vidit simios*" (Agamben 2004, p. 23). In light of this challenge, and the refusal to accept any non-scientific justification for the divide, in his *Systema Naturae* he inscribes the genus *Homo* in the *Anthropomorpha* order, together with the genus *Simia,*

[5] It is estimated that the last common ancestor between the *Homo* and the *Pan* (chimpanzees and bonobos) genuses lived around 6 million years ago (Patterson *et al.* 2006).

Lemur and *Vespertilio*. The neat inclusion of humans among the group of Primates (and, quite interestingly, bats) is not the most interesting act of the Swedish naturalist, according to Agamben. He focuses on the name chosen for our own species: *Homo sapiens*. Differently from all other species, which are described with a bimodal nomenclature (genus + species: *Pan troglodytes, Canis aureus*), the name of our species "*sapiens*" is not a description, but rather a trivialisation of the philosophical maxim "*nosce te ipsum*": "know thyself"[6]. This meant, for Linné, two things: first, that it was not necessary to explain with a specification what a human was, since each one of us is able to "know themselves", to recognise themselves as humans; second, that the "specific identity" of humans could be exactly this, to be able to recognise themselves. Agamben summarises this conclusion: "*man is the animal that must recognize itself as human to be human*" (Agamben 2004, p. 26). *Homo nosce te ipsum*, shows, for Agamben, that embedded in the effort to classify humans there is the anthropological machine. When we try to focus our sight on humans and divide them from animals, we activate this "optical machine constructed of a series of mirrors in which man, looking at himself, sees his own image always already deformed in the features of an ape" (Agamben 2004, pp. 26-27). The product of the machine is the human itself, which stems from the exclusion of the outside.

This ontological operation is for Agamben foundational of Western politics and philosophy and shows that the divide is a continuously reproduced political decision "in which the caesurae and their rearticulation are always dislocated and displaced anew" (Agamben 2004, p. 38). The divide is thus essentially and internally human, an ontological and political operation maintained through time with many different but structurally similar strategies. We can conclude then that the unveiling of the anthropological machine exposes the true nature of "human exceptionalism", since the "uniquely human", "this 'something more', however, seems to be the desire to draw a boundary and establish an exception" (Colombo 2017, p. 110).

Many authors, especially in the field of human-animal studies (Broglio 2013; Mengozzi 2021), have highlighted the fact that, in his discussion of the anthropological machine, Agamben is only concerned with one side of the machine, "the human". The main interest of the Italian author, in line with his overall work, is to examine the consequences of the exclusion of parts of humanity from humanity and "humanness" itself (a case in point is that of the Jews). This privileged focus on humans is evident since almost half of the book is devoted to an in-depth dis-

[6] The name *Homo sapiens* has been used from the tenth edition of the *Systema Naturae* of 1758.

cussion about the Heideggerian concepts of "the Open" and the animal "poverty-in-world". Animals in their variety and internal complexity lie in the background of this discussion, they are relegated to the position of a unifying category, an "empty signifier" (Laclau 2003). Animals are, in Agamben's discussion, an undifferentiated constitutive outside, their role being merely a means of production of "the human". The internal complexity and differentiation captured under the signifier "the animal" are left aside by the philosopher, perpetuating a common trend of construction and essentialisation of a completely artificial category. When we talk about animals, especially in discourses concerning animal rights, human-animal relations, animal welfare and other important issues, we often limit our concern to the animals closer to us, or with whom we have more familiarity (primates, mammals, pets, sometimes fishes and reptiles, and more in general vertebrates), but we rarely have in mind the whole internal complexity of "animals"[7].

I will now examine the consequences of the anthropological machine on its outside, the "excluded par excellence", namely non-human animals, in their practical and political dimension, arguing that the origins of the practices to which we expose animals on a daily basis there is the ontological (and physical) production and unilateral control of the animal body with the objective of producing, in a privative way, the human. This foundational ontological operation shows that, as Agamben (2004, p. 80) claims, "in its origin Western politics is also biopolitics", and that the fundamental conflict that permeates our cultures is between humans and animals, categories produced and reproduced by a sacrificial mechanism of radical exclusion.

