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# Revising Posthumanist Aesthetics in the Ethical Treatment of Nonhuman Animals

The diversity and fervor of posthumanist theories in academic discourse over the past decade is indicative of the compelling concern for the nonhuman in our global ecological frame. Many of these works interrogate the anthropocentric biases that ground most discussions of politics, ethics, and ontology, in order to destabilize and de-hierarchize the privileged place of the human.[1] A posthumanist approach to human-animal relations provides new tools through which to reflect on the constitutive nature of our humanist distinctions and procedures, and to account for them in ways that emphasize the value and specificity of nonhuman animal life. Such an approach opens new avenues through which to evaluate and reframe humanist notions of subjectivity, experience, and ethical relations, in ways that reflect new knowledge of — and increased concern for — nonhuman animals.

One of the leading posthumanist theorists of animal ethics, Cary Wolfe, advocates for a perspective that extends human moral responsibility across species boundaries to the nonhuman animal. Combining aspects of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, Wolfe argues that the current frameworks for the ethical treatment of animals are grounded in an arrogant and oppressive humanist perspective that privileges the human species, and those most like it, at the expense of all others. In other words, these frameworks are inadequate for "thinking about the ethics of *the question of the human as well as the nonhuman animal*" (*Animal Rites* 192; emphasis in original). Wolfe's project aspires towards the abrogation of speciesism, akin to the rejection of racial or gender prejudice (190). This essay, in the spirit of Wolfe's trans-species ethics, employs his posthumanist framework to identify an impediment within that framework to the practical application of his proposal. Wolfe's proposal, to engage the entire sensorium of human and nonhuman animals while simultaneously de-privileging human sight, fails to consider the deeply-seated human visual prejudices associated with human sight. (To clarify, my use of the word "sight" is consistent with Wolfe's use of the term, which includes the visual in general.) Wolfe's attempt to de-hierarchize human sight/visuality does not go far enough, and should incorporate an interrogation of human sight which discloses the significance of human visual biases. Specifically, I propose that there is a critical humanist fault unaccounted for by Wolfe,

the preference for the aesthetically pleasing, which impedes the possibility of realizing a more inclusive ethical framework regarding nonhuman animals.

Human aesthetic preference for non-human animals considered to be visually appealing continually does violence to those animal species considered "ugly," by excluding them from the public purview, and in turn, from the financial support required to keep many of these species from extinction. The aesthetic bias is grounded largely in a human-centric preference for those animals "most-like us" or those most appealing to human interests. This entrenched humanistic bias, which pervades our institutions and institutional practices such as zoos and wildlife funding, excludes certain "ugly" species from our moral responsibility. Inspired by a desire for a more inclusive ethical treatment of nonhuman animals, I propose here to identify the humanistic preference for aesthetically pleasing animals and the practical ethical implications of this bias for those that are excluded. I also argue that to obtain a more posthumanist ethical treatment of non-human animals we may need paradoxically to use our humanist biases against ourselves — at least temporarily. Lastly, through a posthumanist interpretation of Martin Heidegger's notion of care, I argue that we must highlight the human remainder in every posthumanist ethical project. To this end, I revise human aesthetic biases in terms of care.

**Crossing Species Boundaries with Wolfe's Posthumanist Ethics**. Central to most posthumanist projects is the axiom that "human ways of knowing and being in the world do not have privilege or priority over the myriad variety of ways that nonhuman entities … encounter and apprehend in the world" (Chiew 2). At the same time, the "post" of posthumanist theory, as stated by Neil Badmington, "does not (and, moreover, cannot) mark or make an absolute break from the legacy of humanism" (Badmington 21). Posthumanist thought is always infused with, and derived from, a history of humanist thought. This is why Wolfe (following Derrida) understands posthumanism as not a triumphant transcendence of human nature/embodiment, but rather, a call to attend to the human with "*greater* specificity, *greater* attention to its embodiment, embeddedness, and materiality, and how these in turn shape and are shaped by consciousness, mind and so on" (*What is Posthumanism?* 120). Similarly, Wolfe engages Derrida's notion of limitrophy, which concerns

