

■ Animal Poverty: Agamben, Heidegger, and Whitehead

Gregg Lambert
Syracuse University

Abstract

This article examines the concepts of “the animal” and “animality” in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, particularly in response to the recent debates in the fields of Animal Studies and Posthumanism, as well as in response to the revelation of the *Black Notebooks* where earlier statements regarding the animal being “poor in world” also find a resonance with Heidegger’s meditations on the relationship between the German people (*Volk*) and the European Jews. The article concludes by introducing the perspective of “life itself” from the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, and especially concerning the famous proposition “Life is robbery.”

Keywords: Agamben, Heidegger, Whitehead, animal (animal studies), animal (as “poor in world”)

Gregg Lambert is currently Dean’s Professor of Humanities at Syracuse University, USA and Distinguished International Scholar, Kyung Hee University, South Korea. Author of eleven books, critical editions, and more than a hundred articles in peer-reviewed journals and edited collections, Professor Lambert is internationally renowned for his scholarly writings on critical theory, philosophy, the role of the Humanities in the contemporary university, and especially for his work on the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida. He has lectured internationally and been invited as a Visiting Fellow at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, Ewha University, Seoul National University, in 2010 was appointed as the BK21 Distinguished Visiting Scholar at Sungkyunkwan University, South Korea, and is currently a Senior Research Fellow at Western Sydney University, New South Wales. His most recent works are *Return Statements* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), and *Philosophy After Friendship: Deleuze’s Conceptual Personae* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017). Email: glambert@syr.edu.

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In *The Open: Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben structures the relationship between man and animal according to his thesis concerning what he calls “the anthropological machine” (33-38). What kind of machine? In fact, the *polis* itself is the privileged anthropological machine, from Aristotle onward, since there would be neither man nor animal without first a technological opening of the mouth (*logos*), becoming a kind of *poros*, eventually becoming a mechanical orifice (*ductus*) that spits out both beings onto the surface of the earth. Of course, in tracing back the origin of the distinction between man and animal to a privileged logocentric and anthropological machine, here Agamben is referring to an often-cited passage from Aristotle’s *Politics*:

As we maintain, indeed, nature does nothing in vain; now alone among animals man has speech [*logon dē monon anthrōpos ekhei tōn zōon*]. And whereas the voice [*phonē*] is but an indication of pleasure and pain, and is therefore found in other animals . . . [to the power of *logos* belongs] the association of those living beings who have this sense of making a family and a state. (Aristotle 1988)

In the distinction between *phonē* and *logos*, we find the primitive and Homeric caesura between poetry and politics, that is, between verse-making and city-making. In the beginning, the anthropological machine that first emerges in Homer as the product of a simple, rustic metrical device, on the other side of this caesura, becomes the vertical columns of the *polis* that later appear in the forms of Plato, but especially, in the categories of Aristotle. At the threshold of modernity, in other words, this simple pastoral metrical device, and this double columned structure in which humans and animals are divided into separate categories, eventually becomes identified with a uniquely modern machine, the state apparatus (*appareil*).¹ According to Agamben’s reading of this original Greek caesura—largely influenced by the earlier readings of this passage by Rilke and Nietzsche, and by Heidegger as well—we now find that there is, on one side, only the becoming-animal or the bestialization of man, and on the other side, the humanization of the animal. Quoting from Heidegger’s 1942-43 seminar on Parmenides, Agamben refers at this moment to “the oblivion of being” that lies at the bottom of biologism of the nineteenth century as “a monstrous anthropomorphization of the animal and a corresponding animalization of humanity” (Agamben 58). Here, at this point, moreover, we witness the full deployment of Agamben’s version of the biopolitical as a machine for

¹ Although it is important to point out that the original opposition in this passage does not primarily refer to animals, but rather to those that Homer originally denounced as “natural outcasts” and “lovers of war,” as beings who are “tribeless, lawless, and hearthless,” metaphorically, of course, these wild and barbarous tribes could be compared to animals in that they do not have “the sense of good and evil, or just and unjust”; thus, like both animals and the gods, they are judged to be *a-polis*, since they do not have the sense to know how to make a family, a community, a city, or a state (Aristotle 1253).

producing, even manufacturing, the total impoverishment of life, which is largely indebted to Heidegger's own thesis of the animal's "poverty in world" (*Weltarmut*).