4. The war against animals

One of the voices who better depicted this fundamental conflict with clarity and disenchantment is Thomas Hobbes (2012), who famously described the relationship between humans and animals as a "perpetuall warre". In war positive right has no place, the only right is the natural right: this is the condition of the state of nature, where there is no commonly recognised sovereign authority enforcing positive law and the only right of each individual is an *'ius omnium in omnia'*. While, famously, human beings, thanks to their calculative reason and natural laws, are able to create a "social pact" and enter a civil society, with non-human animals, Hobbes wrote, this is not possible, since their lack of reason

[7] It is unlikely that, while talking about "animal issues", we refer to arthropods (insects and arachnids), echinoderms (starfishes and sea urchins), cnidarians (jellyfishes and corals) or other members of the 40 known animal *phyla*.

and language make it unfeasible to make a pact and enforce compliance[8]. Without a common authority to whom confer all natural rights, human-animal relations cannot exit a state of nature, a condition of perpetual war of all against all, in which the only right is strength, and any act of violence can be performed with impunity. Hobbes' merit is the severing from the enduring tradition of Christian theology that founded human dominion over animals on positive divine right. Against this view, he unveils with great lucidity that the dominion stems from the mere natural right of strength: we do what we want to animals because we can, and because we have no reasons to fear them.

The condition of war pictured by the modern philosopher is harsh and violent, but interestingly symmetrical: "Forasmuch therefore as in proceeds from the right of nature, that a beast may kill a man; it is also by the same Right, that a man may slay a beast" (Hobbes 1983, p. 87). However, the war against animals has historically been "distinctly asymmetrical and not only because we were the ones who started it: the disproportion of the forces on the battlefield and their different organization are in fact immeasurable" (Mormino, Colombo, Piazzesi 2017, p. 9). Humans' relationship with animals was one of symmetrical predation for thousands of years, but structurally transformed starting from the Agricultural Revolution. Following Mormino, I call "dominion" the asymmetrical condition of control and violence toward many non-human animals starting with sacrifices and domestication. The relevant shift is from a practice of catching/killing wild animals, to "bringing the animal into existence, in ways and at times useful to humans, and the exploitation of its life processes in their entire duration" (Mormino, Colombo, Piazzesi 2017, p. 7). Human military superiority and organisation led to a condition of systematic control over many species of animals, relegated to a situation of perpetual slavery: they do not have a say on their exploitation and the unidirectional dominion over them, they are often legally considered "propriety" of their human owners. The war against animals probably began as symmetrical predation but changed radically in an asymmetrical system of sacrificial dominion in the last 12,000 years.

Mormino, Colombo and Piazzesi mention three macro-effects of the war against animals in chronological order: domestication, genetic manipulation and engineering, and extinction. The practice of domestication has started around 12,000 years ago with the enclosure and exploitations of large numbers of specific animals for human-centred purposes

[8] The kind of "social pact" observed by the social species that Hobbes described as "political" (bees, ants) is completely different in nature. While the human pact stems from calculative prudential reasoning, it is artificial, that of animals is "natural", they "naturally" aim at the same objective and cooperate without contentions (Hobbes, 1983, p. 87).