> what sprouts or grows at the limit, around the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what *feeds the limit*, generates it, raises it, and complicates it … not to efface the limit, but to multiply its figures, to complicate, thicken,

delinearize, fold, and divide the line precisely by making it increase and multiply. ("The Animal" 398)

The goal is not to erase the difference between human and nonhuman animal, as this would be to disavow singularity and difference, but to embrace species differences as valid asynchronies of being. By complicating the limit we open the human to the nonhuman other, and engage in a Derridean autoimmunitary process, whereby the living being destroys its own protections to expose itself and be more hospitable to the other to come. We will return to the connection between the autoimmune and the opening of the human to the nonhuman later in the paper, but first we move to consider how common conceptions of the subject may perpetuate human speciesism.

The subject, as it has been understood most commonly in Western intellectual discourse and culture, is almost always already human. As such, Western intellectual discourse often remains shackled to an unacknowledged framework of human speciesism. An anthropocentric speciesism unchecked, according to Wolfe, "makes possible the systematic killing of many billions of animals a year for food, product testing, and research," while providing an overarching logic of domination (*Animal Rites* 8). Even with the advent of animal studies, the irony of many of these works is that they remain essentially humanist, effacing the species difference they have sought to respect (ibid.). Ethical rights codes for animals tend to be based first and foremost on human centrality, protecting animals only through an indirect relation to human ownership, interest, or likeness.

One of the theories Wolfe takes issue with is philosopher Luc Ferry's version of liberal democratic humanism. Wolfe argues that Ferry's narrow "contractarian" model of ethics limits animals to only partial forms of protection from harm. Instead of cruelty towards animals being a direct violation of animals' own right to avoid suffering or not to be objectified, such cruelty leads to the potential degradation of human dignity and sensibility, with little concern for the animal itself. For Ferry, animals have no rights, and only benefit from indirect duties humans may have towards them or on their behalf (akin to property), since they do not meet the necessary cognitive abilities (reason, language, etc.) to enter into an ethical contract. Like Ferry, Emmanuel Levinas — as understood by Wolfe — proposes that humans have ethical duties and responsibilities only to those who possess *logos* (language, reason). For Levinas, the human "can have direct responsibilities only toward beings that can speak," whereas "the Other has only to look at me. Indeed, what is expressed in his face may be expressed by his hand or the nape of his neck" (Levinas, qtd. in *Animal Rites* 61). In Wolfe's reading of Levinas, such a face-to-face relationship between two rational parties cannot include any nonhuman

animals, as they are deprived of language and reason, and are for all intents and purposes faceless.

Before moving forward, let me briefly digress to acknowledge the ambiguity of the nonhuman animal in Levinasian ethics that Wolfe may have failed to fully appreciate. Responding to an interviewer's question regarding human obligations towards nonhuman animals, Levinas notes, "It is clear that, without considering animals as human beings, the ethical extends to all living beings. We do not want to make an animal suffer needlessly and so on. But the prototype of this is human ethics" (Wright, Hughes, & Ainley 172). Levinas clearly does not exclude the nonhuman animal altogether from ethical concern. Furthermore, he admits that after the human face we can discover the face of the animal, even though he remains uncertain as to which animals may have a face: "The human face is completely different and only afterwards do we discover the face of an animal. I don't know if a snake has a face. I can't answer that question. A more specific analysis is needed" (ibid.). As others have argued, the Levinasian phenomenology of the face is best understood as a metaphor for the expression/exposure of the other, where the other always exceeds the capacity to be known and to be fully determined, thereby describing a relation that does not prescribe a human other (Atterton; Kendall; Sandry). The ethical encounter understood in this manner would likely lead one to agree with Matthew Calarco's assertion that, while Levinas himself may have been largely anthropocentric, the underlying logic of his philosophy is not (55). Although Wolfe may have glossed over Levinasian ethics too quickly to recognize its openness to the nonhuman animal, he is correct to take issue with Levinas himself, who frequently resorts to advancing his ethics in a way that begins with and ultimately prioritizes the human.