Of course, this thesis has also been poorly understood as merely expressing a certain prejudice toward the animal, given Heidegger's suspicion that the animal *as such* does not exist; there is no animal as a living being, but only as a metaphysical category that is produced by the *animal rationale*. In this article, therefore, I will return to the debate around the meaning of Heidegger's supposed reduction of non-human animals to a state of poverty—that is, of "having in the mode of not having" or of "merely having life" (*des Nurlebenden*) and, thus, capable only of perishing (*verenden*)—a description that, in many respects, already prefigures Agamben's later formulation of bare life as an artificial (thus politically produced) in-distinction between *bios* and *zoe*. Before turning to this debate, however, I want to begin by recalling the full context of the 1929-1930 lecture course. The three theses (i.e., the stone is without world, the animal is world-poor, and humans are world-forming) are proposed in response to three preliminary questions: What is world? What is finitude? What is individuation? (Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts* 181). Accordingly, as Heidegger says, the middle question is also most central because it will define the limits of the other two; therefore, it is not merely by accident that Heidegger chooses—literally as his initial path—the middle thesis concerning the animal, because against the background that the stone is completely without world, at least the human access (or "transposedness," provided by sciences of zoology and biology) to the finite world of animals provides a minimal opening on the basis of which the relationship of the other two beings can be determined.

Nevertheless, we should also recall that soon after setting out on the path of the animal in order to finally determine an understanding of what is world, that is to say, to ask the question how human is world-forming, Heidegger will eventually get lost, and decide to abandon this approach in the second part of the semester, choosing instead to focus on the existential theme of boredom. He doesn't return to the question of world again until three years later when he starts out on another path by asking what is a thing (*Das Ding*), which is different from an object that stands over against consciousness. During the period of the early 1930s, moreover, the question of world becomes completely eclipsed by the existential and spiritual significance of "homeland" (*Heimat*) or "native land" (*Heimatland*), which, as the *Black Notebooks* have recently revealed, are implicitly in conversation with the National Socialist and populist theme of Blood and Soil (*Blut und Boden*). As Jesús Escudero argues, at least from the period beginning in 1935 including the Rectorate Address, one cannot separate the phenomenological meaning of the themes of world and territory from the historical and ideological (i.e., spiritual) significance that Heidegger bestows upon the existential sense of groundedness

(*Bodenständigkeit*), homeland (*Heimat*), and the people (*Volk*) as the three unifying elements of German national identity (33). “The land constitutes what the Greeks call *chthōn*: the place where humans dwell and create a ‘native land’ (*Heimatland*)” (Escudero 29). Thus, aside from designating a geographical territory, the land now acquires an added ontological significance as a space that allows for the unfolding of basic human possibilities, that is to say, it comprises the historical destination of community, the “there” (*Da*) of “Being in common” (*Mitsein*). As human beings inhabit the land and dwell in it, they create a sense of belonging to the place whose borders do not necessarily coincide with territorial and/or geographical boundaries; rather, “this land politics represents the historical and ontological space in which Dasein struggles to find its place. Its own sense of being is rooted in the community, in tradition, in history” (Escudero 29). Following the war, Heidegger attempts to conceal these themes under the question concerning technology and the violent rift between the modern and Greek world views. However, as Escudero writes concerning the post-war period:

The concept of “earth” as used in “The Origin of the Work of Art” does not refer to an idealized nature that is present before the appearance of culture. Instead, earth is a dimension of an individual’s existence that is manifested in one’s struggle with culture and the world. Earth is not a stable foundation, but rather a space for carrying out creative possibilities of existence. (45)

Reflecting on this historical genealogy of concepts along with the earlier theme of the animal being determined as poor in world, we might ask whether an animal’s relation to territory or environment can be defined as a homeland. That is, while animals can be found to inhabit a territory or belong to an environment, do they have the sense to create a homeland, which may require something more than dwelling, inhabiting, or populating an environment? Although I cannot pursue this line of inquiry in this article, one might wonder if Heidegger’s themes merely recapitulate Aristotle’s original distinction between humans, animals, and other “natural outcasts” (barbarians, nomads, etc.), since it depends on what Aristotle also determines as the “sense of making a community and a state” (1253). For example, as Heidegger will express many times during this period, but especially in the Rectorate Address and the seminar on Parmenides, “the state is a people’s way of being” (Escudero 29).

