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The Melancholic Animal — On Depression and Animality

Why do we suffer? In "Mourning and Melancholia," Sigmund Freud wonders what the use of grief and melancholy is, and sets out to understand the meaning of these experiences. He begins by distinguishing melancholy from mourning. Both phenomena share certain characteristics: a feeling of dejection, loss of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, slowing down of activities. In melancholy a loss of self-esteem is added to this picture, as well as an expectation of punishment. The mourning individual has a clear reason for experiencing aforementioned feelings, usually the loss of a loved one, an object, or an idea. She needs to move through a process of mourning, a fixed time period in which the world is empty, in order to be able to enter that world, love, and open up again. Mourning is thus a normal process — even if Freud questions why we should feel pain when we lose someone or something — connected to life's structure. Melancholy is a pathology: instead of the loss of an external object, one experiences a loss of ego, leading to a death drive. Freud thinks that an actual loss lies at the basis of both melancholy and mourning. However, in the process of mourning one severs the ties with the lost object, while in melancholy one identifies with the loss and internalizes it, which is a narcissistic movement (Kristeva).

Freud approached melancholy as pathology of the mind and investigated its workings and meaning in his individual patients. He recognized the physiological components of the condition, such as a loss of appetite or sleep, but explained these as stemming from mental processes, or more specifically: as psychological responses to earlier events in life.

Depression, as we now call what Freud named melancholy, is still considered to be a mental phenomenon. While its exact cause is unknown, it is assumed that it is caused by a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors. Genes and childhood experiences, together with stressful life events, might trigger depressive episodes. Depression is seen as an illness that should be treated with therapy based on dialogue, and/or antidepressant medication. Discourses of healing, in the western world, often focus mainly on medical solutions. They are aimed at a specific type of neoliberal human individual and rely on a problematic dichotomy between body and mind. This approach to depression and healing neglects the cultural, social, and political processes

contributing to depression, as well as the other subjects affected — human and nonhuman.

In this essay I set out on a different road in understanding depression, by focusing on the cultural and historical structures of this phenomenon, in which I pay specific attention to interconnections with animality. The experience of depression fundamentally challenges common western ideas about what it means to be human. When experiencing depression, Cartesian distinctions between body and mind prove to be untenable, and existing notions of rationality, autonomy, and agency, often seen as defining characteristics of humans, are challenged. Zooming out to the level of culture, we find that like madness more generally, melancholy and depression are historically shaped constructions. These constructions are related in manifold ways to the construction of the concept of animality. Focusing on these connections is helpful for rethinking depression in the human case, and for better understanding nonhuman animal depression. Other animals are often neglected in studies of depression, even though they may suffer from it, too. Furthermore, human and animal depressions are often related, symbolically and in different practices. Examining the psycho-geographical dimensions of depression in connection to animality can contribute to a different discourse, which is more inclusive and brings to light the social and political factors involved.

1. Experiencing depression. Phenomenologically, depression is characterized by a disturbance of the experience of the world, relations with others, time, and oneself. Medical ethicist Kevin Aho argues that in order to understand depression we cannot rely solely on a medical discourse that treats this condition as a chemical problem; in order to grasp its meaning, we need to also listen to the stories of those experiencing depression. Drawing on many first person narratives, he distinguishes three defining characteristics of depression. The first is a disruption of spatial orientation and motility, in which the depressed person literally finds it hard to move and perform basic tasks, which leads to a collapse of life-world. The second is a state of emotional indifference that reduces one's ability to care about things and is, similar to what Freud described, not directed at a specific object but at the world as a whole. The third characteristic of depression is that it diminishes possibilities for self-creation, because it restricts the subject to the identity of a depressed person, instead of as someone capable of developing and interpreting herself in other ways in the world. In these three ways depression challenges some of the key features of humanism, such as agency, autonomy, and rationality.

Depression often paralyzes the subject, making it impossible to participate in daily activities, which obstructs one's agency. Even if one is still physically capable of acting, the emotional and cognitive dimensions of existence are emptied of meaning and sense. Depression for these reasons cuts one off from functioning in a world one once took for granted. In this experience, body and mind cannot be separated: bad thoughts and feelings are primordial and the lack of mental freedom is interconnected with a lack of physical freedom. This may lead to a loss of autonomy. The same applies to rationality: the depressed person cannot trust her own thoughts, because they are muddy and negative, and cannot be corrected by reason. Interconnected with this is the fact that the depressed person cannot trust her feelings, because they work against her. Depressed thoughts and feelings of worthlessness mutually reinforce each other.