The lack of so-called human faculties (language, reason, cognition, thoughtful response, etc.) is a common thread found in many approaches to animal ethics.[2] Theorists such as Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Peter Singer, Tom Regan, and Stanley Cavell have relied heavily on ethical codes based on how similar (or dissimilar) the animal is to the human. Wolfe expresses his displeasure most vehemently when thinkers like Cavell care for the animal other "only insofar as it mirrors, in a diminished way, the human form that is the 'source' of recognizing animals as bodies that have sensations, feel pain, and so on" (*Animal Rites* 53). Moreover, any responsibilities to animals for Cavell, Singer, and Regan, are grounded in the humanist notion that they exhibit "in diminished form qualities, potentials, or abilities that are realized to their fullest in human beings" (53). For Wolfe, "the human makes way for the animal, but only by means of the human itself" (205), distinguishing non-human animals not on the basis of

their uniqueness and difference, but as simply inferior versions of our human selves. Wolfe's posthumanist approach to a more inclusive ethics begins with Derrida's reconceptualization of ethical foundations. Rather than attempting to "humanize" nonhuman animals by *giving* them a token form of human cognitive faculties, Wolfe follows Derrida, who instead urges us to rethink the absence of human-like faculties otherwise, as something other than a privation.

Instead of targeting the identifiable human-like characteristics of nonhuman animals, Derrida pursues Jeremy Bentham's question whether animals can suffer. Derrida appropriates Bentham's focus on the ability to suffer, as opposed to the ability to reason, as the benchmark for rights. Suffering is understood here as a type of vulnerability, passivity, inability, and overall non-power shared by humans and nonhuman animals. This lack of power, or not-being-able, elicits a trans-species compassion which awakens us "to our responsibilities and our obligations with respect to the living in general, and precisely to this fundamental compassion that, were we to take it seriously, would have to change even the very basis … of the philosophical problematic of the animal" (Derrida, qtd. in *What is Posthumanism?* 82). Derrida extends the ideas of vulnerability, passivity, inability, finitude, mortality, and non-power by linking their unavailability and inappropriability to the very thing which make them available to us — a second not-being-able — as Wolfe says: "our subjection to a radically ahuman technicity or mechanicity of language," which is itself not human at all (88). The human is always already radically other, never itself, always already ahuman/inhuman because of its prosthetic use of language. For Wolfe, language can no longer be said to separate the human from other living creatures, as it is a nonhuman or ahuman emergence from an evolutionary process of "social interaction and communication among animals including but not limited to *Homo sapiens*" (12). Wolfe's argument, owing much to Derrida, problematizes the question of who and what can count as a subject of ethical address, as well as the anthropocentrism of most theories of animal ethics, by extending a common ethical base that crosses species boundaries.

The importance of Derrida's approach to animals, for Wolfe, is its self-reflexive character and its incessant drive to question long-standing human exclusivity and privilege. Even though the critical study of nonhuman animals is meant to expose the various forms of derision, exploitation, and violence enacted on our fellow creatures, this does not mean that humanist/anthropocentric tendencies are not pervasive in it. Crucially, posthumanist animal studies should be recognized as perpetually imperfect projects that drive theorists and animal rights advocates to improve upon current iterations of ethical discourse on the nonhuman animal. As Wolfe reminds us, pluralist

discourses (those tending to promote inclusivity) often lack a certain critical character and tend to exhibit humanist tendencies:

> Indeed, one of the hallmarks of humanism … is its penchant for that kind of pluralism, in which the sphere of attention and consideration (intellectual or ethical) is broadened and extended to previously marginalized groups, but without in the least destabilizing or throwing into radical question the schema of the human who undertakes such pluralization. In that event, pluralism becomes *incorporation*, and the projects of humanism (intellectually) and liberalism (politically) are extended, and indeed extended in a rather classic sort of way. (99)