At this point, now let’s return to the passages in the 1929 seminar where we find the infamous statement that the animal is “poor in world.” Of course, following Von Uexkuell, it is true that Heidegger restricts the openness of the animal life by the captivation of its own organs, which immediately absorbs the animal into the circle of its surrounding environment (*Umwelt*, meaning “around world”), thus denying the animal any access to the “manifestness of beings *as such*” (Heidegger,

Fundamental Concepts 236). It is this character of captivation (i.e., the complete absorption by its environment) that Heidegger then goes on to determine as the essential trait of the animal *qua* animal, causing this sense of captivation to stand out and become a defining characteristic in the distinction between an environment (or territory) and a world. Concerning the famous example of the tick that is taken from Von Uexkuell, how remarkable that this peculiar form of life could have evolved in the form that “is intrinsically articulated” in relation of immanence to its surrounding environment! (Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts* 168). In other words, this organic melody of intrinsic articulation must exist as a condition of immanent relation, since there must be branches and trees and an innate ability of the tick to know how to climb. There must also be a healthy supply of herbivores, omnivores, and carnivores who just happen to be loitering underneath these branches, and with enough frequency to support this particular form of life. In other words, there must be a structured *openness* that already unites the organism with its surrounding environment to which it is intrinsically articulated.

First, we should recall that the translation of the term “peculiar,” which is related to the German *eigenlich*, is derived from the noun *eigen* (proper) (Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts* 233). However, what Heidegger is referring to as *Eigentümlichkeit* (normally, peculiarity) is not what we would normally associate with authenticity (being proper to oneself), but instead refers to a peculiar trait that stands out as remarkable, in the sense of not finding this same trait in other beings in exactly the same way, thus constituting the being’s “proper peculiarity,” or in other terms, its singularity. Second, while much has been said and written on Heidegger’s statement that the “animal is poor in world,” not much attention has been paid to Heidegger’s peculiar choice of the term poverty itself to define the relationship between the animal and the world. Once again, we must remember at this point of his analytic of finitude, the definition of a world is not yet determined, and so Heidegger has no other option than to choose the customary and anthropocentric path of presupposing a human world as a given that is somehow different from the animal world according to this method of transposition into the animal world (which Heidegger also remarks is a peculiar ontological openness that belongs to human Dasein in order to gain access to other living beings, as demonstrated in the knowledges of biology, ethology, and zoology). At the same time, he also acknowledges that “transposedness” through scientific knowledge will not allow the human to simply “go along with the animal,” and thus will not provide any access to the animal’s world as such (Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts* 210). In other words, what Heidegger calls “transposedness” (via the knowledge of biology and zoology) can “belong to the essence of man without this necessarily meaning that we can transpose

ourselves” *directly* into an animal’s world—that is, of course assuming that the *animal in general* even has something like “a world” (Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts* 210). Therefore, we must note that this definition of Dasein’s capacity or possibility of transposedness is, at the same time, accompanied by a refusal or limitation that conditions our immediate accessibility to the animal’s world. It is this peculiar possibility of having and not-having, with respect to the world inhabited by animals and other living beings, that is now transferred back onto the animal’s own relation to the specific world that is proper or peculiar to human beings. In other words, it is the creation of a distinctly human world that actually first produces the finitude that now defines the animal’s relation to this world!