(probably for symbolic/religious reasons firstly, and later for economic motives) (Mormino 2017): to its "evolution" and "institutionalisation" and the practice of industrial farming will be devoted the last part of this article. The processes of genetic manipulation show the strong biopolitical nature of the structure: the production and modification of animal bodies is material, not only ontological. Billions of non-human individuals are meticulously brought into existence with the only purpose of being "utilised" and killed. The artificial selection of individuals with "better" characters (for human needs and desires) has marked the transformation of numerous species: farm animals have been selected in order to produce more meat, milk or wool, and to be more tame and docile; animals used in laboratories have been engineered to develop certain specific characters useful for the research (the "oncomouse", a mouse whose genetic code has been modified to increase its susceptibility to cancer, is a famous example). Also, animals considered "pets" have a long history of genetic manipulation: domesticated dogs not only lost many characteristics of their wolf ancestors but experienced feverish selections that shaped the great variety of dog breeds, so different from each other. The example of dogs sheds light on one of the most cruel and violent consequences of the process of modification: the creation of "harmful phenotypes", namely individuals whose selected characters generate great suffering or early and inborn pathologies[9]. We have canalised the evolutionary process of many animals in directions that, without our interference, would have been impossible, sometimes deliberately, other times with little understanding, sometimes through invasive methods of DNA engineering, other times with simpler artificial selection of mating individuals. Humans have practised genetic modification for different purposes: economic (breeds of cow producing up to 10,000 kg of milk per year)[10], scientific (the oncomouse), aesthetic (the pug) and even artistic (as the bio fluorescent rabbit Alba "created" by Eduardo Kac) (Harari 2014, pp. 402-403). At the expense of the already excluded, genetic manipulation modified the physical conditions of many species, harmlessly in the best scenarios, with a great amount of violence and pain in others.

[9] One of the most evident examples is brachycephaly: common among many different dog breeds (bulldogs, pugs, chihuahuas, Cavalier Kings, Dog de Bordeaux), this condition stems from the selected characters making the head of the dogs smaller and flattened for aesthetic reasons and generates severe health problems to the respiratory and digestive systems, to the spine, ears, eyes and skin. This issue is mentioned by Pollo (2021, pp. 90-91).

[10] This is the case of the Holstein Friesian cow. Similar cases are the selection of sheep that produce such an abundant amount of wool that they cannot survive without being sheared or that of chicken breeds such as the broiler who reach 1,5 kg of weight in just 30 days of life (they are another harmful phenotype, prone to cardiovascular and skeletal dysfunctions).

Species extinction is the third consequence of the war against animals, which emerged as a concerning issue in the last decades. The complete destruction of other species is not a new fact in human history: it has been suggested that behind the extinction of other *Homo* species such as *neanderthal* or *denisova* there could be the hand of the first groups of *sapiens* that reached Europe around 40,000 years ago, also through deliberate actions of warfare, aggression and systematic killing, in a quasi-genocidal fashion (Harari 2014, pp. 23-24). Also, it has been hypothesised that the extinction of the so-called "Pleistocene megafauna", the group of many big size species (among which mammoths and giant sloths) disappeared in the last half of the Late Pleistocene (50-12,000 y. a.), could have been con-caused by the migration of *Homo sapiens* groups in new regions[11]. Destruction of habitats, pollution, extensive urbanisation and climate change are causing the disappearance of animal species at an impressive rate, leading to what has been called "Sixth Mass Extinction", an ecocide of immense dimensions: today, the rate of extinctions has increased exponentially, up to a thousand times higher than the "background rate of extinction" (Pimm *et al.* 2014).

The convergence of the practices of domestication, genetic manipulation and species extinction generated what Crary and Gruen (2022, p. 14) called "Animal Crisis": a situation in which "human-animal relations have reached a desperate point". Biodiversity loss and the systemic killing of animals on an industrial scale reinforce the relation of oppression and dominion over non-humans, whose lives are day-by-day exploited and commodified. According to these authors, "Anthropogenic animal destruction also includes the deliberate creation, exploitation, and killing of animals in laboratories, hunting grounds on land and in the oceans, aqua-farms, and land-based industrial farms" (Crary & Gruen 2022, p. 12). In terms of mammal biomass, wildlife makes up only about 4%, while livestock amount to 62% (humans form the remaining 34%), and, as scientific studies show, in term of biomass "humans and livestock overweight all vertebrates combined, with the exception of fish" (Bar-On, Phillips, Milo 2018, p. 6508)[12]. To this proportion, we should integrate another data: that of animal killing. According to FAO data (Roser 2023), more than 200 million cows, pigs, chickens, goats, sheep and ducks are slaughtered for meat and dairy every day (this data excludes millions of fish, the number of which is difficult to estimate). That means that, as the

[11] The role of humans in the Quaternary extinction event is debated among scientists. However, the coincidence of human migration in Australia around 50,000 y. a. and in the Americas around 13,000 y. a. with the extinction of local megafaunas is a strong clue (Sandom *et al.* 2014).