The humanist pluralism or liberalism that Wolfe takes issue with is one that — similar to an increased recognition of disabled persons in society — takes nonhuman animals as the latest marginalized group to have ethical and legal enfranchisement extended to them via a politics of recognition (136). Such a politics of recognition ultimately reinforces the normative model of subjectivity, which is essentially anthropocentric. The normalized liberal subject, holding rights and privileges, speciously extends validation or legitimation to those previously disenfranchised. It is a "kind of tokenism in which nonhumans who are 'racially' similar enough to us to achieve recognition are protected, while all around us a Holocaust … against our other fellow creatures rages on and indeed accelerates" (*Before the Law* 104). Providing full or partial rights are steps in the right direction in human relations with nonhuman animals, yet they still maintain a humanist/anthropocentric grounding that reproduces the kinds of normative subjectivity that provide a foundation for the discrimination against nonhuman animals in the first place. For Wolfe, Derrida's deconstruction and Luhmann's system's theory force us to rethink and re-contextualize our taken-for-granted human experiences and ways of knowing in new ways that recognize our anthropocentric bias, in hopes to create new meanings that are not exclusively human-centered.

The ability to reframe our experiences and knowledge in ways that are less human-centric is imperative for Wolfe's posthumanist thought. As such, Wolfe relies heavily on Luhmann's systems theory, which provides him, most notably, with a self-referential, self-modifying mechanism at work within the human system. The self-modifying mode of operation allows for an openness to the environment, and the possibility for re-evaluating internal representations of the environment within the human system. Luhmann's systems theory is based on the premise that each organism represents one of a plethora of systems that internalizes the outside of the system as a form of reduced

complexity. This involves selecting a limited amount of information from outside of the system and organizing representations of it in a way that allows for effective and efficient processing of meaning. The organism's internal system is able to create or modify existing internal representations when provided with new information. In Wolfe's reading of Luhmann, each system (like that of an individual organism) has a "fundamental and inescapable 'blindness'" which generates the necessity for "the other and the world, the 'outside' of the system" (*Animal Rites* 204). In order to more accurately and effectively represent the outside world, the system must constantly reassess and reframe its representations of the outside. These representations of the outside, however, are always made within the self-referential closure of the system. For Wolfe, Luhmann's systems theory articulates that "the 'there' of the outside emerges only as the outside of the inside, only by means of … [the] irreducible difference, [which] keeps open the alterity of the other and makes possible the ongoing question of the difference between … observation and what it excludes" (206). In other words, Luhmann's systems theory demonstrates that the relationship between a system and its environment is always mediated. As such, there remains an insurmountable alterity between the system and its environment, leaving open the possibility to amend previously held representations. For Wolfe, this open-endedness is an immense opportunity for changing how we see nonhuman animals. Wolfe also acknowledges Derrida's "to come," which is meant to convey the point that identity is a process that is never complete, requiring repetition, and always differing and deferring from one moment to the next towards a future that never arrives as such. The inexhaustibility of the outside of the system is, for Wolfe, a nod to Derrida's "to come," in which there is always an act of selection and exclusion when describing an entity or concept, and thus always a "not yet" or incompleteness which supplies the opportunity to re-conceptualize knowledge and opinion in the future. In the context of systems theory and Wolfe's posthumanist approach, this means re-interpreting humanist conceptions in ways that will allow for the development of more inclusive and ethical relationships with nonhuman animals in the future.

Wolfe's posthumanist approach to the nonhuman animal is predicated on the possibility of humans recognizing and changing previously held human-centric representations of the nonhuman animal. In doing so, Wolfe takes aim at what he considers to be the dominance of human sight and the visual for apprehending the nonhuman animal other, in hopes that we may be able to change visual representations and our anthropocentric gaze towards nonhuman animals. In particular, Wolfe problematizes the relationship between the visual and its intimate connection to human reason, ability and mastery, in order to disassociate the visual from these humanist qualities. To anticipate, this leads him to take issue with ethical approaches which

merely aim to extend rights to nonhuman animals because they are "like us humans," to instead articulate a posthumanist ethics which will not discriminate based on how similar (visually or otherwise) an animal species is to the human.