But why does Heidegger choose the term “poverty” (*Armut*) to represent the animal’s relation to the human world? In other words, *what is this poverty in world* of the animal? Of course, in the recent debates around the animal, many humans have been offended by this statement on behalf of animals and other non-human things (e.g., plants, cells, soccer balls, and all manner of objects in general). Nevertheless, Heidegger is pursuing the difference between the nature of living organisms expressed in modern biology and ethnology from the traditional (i.e., metaphysical) concept of animality, according to which the animal is usually defined as lacking something essential (i.e., speech, language, reason, soul, etc.) that is already assumed to naturally belong to man (as in the example of the “sense of speech,” *logos*, as we found in the passage by Aristotle). At this stage of Heidegger’s exploration of the fundamental concepts, however, the concept of *logos* is not yet sufficiently defined in order to appear as what is peculiar to the living being of man; instead, the defining characteristic is world, which the animal also possesses, but in a state of deprivation. Here, we should also recall Plato’s distinction of animal life in *The Statesman*, where the lacking characteristic would be the soul, defined as a form of life itself (*zoe*) that is not related to death, or to the zoological meaning of the finitude of living beings.²

Therefore, we might ask whether Heidegger is merely repeating a dominant statement that he draws from Platonic and Aristotelian tradition to define the relation between human and animal in terms of the lack of a certain capacity, or of a particular attribute, that naturally belongs to one species and not to the other. Or, rather, is he actually repeating this dominant judgement in the form of a fundamental question concerning the relation between a human understanding of poverty and the nature of the lacking something essential that recurs in traditional

² Concerning this distinction, see Michael Nass’s excellent discussion in *Plato and the Invention of Life*.

(i.e., metaphysical) concepts of animality? Although the latter is perhaps a better description of Heidegger's intention at this point, he immediately expresses doubts about the success of this approach in determining the nature of this lack or deprivation, since "even after carefully determining what it means to be deprived of something, we still do not possess an adequate answer. Why not?" As he goes on to say:

Because we cannot simply conjure up the essence of poverty in world from out of the formal concept of deprivation. We can grasp this poverty only if we first know what world is. Only then are we in a position to say *what* it is that the animal is deprived of, and thus to say what this poverty in world implies. First of all, we must pursue the concept of world by examining the essence of man and the world-forming character we have claimed for him: we must first examine the positive moment, then the negative moment and finally the lack. (Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts* 211)

To conclude our brief excursion on this question, Heidegger never says that the animal is simply deprived of something definite like speech or soul. He only says that the animal is, in a certain sense, deprived of "world"—but again, this only leads us again to the question "what is world?" But again, since the concept of world has not yet been positively defined, its "sense" cannot simply be deduced from a statement of its negative disposition in the animal (just as the full positive sense of speech and soul for the human can be deduced from the proposition that negates these attributes in the animal). As Heidegger says, "only where there is a having do we then find a not-having" (Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts* 211). In the case of poverty, however, deprivation is defined by a form of having in the mode of not having: the poor are poor because their mode of access to capital is defined in terms of not having—i.e., they are deprived of wealth that is defined in terms of private property. Does this imply that the rich also have more world if we employ the same analogy? It often seems that this is the case if world is defined by openness and by a greater degree of possibility. If so, then Heidegger's use of the terms of "poverty" and "wealth" might lead to a more Marxist understanding of the concept of animality, and especially to what Marx and Engels often refer to as the beastialization of labor-power.

On the other hand, what would function as the equivalent of the access to the means of production if we were to follow this Marxian analogy? That is to say, what would the animal become if it were suddenly given the possibility of being *weltbildend* like the human being? In fact, Heidegger's own definition of the animal already gives to the animal this possibility, or, in Aristotelian terms this *potentia*, except that animals are animals only because they have this potentiality in the form of deprivation. From this last observation, we can now conclude that what appears under the term poverty merely represents an extreme determination of the same principle of deprivation according to which the poor are often compared to ani-

mals. Consequently, the dominant statement that “the animal is poor in world” could only be understood from the perspective of a previous metaphysical determination of animality, which causes the animal to appear more or less like a poor human being, except that in this case, the animal is found to be poorer than even the poorest of human beings, since it is also lacking something essential that belongs to the human being; as a result, the animal appears as a being who is both *relatively* poor and, at the same time, *absolutely* deprived.