To conceptualize this further, it is helpful to turn to the work of Merleau-Ponty, according to whom body-mind dualism is untenable. Our mental states are always embodied, he argues, and we think and perceive with our bodies. This does not mean he denies the existence of the mental or reduces everything to matter; rather, the use of our mind cannot be separated from our situated, physical being in the world. Bodies are not objects that our minds control. Depression shows us this very clearly. Thoughts affect not only the depressed person's mood, but can also literally affect her capacity to move, and in turn one's mood and physical disposition affects the thoughts that are thought, and so on.

According to Merleau-Ponty, humans share this embodied existence with other animals. While it is commonly accepted that nonhuman animals feel joy and suffer, it was long thought that they are not capable of suffering from depression because they lack the necessary sophisticated cognitive and emotional capacities. Recent studies in the fields of animal cognition, emotion, and cultures (Bekoff, *Minding Animals*; Smuts) challenge this view of animal minds and moods, and show that differences between humans and other animals are of degree and not kind. This raises the question of whether or not they suffer from depression, too, and how humans can find out. In order to conceptualize depression in humans, Aho focuses on first person narratives that rely on human language. The fact that other animals usually do not speak in human language makes this type of research into their minds and moods impossible. Humans can however witness their behaviors and despair, and in certain instances compare these to humans'.

Nonhuman animal depression. Recent years have seen an increase in the study of nonhuman animal emotions and minds (Bekoff, *Minding Animals*), but depression in

nonhuman animals has not been studied much. Certain symptoms of depression, however, have been studied, and we know that chronic anxiety, aggressiveness, sleep problems, helplessness, and lethargy are found in a wide range of species (see Peña-Guzmán for an overview). Many nonhuman animals suffer from conditions that can be compared to human psychiatric disorders, such as post-traumatic stress syndrome, eating disorders, or certain personality disorders, such as borderline personality disorder (*ibid.;* see also Braitman). Nonhuman animal mental disorders are often treated with drugs intended for human use; companion animals and captive animals that suffer from anxiety or depression are, for example, treated in the US with human antidepressants like Prozac. The fact that these are effective is taken as proof of the animal subjects' depression. Many nonhuman animals display behaviors that are self-injurious and self-destructive.

In a discussion of nonhuman animal suicide, David M. Peña-Guzmán argues that differences between human and nonhuman animal suicide should be understood along a continuum. Self-reflexive behavior is found not only in humans, he argues, but also in other animals, and is not an all or nothing case in humans, either. Different nonhuman animals have different types and degrees of subjective self-awareness, the breadth of which we often do not yet know. We do know that a great deal of empirical research supports this idea of continuity in animal capacities, in many fields, ranging from culture to language (Meijer, *Political Animal Voices*, chapter 2). Furthermore, ideas of rationality, self-consciousness, and free will in humans are also disputed, for different reasons. Peña-Guzmán points out, for example, that suicide is not only committed by reflexive subjects: young children have committed suicide, as well as humans who are considered to be non-rational. A notion commonly associated with suicide is free will, but on the one hand, it is unclear whether we can speak of free will in the case of humans, and on the other hand, we know that other animals do plan ahead and make informed decisions, and have agency in shaping their own lives. Awareness of death, another factor that is also often mentioned in discussions about nonhuman animal suicide, is not needed to be able to commit suicide — the example of children and non-rational humans illustrates this point also — and for humans death ultimately remains a mystery as well. In this context it should not be forgotten that death plays a central role in the lives of many animals (Meijer, "The Good Life"). They lose their loved ones and can feel grief, which can be so strong they die from it (King). Many nonhuman animals have mourning rituals surrounding death. All these factors also play a role in conceptualizing nonhuman animal depression, even though it might not entail the same level of cognition and awareness, for example, regarding the capacity to plan ahead or desire death.

So, while we do not have the type of first-person narratives Aho relies on to understand nonhuman animal depression, there seems to be overlap in the conditions of depressed human and nonhuman animals. Salmon in intensive farming, for example, show the disruption of spatial orientation and motility Aho mentions — they often just float listlessly — and show no interest in others, which could be related to emotional indifference (Vindas et al.). Aho also mentions a loss of possibilities of self-creation, because depression restricts one to the identity of a depressed person, instead of as someone capable of developing and interpreting herself in other ways in the world. For nonhuman animals, depression has been studied mostly in captivity, a situation in which these animals cannot manifest themselves in the world anyway. This loss of worldliness and the boredom stemming from their captivity seems to play a large role in their depressions (Braitman; Peña-Guzmán).