Employing a posthumanist approach to ethics involves reiterating an important disclaimer: that surpassing or transcending the human (or the human system, if you will) may not be entirely possible, but re-evaluating the human system will provide the opportunity for a more inclusive ethical code. Wolfe formulates a posthumanist approach that does not surpass or reject the human, but "enables us to describe the human and its characteristic modes of communication interaction, meaning, social significations, and affective investments with *greater* specificity once we have removed meaning from the ontologically closed domain of" anthropocentrism (*What is Posthumanism?* XXV). Moreover, this posthumanist formulation must attend to the specificity of the human while acknowledging that the human is ultimately comprised of things nonhuman. It is this interpellation, one urging for a greater acknowledgement and understanding of the human and its ways of constructing meaning and knowledge, which provides the impetus for recognizing the anthropocentric/humanist bias of favoring aesthetically pleasing animals, over ugly ones, which has profound implications for the welfare of innumerable species.

**The Implications of an Anthropocentric Aesthetic Bias**. Much of Wolfe's work on animal ethics addresses the selective constructions and reductions involved in the act of viewing. Drawing from Luhmann's systems theory, Wolfe understands that sense observations are selective and contingent assemblies that reduce environmental input. In order for an organism to remain viable and informed by its environment, it must maintain a perpetual self-reflexive openness that continually produces an increase in its internal representation of environmental complexity by challenging previously formed representations to account more accurately for its changing environment. Every system must work to make sense of and organize the overwhelming flood of environmental input, which always involves selection and reduction (131). As selection and reduction of environmental sense information is inexorable, there is a necessary "blindness" that pervades every system. Knowing that there will always remain something unseen is, for Wolfe, a posthumanist rejoinder to the humanist trope of visuality-as-mastery (ibid.). In the spirit of both Derrida and Luhmann, Wolfe devotes a substantial portion of his work to de-hierarchizing the human sense of sight and visuality which has become humanity's most privileged sense perception.[3] For Wolfe, it is imperative to cut the visual "loose from its indexical relation to the human, to reason, and to the representational mastery of space itself, and set it adrift within the generalized animal

sensorium" (133-134). In other words, animal ethics must concentrate on a greater engagement with the entire sensorium available not only to humanity, but to other living things as well. In taking this invitation seriously one must not only welcome a greater commitment to understanding the world through senses other than sight, but also to re-contextualize sight to allow for a more comprehensive or differentiated "seeing" and knowledge of animals within our world — a notion Wolfe does not consider. A more inclusive animal ethics involves understanding *how* the human sees nonhuman animals, so that we may open up our visual fields to that which has remained unseen. What I wish to emphasize in this essay, is that our current methods for viewing the nonhuman animal unduly ignore those nonhuman animal species which are deemed to be visually unappealing.

According to agronomist Ernest Small, those species most at risk for extinction tend to be unattractive, and not obviously of any direct use to humans, and consequently lack crucial conservation support ("The New Noah's Ark: Part 1"). The biodiversity of the planet is consequently "being beautified by selective conservation of attractive species, while the plight of the overwhelming majority of species is receiving limited attention" (232). When conservation and restoration of lands and animals depends largely on convincing the public, the government, and wildlife organizations to provide the necessary funding, it is only those animals which are aesthetically pleasing or directly useful to humans that attract public attention effectively. The alarming rate at which species extinction is accelerating — roughly 30,000 species per year[4] — coupled with the limited willingness of government, business, and civil society to minimize these losses, choices as to which species are to be saved are at the fore of the issue (234).[5] When allocating limited resources and funding to conservation efforts, there is a widely acknowledged discrepancy between the priorities of academic researchers and the actual practitioners — policy makers and nongovernmental organizations — who are engaged in the practical application of these efforts (Sutherland et al. 559). In practice, biodiversity conservation campaigns employ common marketing techniques to draw attention to their causes, and in so doing they tend to neglect certain species that do not fit the dominant marketing techniques. These marketing techniques emphasize two main principles: economic considerations directed towards human utility, and subjective satisfaction "based on human values, prejudices, instincts, or sensations" ("The New Noah's Ark: Part 1" 238). For Small, perhaps even more important than economic justifications for species conservation are the emotional characteristics and attachments of certain species that appeal to the human psyche.