I think at this point we have now established a general definition of animality in Heidegger’s analysis as referring to that peculiar being that exists on a scale between mere possibility and absolute deprivation. And yet, it is important to observe that the human is not defined as wealthy in world, but rather as world-forming, which is not the same thing as being wealthy in all cases as a species being. In fact, when compared not to the animal, but rather to life in general (or life itself), the human is by contrast not only poor, but is absolutely impoverished! As Heidegger writes, “on the contrary, life is a domain which possesses a wealth of openness with which the human world may have nothing to compare” (*Fundamental Concepts* 255). Moreover, we find no basis for comparing human life and life itself, which is to say, the manifold totality of living beings in both a zoological and ontological sense (as either the diversity of genus and species, or the total ensemble of living beings). In fact, I think this is Heidegger’s entire question concerning the animal: that the determination of animality in the form of a species distinction may, in fact, not exist naturally. For example, in his book about Nietzsche he leaves it clear that “biology as such never decides what is living” (qtd. in Escudero 38). To put this differently: what can be shown to exist in biological and zoological terms does not necessarily lead to the metaphysical determination of the species distinction between human and animal, nor even to the multifarious diversity of “life in general,” but will only lead us to a particular environment that is peculiar to human beings, which we will also find to be inhabited by other living beings such as animals and plants, and even non-living things such as machines, and all manner of objects as well.

I will now skip to the conclusion of a very long exposition of Heidegger’s seminar and simply ask the following question: what then is the environment that is peculiar to man? Heidegger chooses to call this environment “a world,” but, as I have demonstrated, this is only defined negatively in contrast to the environment occupied by the animal, which is formed by what Heidegger calls (following Von Uexkell) the expression of an eliminative character (*Entthemmung*) of openness particular to the animal’s so-called complete absorption into its environment. In fact, it is through the process of eliminative behavior that the environment is first produced in the form of an encirclement (*Umringen*) that is brought about

(*errungen*) in relation to “a continual production of an emptiness” (*Fundamental Concepts* 211) where the particular animal lives. We can understand this production of emptiness, for example, as the air where the bird flies, or the ocean where the fish swims. In order for this particular form of life or species-being to occur and become proper to itself, there must be the eliminative character that defines its relation to an environment that is proper to it, and this is why we find so many birds in the air, and so many fish in the ocean. (Of course, there are exceptions in each species as if there is an essential indecision of life itself concerning the proper environment for each species, and the evolutionary process seems to always find ways to create new species to populate every kind of environment that exists, in which living is possible.) Is there such an environment, like water for fish or air for fowl, that basically defines the nature of emptiness in which the human dwells? Of course, we would not have to consider this question that long before determining that there is no proper environment for the human, no particular form of emptiness that determines its own proper element, no place where we would normally expect to find the human species unless we say that the earth itself is our particular ring, our encirclement, our species’ environment. And yet, this would not be correct either, or at least not for long, as humans travel through a new emptiness, outer space, and visit other planets in order to colonize them and extract new sources of life for our species. Perhaps it is in this sense that the human is world-forming, meaning producing new environments, wider and wider circles of being, and even greater and more infinite spaces of emptiness in the totality of beings, in order to populate these vast spaces of emptiness and fill them with our biopolitical life. Consequently, it now appears that there is no space, no environment, that is ultimately proper to man, since we find him in every environment: in the air, on the ocean, or underneath; beneath the earth, or in outer space. This is the proper peculiarity that defines our species. *Oh, how great is man! How wide his circle of life, that is, how large a compass to measure his zone of emptiness!*

At the same time, we must also recognize, the more that our species widens our circle, producing new manners of populating the emptiness that we dwell in, the more the human species encircles other species and incorporates them into our own circle of life, which means that these other beings and species become incorporated into the emptiness we produce in our infinite expansion. Consequently, animals (and indeed plants, material, or any object that can be identified with a particular area of being) become part of the empty space produced and in which the human species dwells. For example, it is precisely because of this emptiness that now determines the animal to live within our encirclement, that the animal can be slaughtered and eaten because its being is reduced to emptiness and the human needs this emptiness in order to live and to produce its own existence. It