[12] The situation is homologous for what concerns domesticated and wild birds.

Humane Foundation calculated, "if humans killed each other at the same rate we kill animals, […] we'd be extinct in 17 days" (Crary & Gruen 2022, p. 13)[13].

5. The system of dominion

The ecofeminist tradition has always regarded the contemporary system of animal oppression and dominion as focal point of discussion, highlighting how structural and systemic exploitation and destruction of animals and nature are rooted in the same framework that oppresses and subjugates "women, the poor, colonized, racialized, and other marginalized people" (Crary & Gruen 2022, p. 130). The ecofeminist framework is grounded on the critique of all hierarchical oppressive relations and divides (man/women, white/non-white, human/animal, nature/culture) which are interpreted as "structurally interrelated" (Crary & Gruen 2022, p. 3). The human/non-human divide can be interpreted as the first form of exclusion, from which all other exclusions were shaped, among which hierarchical structures of oppression such as patriarchy, monarchies, animal exploitation and non-criminal killing: their origin is the sacrificial exclusion of a constitutive outside. Ecofeminist scholars put emphasis on the elements of connection between practices of women and animal oppression, such as the "reproductive and sexual enslavement of female animal bodies" (Gaard 2012, p. 524), the role of violence in the maintenance of such systems, the feminisation of feminist empathy and care for animals' oppression, the link between the practice of eating meat and male supremacy (Adams 2015). From this standpoint, many practices of human dominion over animals can be described as fully-fledged forms of slavery. The fight against commodification, violent coercion, exploitation and killing of non-human animals is regarded by ecofeminists as a structural part of the common and intersectional struggle for liberation and recognition. The deconstruction of the system of oppression and exclusion is for ecofeminists the primary goal of animal ethics and politics.

Many practices of human-animal relationship are mentioned as forms of "animal slavery". Simone Pollo (2021, pp. 85-92), for example, de-

[13] This calculation must be interpreted in light of the immense number of non-human animal individuals (especially livestock) compared to the relatively small number of humans (8 billion individuals). According to FAO data, livestock chickens amounted to more than 21 billion in 2014, while cows and other cattle species to 1,5 billion: Our World in Data, Chart: Livestock counts, World, 2014, https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/livestock-counts?time=latest.

scribes in his Manifesto activities which he deems incompatible with the ethos and the principles of liberal democratic societies: the first he mentions is the usage of animals in circus performances and other similar shows, such as in dolphinariums where dolphins, whales and orcas perform in "ability tricks" and "comic shows" with their human owners. The animals involved in these practices are, almost always, individuals of wild species (whose needs are often incompatible with an enforced co-habitation with humans), they often undergo a stressful and violent process of taming, learning actions and commands completely out of tune with their wild behaviours and routines. Other forms of animal slavery described in the Manifesto are *corridas*, sport hunting, the intentional selection and trade of harmful phenotypes and fur farming. While these practices are deemed incompatible with democratic societies, and thus democratic animalism is committed to a complete abolition, Pollo argues that for other activities, such as animal experimentation for scientific and health research, democratic animalism "must necessarily stand on a 'reformist' position, that is, one oriented toward advocating for ever-increasing protections for the welfare of animals involved in experimentation and for making it a political and scientific priority to find alternatives *to* and *within* animal experimentation" (Pollo 2021, p. 82).