Further, investigating nonhuman animal depression can help us get a better grasp on the phenomenon for humans and other animals. It can also help humans to understand better the behavior of other animals, which is important in building better relations. It is morally relevant to know that other animals suffer from depression, too. The experience of depression borders on the unbearable, as many humans can testify. Knowing that other animals may suffer from similar conditions shows us that their situation, for example, in intensive farming or laboratories, might even be worse than thought before, which should have consequences for how humans treat them.

Studying animal depression is not simply a matter of doing more biological research. As mentioned above, in western societies depression is usually approached as a medical problem. Therapy and pills are seen as the solution for chemical imbalances leading to depression, and for those who stay ill, or who suffer from recurring episodes, there is always the option of hospitalization. This does not take into account the full meaning of depression, and for many humans, for example from non-western cultures, this approach simply does not work (Cvetkovich). The reason for this is that specific view of the individual — as a rational, individualistic, autonomous agent — is taken as the standard to which all deviating humans are measured. This image of the human is presented as biological or natural, as a universal truth. Ideas about madness and sanity are, however, cultural constructions, formed by power relations that value certain subjects more than others, and that often exclude nonhuman animals, which becomes clear when we consider their history.

2. Melancholy and animality. A swing consists of a bed or chair that is tied to the ceiling and operated mechanically. A melancholic person is tied to this bed or chair in a straightjacket and turned in an oscillatory or circular manner at varying tempos. If this leads to mania, the tempo is too fast, or an intermittent tempo should be chosen. According to Mason Cox, who developed this swing as a treatment for mental illness in the 17th century, it was very successful in treating melancholy (Foucault). Other accepted ways of treating melancholy around that time were music, dance, and plays (Burton), work, and inciting fear (Foucault). There was no strict line between medicine and art, nor between melancholy and reason. Melancholy was even fashionable for a while, during the later 16th and early 17th centuries in England, and features prominently in the literature, music, and art of that time. Melancholy and other forms of madness were not seen as anomalies that should be erased; they were viewed as elements of human experience, and the experience of madness was seen as disclosing something about the whole of life.

Views of melancholy and madness have changed significantly throughout history. In the Middle Ages, for example, it was thought that demons played an important role in causing melancholy. From ancient times to the 19th century it was thought that melancholic humans suffered from an overabundance of black bile. This idea was based on the four humours of Hippocratic medicine — black bile, yellow bile, blood and phlegm — which needed to be balanced for someone to function well.

In *The History of Madness*, Michel Foucault discusses several of these views. He focuses on the changes in the western perception of madness from pre-modern to modern time, showing how our current conception of madness as a psychological category came into being. He does so not by narrating the history of psychology, but by telling the story of the other side, the mad people, the ones who have been silenced. By focusing on practices and tools that were used to treat, mark out, or label mad people, he investigates the construction of the modern conception of reason. This archeology of madness not only sheds light on the construction of "mad" and "sane," it also sheds light on how our view of the human came into being. The concept madness helped create the image we have of reason and rationality. It functioned as a negative to create the positive image of the human as a rational agent.

This image of the human has been challenged from the perspective of different fields of study such as feminism (Adams, *Sexual Politics*), poststructuralism (Derrida, *The Animal*), Black Studies (Ko and Ko), and disability studies (Taylor). Nonhuman animals often function as the ultimate other in western thought and practices (Derrida, *op. cit*;

Meijer, *Political Animal*), and human groups that deviated from the Enlightenment subject were often compared to nonhuman animals. In Beasts of Burden, Sunaura Taylor shows, for example, how notions of disability and animality are thoroughly intertwined, leading to similar treatments.[1] Disabled humans are animalized, and ableism affects not only humans, but also other animals. Both conceptually and in many practices, the oppressions are interlinked. Disabled humans are, for example, seen as animals and compared to them in language. Other animals develop disabilities through human breeding programs; this applies to companion animals as well as to farmed animals in industrialized farming practices. These disabilities are not just physical; many nonhuman animals suffer from severe psychological problems. Similar to disability and animality, the concepts madness and animality are interconnected in many ways.