becomes a justification of eating and soon the very condition of the existence for certain animals that are produced as so much empty space in which the human dwells. I think we have now arrived at a point of understanding the world-forming character that is proper to our species, which is that we have no proper environment. The human being, as world producing, defines a particular form of life that encircles every other living thing, thereby reducing them to emptiness in which our own life is brought about and even increases its power over life itself. Even our increasing knowledge of cellular biology is part of this process, which in the last analysis is a purely aggressive and dominating struggle (*Ringen*) to maintain this encircling ring or sphere (*Welt*) within which a specifically articulated form of life can appear. It is this struggle for total encirclement of life in its generality that Heidegger defines as our proper peculiarity as a species, and it is the fate of all other forms of life to become incorporated into the expanded circle and our struggle against the opposing power of life itself. Here, we are prepared to see the framing of these questions in the terms that later appear around the questioning concerning technology. For example, the “breeding of human beings” (*Züchtung des Menschen*) is the maximum expression of modern technology in its attempt to exploit natural and human resources—a product of the mechanization (*Machinalisierung*) that governs the present. Thus, early on, Heidegger believes that Nietzsche is the first to recognize the metaphysical character of the machine, which transforms human beings into a simple form (*Gestalt*) on which a shape (*Typ*) can be imprinted, and, finally, into “research material” (*Versuchsmaterial*) (Heidegger, *Question 13*).

What would this imply, if Heidegger’s formulation of animality prepares us to understand, following Cary Wolfe’s recent work, the contemporary biopolitical enframing of nonhuman animal life that can be allowed to perish, since the manner in which the animal has life does not stand out as the question of its own proper access to being—which the animal has been categorically deprived of—given that this peculiar capacity belongs only to the animal that is called man.³ Nevertheless, this also raises a question concerning the exact meaning of this peculiar capacity, a meaning which has only been assumed to refer to politics, specifically to the opening that refers to the *polis* as the point where the conflict (*Streit*) between the animal and human, earth and world, comes most decisively into appearance. In reflecting on this peculiar capacity, it is worthwhile to recall Michel Foucault’s famous assertion that our society’s “threshold of modernity” has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies, as in the case of nuclear war (Foucault 137). Here, I would only qualify this statement,

³ See Wolfe, *Before the Law*, ch. 1.

in a Derridean manner, that is, to include a few other species in this wager as well, besides the human species. In other words, do the questions that have emerged around the Anthropocene only represent a sharpened reflection of the above formulation?

I think we have come to the point where we can ask the following question, which I will pose first in the manner of Agamben, and then in conclusion, according to the philosophy of Whitehead. Is it this emptiness (which I transpose to name “the open”) that is produced in the manner of a machine, and by machines, as the emptying out of environments and other living beings, that is either peculiar or proper to man? Again, according to Agamben’s thesis, it is this emptiness that is *produced* by the anthropological machine, and even the bodies of animals are emptied in order to be incorporated into becoming a space where the human dwells. But does man first produce the emptiness itself and where does it come from except from life itself? In other words, man does not create this emptiness *ex nihilo*, but rather produces it on the basis of what life provides as a first opening, or emptiness in the field composed of living beings. Once again, according to Heidegger, “life is a domain which possesses a wealth of openness with which the human world may have nothing to compare” (Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts* 255). It is here that Agamben wants to include this openness mechanistically, in order to cause the human openness and the animal non-openness to become a constant source of energy for driving the anthropological machine:

That is to say that poverty in the world—in which the animal in some way feels it’s not being open⁴—has the strategic function of ensuring a passage between the animal environment and the open, from a perspective in which captivation as the essence of the animal is as it were a suitable background against which the essence of humanity can now be set off. (Agamben 61)

In other words, according to Agamben’s thesis, it is only the openness of the human world that operates directly on the non-openness of the animal environment in the manner of a machine, which is not epistemological but politically defined. Moreover, it is in the manner that the human itself is caught up in its own anthropological machine, and determined more and more in terms of the struggle with the animal closeness, that this machine strategically or politically operates on the human producing the same state of “exposure without disconcealment” (Agamben 61).