Interestingly, one of the practices that is mostly discussed in animal ethics debates, and that many scholars deem as the most paradigmatic instance of animal slavery, is absent in Pollo's list: animal farming in its contemporary industrial apparatus. This eminent exclusion is defended through a discussion on the cultural, symbolic and traditional meaning of the practice of animal farming and eating meat. Domestication and farming are the first instances of dominion over animals, they have accompanied the development of human civilisations since the construction of the first cities, being a fundamental element of the Agricultural Revolution, an event (or better, a series of parallel events) which marked a radical and irremediable transformation of the ways of life of many human groups: "human civilisation is structurally founded on the use of animals" (Pollo 2021, p. 63). In another essay, Pollo (2017, p. 148) stresses this point against different theories defending vegetarianism as a moral universal imperative stemming from the recognition of animal suffering and exploitation. He argues that these accounts, such as the classical animal rights theories of Singer and Regan, "underestimate the importance and complexity of meat-eating habits in the human form of life". Animal domestication and farming for meat, milk and wool are foundational elements of (at least) Western societies: these practices stem from and crystallise the human/non-human divide in the form of the human/animal separation. But to state that these institutionalised

actions are part of the deep structure of our societies is not at odds with claiming their being oppressive, violent and exploitative practices.

The argument Pollo uses to support this idea works on two binaries: the first is the deep cultural and traditional element just discussed, and the second is the issue of "unnecessary harm". Circuses, dolphinariums, fur farms, and other activities deemed forms of animal slavery, are considered by Pollo unjustifiable because they cause harm for frivolous reasons: they sacrifice the well-being and dignity of the animals involved for unnecessary purposes, perpetuating in this way "the anthropocentric idea that animals are a commodity always available for human interests and desires" (Pollo 2021, p. 90). I would argue this reasoning underestimates two elements: first, the fact that the possible cultural and traditional importance for human societies of those practices (some of which have, such as circuses and sport hunting, an important and enduring part in human cultural history) are considered "irrelevant", "unimportant" and "inconclusive" while those of animal farming and meat-eating are regarded as prominent. Even if the latter has a historical foundational role, its cultural value is exaggerated in comparison with the others, the history and cultural values of which are ignored. Second, if their "unnecessary" nature is enough to consider these practices unjust forms of slavery, the same could be argued for animal farming and meat-eating. In contemporary industrial societies, eating meat and using other products originating from animals cannot be described as a "necessity": we could clearly survive with plant-based or synthetic alternatives. On the contrary, many authors (Burgat 2022, p. 455) showed that "it was precisely at a time when humanity could have stopped using 'animal resources' that it instead institutionalised, and therefore generalised and intensified, a murderous relationship to animals".

Data show that the world consumption of meat grew from 62 million tons in 1950, to 437 million tons in 2011: an increase of over 700% (Larsen, Roney 2013). The animal industry exploded and institutionalised as an integral part of everyday life in contemporary societies in the second half of the XX century, generating a new dimension of life conditions for the many species involved, trending toward a deepening crisis of relationships. We can speak of a fully-fledged "Animal Crisis" only considering these "disruptive innovations". According to Krzykawski (2021, p. 80), the industrialised process of killing animals led to what he calls "de-animalisation", which appears to be "the tragic final stage of the consecutive processes of the domestication and instrumentalization of animals in the modern era", which made them invisible to society, and their bodies inanimate pieces of matter, disposable to be created and processed in an ever-ending industrial cycle. While, before the advent of hyper-industrial apparatus, animals were considered machines, efficient

means of production, objects and instruments humans were free to use and treat as they needed and pleased, the situation changed with the development of global capitalism: "if industrial animals, such as horses or cows […] could have been seen as *lumpenproletariat* at the beginning of the twentieth century, they have *massively* become 'quickly used and replaced objects of consumption' since the 1950s" (Krzykawski 2021, p. 79). Inside the industry, animals have been "de-objectified", "their bodies became disposable and processable" (Krzykawski 2021, p. 77), ready to be transformed and presented as something "other than itself" in the form of varieties of meat.