Animality and Foucault's genealogy of madness. In his genealogy of madness, Foucault repeatedly uses the concept animality. It is the only place in his work where he does so, and he uses it in order to explicate and problematize madness, not animality. Similar to madness, Foucault sees animality as a cultural construction, which changes meaning in different times. The concept does have some fixed components: it is always characterized by *déraison* and overflowing emotion, as well as a raging, a wildness, a strength (Palmer). But these aspects of animality were interpreted differently in different times.

In the Renaissance, animality functioned as a figurative or symbolic portrayal of a dark and threatening, yet illuminating, element of the cosmos or human nature. It was part of the order of things and not the opposite of the human. It was also not something to eliminate from one's existence, but a part of it.

This changed in the classical age, where it was increasingly seen as a "zero point" of human nature (Palmer 77). Animality became what is left when humanity is stripped of reason. During this time, mad people were literally treated as nonhuman animals, in different practices. In the 18th century, there were, for example, displays of the mad based on menageries, where parents brought their children as a warning (79). Mad people were also confined in cages, starved, and beaten, and even used as beasts of burden on farms, where whips were used to make them work faster. Similar to that of other animals, their bodily integrity was not recognized. "Crazy" women have throughout history been sterilized without consent (Krase). Lobotomies and other practices that worked on the body, such as electroshock therapy, were also used, often without consent. These patients were seen mainly as bodies, just like other animals.

Foucault emphasizes that his history of madness is a history of those who were silent, or rather silenced. This silence, of course, reminds us of other animals in the ways they are silenced in discourse and practices, treated as mute, in the ways their languages are seen as unintelligible because they are different from human language, and in the ways they are portrayed (Meijer, *Political Animal*).

This process led to the modern view in which both mad people and animals are seen as irrational, and in which the concepts madness and animality both become opposites of rationality (Derrida, "Cogito"; Palmer). While Foucault questions the opposition between reason and madness, he never challenges the split between reason and animality, nor does he consider the possibility that there is overlap between these concepts (Palmer). This is problematic, because even within this construction of reason there are rational animals like nonhuman primates, dolphins, and others,[2] and there are different discourses of rationality, such as certain nonwestern views, of which animality is a part.

In modern science, the disciplining of the bodies of mad people that occured, for example, when humans were locked up in cages or made to work, transforms into a disciplining of the mind. The methods changed, but mad subjects are still molded into a certain type of being. Here we also find similarities to the treatment of nonhuman animals; the contemporary mad subject is perhaps most similar to the domesticated animal, who needs caretakers in the form of doctors (Derby).[3]

This very brief discussion of the interconnections between madness and animality shows the birth of a cultural view in which a certain conception of the proper, healthy human individual becomes dominant. This view is solidified in many different ways, such as in the DSM, Freud's ideas of the psyche, the large-scale use of anti-depressants in the west, and in cultural expressions of madness, depression, and sanity. This way of conceptualizing madness and subsequently of depression not only has consequences for human subjects, it also affirms a view of nonhuman animals as animal, implying they are not rational, and not even subjects in the proper sense of the term. Furthermore, Foucault shows that hospitals, clinics, techniques, policies, and politics do not simply focus on individuals, but also target social groups, such as the poor. Behind our view of madness lies a (contingent) system of larger political and legal structures that form and inform our conception of the "right" subjectivity. In the case of depression, as with the other forms of madness, these cultural frameworks shape the interpretation of the feelings we experience and the conditions for living through and with it.

3. The cultural dimensions of depression. A 2013 study showed that Afghanistan has the highest rate of clinical depression worldwide, followed by other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (Ferrari et al.). Studies also show that humans from marginalized social groups within countries, such as for example Black women in the UK (Ferguson) or transgender teenagers in de US (Reisner et al.), suffer from higher rates of depression than humans from dominant groups. Social-cultural patterns, such as racism, colonialism, neo-liberalism, speciecism, and ableism, favor some individuals over others. This may lead members of marginalized groups to internalize the idea they are worth less, and creates material realities which are more difficult to cope with, such as a lack of access to healthcare, education, access to public spaces, contraception, good food, or general poverty. Different generations can pass these feelings on, all the way down to the level of genes. Children from Holocaust survivors or refugees are for example often at higher risk for depression, not just because of their parents' behavior in their childhood, but also because of their genetic make-up (Cvetkovich).