And yet, we would be rightfully suspicious of this mechanistic interpretation of the two types of openness between human and non-human, which are sym-

⁴ However, this must be remarked as purely speculative feeling or “transposedness” in Heidegger’s terms.

metrically divided by a chiasmus which Agamben neatly places in between them to cover over an abyssal difference or divergence. First of all, we are suspicious because in the very passage that Agamben cites, Heidegger himself calls this mechanistic or machinic interpretation of biology deceptive, and even more seriously, an illusion: “Certainly it will be seen that this closest proximity of both determinations of essence is merely deceptive, that an abyss lies between them which cannot be bridged by any mediation whatsoever” (*Fundamental Concepts* 282). Secondly, we are suspicious because we have already noted the existence of another term that would disrupt any neat symmetry between these two perspectives even though it belongs essentially to both terms and is what opens each to the other, which is life itself. In other words, just as human Dasein cannot give to itself its own openness, that is to say, its own *Nichtung*, but rather must first procure this opening from either the totality of Being or life in general, either of which first give any living being access to both environment and to the possibility of having a world. So, what or from where does this opening first arrive, which I have already determined as both the act emptying out, at the same time as filling up, except the act of eating that determines the essential relation of all living beings to their environments as well as to the other living beings that are found there—e.g., between an organism and the environment composed of other living beings, both organic and inorganic? This opening is abyssal, or groundless, because there is eating all the way down. Even breathing performs the constant interplay of emptying and filling up, also in the manner of a caesura between inside and outside, between entity and environment, between earth and world, which covers over and mediates this abyssal ground between life and the living being. Therefore, it is only on the basis of an emptiness (i.e., this openness produced by the act of eating or being eaten) that life first produces in living beings that one can even establish any relation between the animal and the human, but also between the animal and the plant as well.

To conclude this brief meditation, and in order to determine a completely different character of the open (one that is non-Heideggerian and thus non-Agambenian as well), I will turn to the philosophy of Whitehead, even though I could also turn to the biology of Canguilhem as I have elsewhere in my writings.⁵ In both cases, the open is defined precisely as the relation between living society and environment, or even between the cell and its boundary or limit, the minimum of being that constitutes its fragile unity. In Whitehead, however, it is described as the precarious balance between organism and environment, and as the act of theft and counter-theft that constitutes the relation; specifically, this definition of

⁵ See the conclusion of my *Return Statements* 213-28.

the open appears in the last part of *Process and Reality*, and is even described as the manner in which nature passes into the place of the living, in the proposition that “Life is Robbery” (83). Because the sense of this statement appears truncated next to the complexity of the surrounding propositions, its simplicity is profound, as if the entire text was written to allow the force of this statement “life is robbery” to deliver a shock. It is presented as the second principle characteristic of the psychological-physiology of life in Whitehead’s cosmological argument. The first characteristic of life is the reaction adapted to the capture of intensity in a variety of circumstances; the second characteristic is the definition of the capture of intensity as robbery. We should recall here the chapter head is the “Order of Nature,” which could also be understood as the description of the natural law that regulates the arrangement between different societies. A living society is situated in the environment of other societies, both organic and inorganic. According to Whitehead, the fundamental law of nature is robbery which is then reactively adapted by living societies into the form of a hierarchy; thus, the principle of robbery is distributed as the governing relation between different living societies through which the totality of Nature is ordered (or to use more contemporary terminology, by which it achieves the form of a structure). “Thus,” Whitehead states, “all [societies] require interplay with their environment; and in the case of living societies this interplay takes the form of robbery” (105). For the purpose of our discussion, robbery could be an appropriate characterization of the nature of what Heidegger calls *Weltbilden* and it is through the act of robbery that the human dwells in an environment that is already full of other living societies. What distinguishes the difference of the manner in which the animal robs other living societies that compose its environment for food and the manner in which the human, in turn, robs all the environments that constitute its world is that, for Whitehead, in the case of higher organization of living societies, the robber requires justification, that is, the basis for the *animal rationale* is already an expression of morality that determines the manner in which all things eat and are eaten. For example, as an aside, what both Nietzsche and Rilke each define as “the monstrous animalization of man,” according to nineteenth-century biologism, or what Agamben proposes as “bare life,” are essentially manners of doing justice to the act robbery itself, that is to say, of rationalizing the principle of biopolitical right even in a critical or negative sense of *thanapolitics*.