An aspect highlighted and discussed by different authors is the strong link between the practice of eating meat and the mechanism of the divide. Derrida (1991) famously used the term "sacrificial structure" to describe the existence of a deep system of production of the subject that includes as a core element the "noncriminal putting to death" of animals. This structure is at the origins of multiple systems of domination and oppression, of the schema he called "*carno-phallogocentrism*" (Derrida 1991, p. 113)[14], and is central for the production of a peculiar contingent subjectivity. The carnivorous virile subject emerges as the production of the sacrificial structure as the ultimate result of the process of systematic exclusion and elimination of parts of reality from the protected sphere of the properly "human". Florence Burgat (2022) has taken this concept, trying to better describe the link between eating meat and sacrifice. Starting from the claim that the consumption of meat is not a necessity, but rather a deep desire of humanity which must be taken seriously, she interprets sacrifice in the light of the structuralist tradition. A structure is, she argues recalling Lévi-Strauss' anthropology, a "primordial fact", a system we find ourselves in since our birth, that influences and shapes all societal systems of relations. Eating meat is, in this framework, intended as a "superstructure" born to institutionalise and defend a relationship of radical severing and hierarchical violent dominion over non-human animals. The desire to eat meat is nothing but an expression of the desire for "a radical and indefinite separation form 'animality' that only the eating of animals can fully achieve. To chew something, digest it and also expel it in the form of excrement is to obliterate it in a way like no other" (Burgat 2022, p. 457). This is why Burgat thinks that a universal complete shift toward vegetarianism would be impossible: the desire for meat will persist in any case, since it is deeply rooted in a sacrificial structure of division. What meat-eaters "love" about meat is not, she argues, its mere

[14] This close link between the practice of eating meat (interpreted as a fundamental productive process of virility) and the patriarchal structure has been interestingly developed simultaneously and independently by Jacques Derrida and Carol Adams (2015).

physical substance, but the fact that it comes from an animal. While it could seem at first that this thesis is at odds with the concept of "de-animalisation" presented before, I argue that they are both expressions of the primordial sacrificial mechanism which enable us to watch the same entity (animals) in two apparently contradictory ways. We hide the fact that what we eat is processed animal flesh, disassociating it from its original referent, and at the same time deeply incorporate the subjective necessity of prevailing and eliminating that animal, perpetuating, reproducing, and empathising the radical divide.

6. Conclusion

The advantage of the biopolitical/ecofeminist frameworks deployed in this article is that it is able, as we discussed, to detect the central role played by the human/non-human divide in the formation of the "Animal Crisis". The divide emerges in being is not only a "product of detached reason", nor simply the reaction to an affective dimension of fear and arrogance, but rather the consequence of a political process of exclusion the branches of which form our present.

Classical animal rights theories, such as Singer's or Regan's, apply "extension strategies" (Pellegrino & di Paola 2018, pp. 137-154): starting from the idea that there exists some characteristics that are bearers of moral value, they support the extension of moral status and rights to all those who are equipped with these traits. For Singer the characteristic giving value to forms of life is the capacity to feel pain and pleasure, whose interests must be protected accordingly, while Regan focuses on subjectivity as the relevant trait. Other theorists focused on agency, sentience, intelligence, conscience and self-consciousness. All these strategies, while praiseworthy for their concern for animal suffering and the strong advocacy for the protection of animal lives, still necessarily operate constituting a protected inside at the expenses of an excluded outside. The expansion of the circle of moral concern can function only if there is someone outside of it. The human/non-human divide is perpetuated in these theories through "the game of 'how close are you to the [human] model'" (Colombo 2017, p. 131): in virtue of the presence of some arbitrary characteristics, which are always common traits to humans that we value important, a species is included or excluded from the moral circle. The experiments aimed at showing the presence of these characteristics in apes, dolphins, orcas and other species, gained strong popularity, but they are founded on the idea of showing that those species are close to humans, and thus worthy of moral consideration and rights. Those who pass the test are included in the inside because they share something with

us, they are, in part, humans; those who fail it, remain outside. While it is possible to defend the strategic necessity of dividing between different animals while dealing with animal ethics, classical theories are still operating with variants of the anthropological machine, without questioning its structure.

This article is not meant to draw an automatic moral condemnation to the practices described, for which the debate in animal ethics offers multiple arguments, but rather to clarify how the original *cesura* between humans and animals is directly linked to the current state of affairs with its system of almost absolute dominion. This clarification is, in the intention of the author, essential to construct political solution to the Animal Crisis, since it put to the forefront its biopolitical foundation.

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