In *Depression, A Public Feeling*, Ann Cvetkovich examines the processes that lead to depression in the US, such as the heritage of colonialism and slavery. She argues that the current fixation on the individual and the framing of the problem in medical terms obscures the cultural processes that make large groups of humans ill. Dissatisfied with the narratives around depression by middle class white people, she aims to develop a different narrative, tied to her own experiences in the queer feminist community, which is sensitive to other social groups. She does so by writing a memoir of her own experiences with depression, which is connected to the pressures of working as a young academic, and by looking at literature that makes visible the patterns that depress certain groups, such as Black people.

Cvetkovich does not discuss nonhuman animal depression, or the role of large-scale nonhuman animal exploitation in human depression. This is surprising, because the treatment of nonhuman animals can be regarded as one of the most violent aspects of societies worldwide (Adams, *Sexual Politics*). As we saw above, humans are not the only ones to suffer from depression. Nonhuman animals in zoos, farmed animals such as pigs, chickens, cows, and fishes (Vindas et al.), and laboratory animals are known to suffer from boredom (Bovenkerk and Driessen), which often leads to depression (Braitman) and may lead them to commit suicide (Peña-Guzman).

Furthermore, not only do humans share the experience of depression with other animals, humans and other animals may also suffer from depression because of the same underlying social-political causes. Examples of interconnections include the

colonization of the land of indigenous groups of humans and animals which breaks up social groups and force them to move, PTSD in slaughterhouse workers (McWilliams), compassion fatigue in human animal activists (Adams, "Traumatic Knowledge"), and the suffering of humans and other animals in war zones. Similar to human trauma, animal trauma is also moved on from one generation to another. Feral and stray dogs, for example, have different responses to humans based on the historical treatment of their community (De Lavigne) and a period of hunting causes animals to fear humans for generations (Bekoff, "Stalking").

Similar to colonialism or capitalism, human exploitation of other animals based on speciesism is a fundamental aspect of the structure of our society that influences all living beings, either directly or indirectly. A complete psycho-geographical account of depression demands a mapping of all structures of oppression, and their connections. Relations with nonhuman animals should also be taken into account. This asks for a new approach to depression, which is not only sensitive to other cultures, but also to species.

To begin to explore this, I will now discuss an example of a situation in which nonhuman and human animal suffering, and to some degree depression, is intertwined: the animal advocacy movement.

Animal suffering and advocacy. Humans who care for other animals in shelters, sanctuaries, or as veterinarians,[4] who advocate for them, or who in other ways devote their time to improving their situation, run the risk of developing compassion fatigue.[5] They might collapse under the weight of their knowledge of how other animals are treated, and how bad the situation is for billions of them. Carol Adams calls this painful knowledge about the fate of the other animals "traumatic knowledge." This type of knowledge makes one feel the suffering of other animals and intensifies the emotional connection to them, causing dissonance, disturbance, and disjunction, and poses a major challenge to individuals experiencing it. This affects not just individuals but also the movement as a whole, both in its goals and in its effectiveness.

The animal movement has a strong focus on ending animal suffering, which often connects to an abolitionist view of interspecies relations. It is argued that because relations with other animals are necessarily oppressive, the proof of which is in the oppression occurring today, we should aim for abolishing relations with them. This abolitionist approach is by some thought to stand in the way of imagining new futures and new relations with other animals. Donaldson and Kymlicka, for example, argue

that the strong focus on negative rights for other animals is understandable, given the situation that they are in, but that we also need to conceptualize new relations with them. This is a conceptual necessity, because taking other animals seriously as individuals with a perspective on common matters involves rethinking relations. It also has value for advocacy. Arguing for abolishing all relations with other animals hinders the movement because it estranges certain humans from it, who want a better life for other animals but who do not want to end all relations with them.

Actual human melancholy, or depression, because of large-scale animal suffering also hinders the movement. At the core of this melancholy lies not just the fact that other animals suffer, but also the knowledge that they most probably will continue to do so, at least in the foreseeable future. This affects those advocating for animals, sometimes leading them to cease their work for the animals. Many other humans also simply cannot cope with animal pain and suffering, or fear they cannot cope, which leads them to look the other way when they are confronted with it, instead of changing their habits (Adams, "Traumatic Knowledge"). They might feel that their acts do not matter anyway, which may lead to cognitive dissonance or moral lethargy (Aaltola).

In this example the suffering, and in certain instances depressions, of nonhuman animals and human animals are interrelated, not just on the level of individuals, but also on the level of social groups, such as farmed animals and humans working for and with other animals. Challenging oppressive structures, as done by animal advocates, could perhaps be seen as contributing to a collective healing process.