However, an equally pressing problem concerns us, which is the following: if the relationship between living societies, or between a living society and its environment which is composed of organic and inorganic societies, is only mediated by this violent interplay of theft and counter-theft, then does the restriction or repression of this violence actually result in a loss of relation between a living society

and its environment? Employing Whitehead's own term, all living societies need "food" (in the form of new and original intensities) and this food means nothing less than the destruction of other societies. Would then the restraint or curtailment of eating result in a weakened and anorexic organism? If robbery is the only means of my relation to the environment, basically to the other societies that comprise my milieu, would this not constitute a loss of relationship with the environment? This further clarifies the phrase "life is robbery," meaning that life is robbery and nothing else besides. There is no neutral being called life, which then is defined as having the predicate of robbery. There can be no life without robbery, and where there is no robbery, there is no life. Again, we must stress that Whitehead appears to be implying that life itself never belongs to any particular living society—another sense of its asocial nature—but only appears in the interstices between societies. It is always outside. This would mean that I am living only to the degree that I am related to this outside, open to it, and that it is through this empty space that life appears and reappears establishing my connection to the environment.

According to Whitehead, life itself functions as a catalyst of the relationship between a living society and its environment even though this catalyst is a kind of robbery. It is only by robbing other societies that I live; even more, it is only by the act of robbery that one living society is actually related to another. In a certain sense, if I wasn't robbing another living society or being robbed by another, I wouldn't have any basis for a knowledge of that society (*conatus*). This truism will have important implications for science (the knowledge of the world), on the one hand, and theology (the knowledge of God) on the other. One could go so far to say that science would not have any predisposition to explore the environment composed of organic and non-organic societies, if this relationship was not already established by the act of robbing them for their food, or in turn, being robbed. Here again, to quote Whitehead, "The robber requires justification!" (Whitehead 105). Recalling our earlier example of an offended society who seeks to rob the robber of his intensity, the same principle can be found to operate in the drive to cure cancer or any number of human diseases—as if to capture the intensity or vivid immediacy that belongs to the living society composed of cancerous cells, or of a virus. In doing so, in finding a cure or an inoculation, does science reduce the virus to the status of food? Yes, but only to the degree that knowledge is also a kind of food, that is, knowing how to destroy or separate a particular living society from its power (*potentia*); in turn, this becomes the power of a particular living society over others that comprise its environment in the order of a hierarchy.

If in other circumstances this attribute does not appear, first of all, as a positive characteristic, but rather as something essentially negative and improper (as an intruder or a dangerous predator), perhaps this expresses its position in relation to

the consciousness of our living society. Does this imply that the human society perceives life as not part of its own society, but a shadowy figure lurking in the interstices, as if viewing life from a perspective that is not-life, as death for example? Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as death, only robbery. What is death but the event where life robs a particular living society of its own intensity which reduces it to the status of food? Rather, what this improper character reveals is the perception of a supreme apathy; life is in-human, not for us, but for itself. It is essentially indifferent—perhaps even supremely indifferent—with regard to this or that living society. It is this indifference, moreover, wrongly depicted as cruelty or as malign evil, that reveals our reaction of terror in the face of life (fundamentally a stranger) and which makes us fear it absolutely. Death, the absolute master? Not at all. And yet, it does no good to correct this misnomer simply by substituting the name of Life either. To conclude, therefore, I will simply recall the fragment by Heraclitus that Lacan once used to demonstrate the dialectical relationship between these two terms which often leads to the same confusion between life and death: “To the bow is given the name of Life (βίος) and its work is Death (θάνατος)” (Lacan 177).

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困乏的動物：阿岡本、海德格、懷海德

摘要

本論文檢視海德格哲學中的「動物」與「動物性」概念，藉此回應現今動物研究與後人類主義中正在進行的若干爭論，同時也回應海德格《黑色筆記》所透露的涵義，亦即此系列筆記中對德國人和歐洲猶太人相互關係的思考，呼應了關於動物「在世困乏存有」的早期論述。本文歸結於懷海德哲學中「生命本身」的視角，尤以懷海德眾所皆知的主張「生命就是掠奪」為核心。

關鍵字：阿岡本、海德格、懷海德、動物（研究）、動物（指稱「在世困乏存有」）