4. Conclusion: interspecies healing and the politics of care. The experience of depression is for humans characterized by a disturbance of one's relation to the world, relations with others, time and oneself (Aho). A historical and cultural analysis of depression shows that this experience is influenced by larger scale cultural, social and political structures. To answer Freud's question — why do we suffer? — and to adequately treat depression, these factors also need to be taken seriously. This demands that we investigate further forms of depression in different groups and the connections between these, as well as for conceptualizing alternatives beyond pills and therapy. Antidepressants might be of great value for individual humans, companion animals, zoo animals, and others, but they only treat symptoms and not the holes in the underlying fabric of society.

Changing the societal patterns and structures that co-create depression requires political and social reform. This will not heal all individuals; depression is

interconnected with life's ontological structure of absurdity and loss. But for marginalized groups, it would improve life. While a better world seems to be far away, especially with regard to the exploitation of nonhuman animals, there are already many practices that counter suffering and focus on creating new worlds with others. By way of a conclusion I will first discuss some examples of interspecies healing practices, and then conceptualize interspecies relations in sanctuaries as a politics of care.

Interspecies healing practices. Therapy in the form of talking, medication, behavioral therapy, or hospitalization can be valuable — and getting to know oneself is good for everyone. There is beauty in the idea of dialogue as healing and that in speaking to a therapist you can rebuild yourself, by re-examining your history and present. For humans suffering from chronic depression, however, it is not possible to heal once and for all; one rather has to learn to live with recurring episodes. For those suffering from depression, Cvetkovich offers practical advice: keep moving and help others. Moving is here meant literally: exercise can be one of the few things that can get one through the day, and can help prevent depression in some humans. Helping others shifts the focus from locating value in one's own existence, something that is lacking in the depressed person, to acknowledging the value of others. It also connects the depressed person, who usually feels isolated from others, the world and her own projects, to her surroundings.

Living with depression asks for a stoic attitude — to accept what is given and learn to sometimes ignore what you feel, in favor of keeping going. Above, I discussed Merleau-Ponty's views on the body as the center of lived experience and as completely interconnected with the mind. This view is not only adequate for understanding the entanglement of body and mind in depression, it is also helpful in conceptualizing moving through it. Setting the body in motion is not always possible, either because the depression is paralyzing or because one is not capable of moving physically, but walking, swimming, or running is helpful for many. It makes the body/mind feel better, and when one goes outside for walking or running, the world helps. Nature shows us the world is bigger than we are and carries us, and that we are animal bodies, simply moving through time. Developing a walking or running routine is also helpful: the body learns these habits as part of life (Merleau-Ponty), which will help one to keep going when things are tough.

Many depressed humans feel unconnected to others, yet they are often also more dependent on care, either from healthcare professionals or people close to them. Dependency in western societies is often seen as a sign of weakness. This does not

recognize that we are dependent on others at different points in our lives, and it obscures the full potential of these relations. We are always already entangled in relations, not just with members of our own, but also with members of other species (Gruen). Many depressed humans report experiencing help from their companion animals (Bekoff, "Companion Animals"), which challenges the species hierarchy: now the companion animal takes care of the human. Depression is an extreme state, but many non-depressed humans also receive this kind of support from their companion animals, leading some thinkers to wonder whether perhaps all companion animals are in some sense emotional support animals (Driessen). But maybe they are simply friends, who sometimes help out, and whom you help at other points.

There are different interspecies healing practices that combine keeping moving and helping others. One example is found in households, where taking care of adopted companion dogs and taking long daily walks with them can help humans and dogs.[6] Volunteering in animal shelters can in certain cases also be seen as an interspecies healing practice. A good example is the Amsterdam Stray Cat Foundation, where humans with different neuro-atypical conditions, who have trouble fitting in in human society, take care of Amsterdam's feral cats and vice versa (see Meijer, forthcoming), co-creating ecologies of care through the city. The nonhuman animals in both of these examples may of course also suffer from depression or PTSD and benefit from the relationships for the same reasons as the humans.

Caring for others as a political act. Caring for others is an act of resistance in a world that does not value their lives.[7] Care is not simply intuitive or emotional, something following from fuzzy warm feelings: it is a moral attitude, one we should cultivate, which requires continuous attention (Gruen). This moral attitude can also offer a different perspective on social and political relations.

Care ethics takes (unequal) relations, such as those between mother and child, as the starting point for ethical behavior. Instead of following rules, maximizing happiness, or perfecting one's character, the focus is not on the self but on the other (Held). The strong focus on reason and the individual in other ethical theories is also challenged, and care ethicists emphasize that human — and as ecofeminists (Adams, *Sexual Politics*; "Traumatic Knowledge"; Gruen) argue, also nonhuman — animals are always born into relations. Judgments are not universal but always tied to a context, since individuals are always situated.

Different aspects of the care ethical model can function as a starting point for a political model of care. Instead of conceptualizing politics as the struggle between atomistic individuals with competing interests, or the process in which rational arguments lead to universal claims, relationships of care towards other social groups or communities, such as for example domesticated animals, or homeless humans, can be brought to the front. Universal justice is not the focus here, because political and social relations are always formed in specific contexts in which judgments can be improved but will never be universal, but a striving for a more just world in given circumstances.[8]

A good example of a politics of care is found in animal sanctuaries (Meijer, "Sanctuary Politics" 2). Historically, sanctuaries are seen as apolitical spaces, which provide safety and refuge. In this model, those seeking sanctuary are often seen as outsiders or guests, in contrast to citizens, and connections between sanctuaries and democratic institutions or political practices are not often made. This runs the risk of reproducing exclusions and hierarchies of power, as well as legitimizing injustices, because the underlying power structures and the institutional mechanisms from which the exclusion follows are not challenged. New sanctuary practices challenge this, offering a more political model of sanctuary, focusing on political agency, political resistance, and redefining the demos. This movement is most clear in the human case, but explorations toward a more political model of sanctuaries, as sites-of-citizenship, are also found in relation to animal sanctuaries (Donaldson and Kymlicka, "Co-Citizens"). There are many different types of nonhuman animal sanctuaries that engage in different kinds of activities; for example, they provide permanent housing and care for formerly exploited farmed animals, take care of stray cats living in urban areas, or rehabilitate and release wild animals.

Different types of sanctuaries have in common that they focus on care and relations with groups of "others," who often suffer from forms of violence because they are not part of the demos. They sometimes practice civil disobedience, and sanctuaries generally challenge the powers that be, making space for those who are not seen to belong here, and providing them with a place to recover from their traumas. Their care extends beyond helping individuals: they also form a critique of violent structures in our societies that make humans and other animals ill, and show alternatives. In order to counter oppressive structures it is needed to imagine new futures, with other animals.

Notes

1. In order to co-conceptualize different forms of oppression, Claire Jean Kim offers a multi-optic view. She argues that we need different lenses to be able to see different

kinds of oppressions clearly, and that these cannot be reduced to one primary form of oppression. Racism for example does not trump speciesism, different oppressions often are primordial and follow their own genealogy. In order to challenge them we need to regard them in their own context and not reduce one to the other. Explicating interconnections is useful and often necessary for understanding these different oppressions, and conceptualizing the road to a better future.

2. With these examples I refer to nonhuman animals who are seen as rational according to existing standards of rationality. This is a flawed view, in my opinion, because different nonhuman animals have different ways of navigating the world and their own forms of intelligence, and expressing this (see Meijer, *Political Animal*), but the point is that even if we accept current notions of rationality we cannot exclude all nonhuman animals.

3. An interesting parallel is found in Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka's comparison of certain animal sanctuaries and "total institutions" ("Farmed Animal").

4. Veterinary surgeons in the US have a 1.5 times higher chance to suffer from depression than the general population and are three times more likely to have suicidal thoughts (Kelly). Female vets are 3.5 times more likely to die from suicide than other members of the US population (Tomasi et al.).

5. Other animals may also internalize human grief; support dogs for veterans with PTSD for example sometimes develop secondary PTSD.

6. Smuts discusses how living with her adopted companion Safi changed both their lives and how mutual habits come into being; in "Stray Philosophy" I discuss how a Romanian stray dog and a human learn to live together. These kinds of relationships form a good basis for healing.

7. Care can both be a form of political resistance, when you care for those who are not seen as worth caring about, and a form of ontological resistance, to the fact that everything will perish and disappear.

8. The Dutch Party for the Animals is also an example of this. They practice a new form of politics, based on care and solidarity instead of on competing interests and economic growth. Interestingly, they are growing fast; they now have five seats in parliament, are

well represented in city councils and provinces, and are highly visible in debates and media.

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