Appropriately named "charismatic megafauna" or "superstar species" are those select species that tend to conform to generalized human concepts of beauty and power.

These species tend to be the "star attractions in zoos and animal preserves, [and] the subjects of extensive scientific study and of considerable media coverage" ("The New Noah's Ark: Part 2" 39). Examples would include bears, elephants, apes, lions, tigers, whales, dolphins, and some birds. These superstar species are usually mammals of a larger size, and tend to exclude smaller animals like insects, fishes, and most bird species. Those lacking a certain sense of beauty in the eyes of the human observer have hindered public support for their conservation needs. The explanation for this prejudice seemingly stems from human beings' evolutionary preference for particular human-like features, as well as features that display power, beauty, and decoration. Moreover, humans tend to admire characteristics they identify as having high value in human society (maternal instincts and cooperation), while abhorring those understood as being maladaptive in human society (thievery and extreme aggression). Most importantly, baby/infantile characteristics, representing vulnerability, are always the strongest elicitors of human empathy and support (41).

The evolution of human species has involved an immense pressure on those characteristics found in human infants, so as to elicit feelings of attractiveness/cuteness and to evoke protective instincts (ibid.). These infantile characteristics, often termed baby schema (*Kindchenschema*), are recognized by a particular set of facial and body features, such as small body size with a disproportionately larger head, big eyes, and soft/rounded body features. Personality traits such as playfulness, innocence, curiosity, and affectionate behavior are often associated with these physical features, and combine positively to evoke attributions of cuteness and caretaking behaviors. According to Konrad Lorenz, these features are evolutionary adaptations which trigger nurturing responses in adults, ensuring species survival (Lorenz). Furthermore, this adaptation, suggests Lorenz, is species-unspecific, where cuteness and the evocation of caretaking behavior is determined by pedomorphic characteristics found in a variety of species (cats, dogs, etc.). Notably, research looking at the effects of baby schema, pedomorphic characteristics, and cuteness support the idea that these adaptations in humans also transfer across species (Golle et al.). According to Golle, research suggests "a common mechanism that codes the cuteness of human and nonhuman infant faces" (4). In other words, humans have a general instinct to take care of the young irrespective of species, assuming the presence of particular infantile characteristics. The presence of a generalized trans-species mechanism coding for cuteness and infantile characteristics implies that, as with human children, a high degree of baby schema in a nonhuman animal would elicit a stronger motivation for caretaking than would a nonhuman animal with a low degree of baby schema. Research does indeed suggest that a higher degree of baby schema results in increased motivation for caretaking in humans

(Glocker et al.), and recent findings suggest that this increased motivation in caregiving behavior may translate into conservation support for nonhuman animals (Gunnthorsdottir).

The human instinctual inclination to care for human young has far-reaching implications for how humans care for and support nonhuman animals. In a study conducted by Anna Gunnthorsdottir, it was found that the attractiveness of nonhuman species substantially increased support for their protection. Her study, which sought to explore the visceral factors in decisions to support endangered animal species, confirms the direction of a growing body of research that finds that support for conservation is often based on the superficial characteristics of the animal rather than on its ecological value, uniqueness, or well-being (211). In sum, the greater the perceived attractiveness of an animal, the more fundraising support it received. The ramifications of these particular biases (resemblance to humans, aesthetic appeal, cultural import, and familiarity) have also been shown to be consistent across cultures (Kellert). Such results lead one to question how humanity's selective preferences for certain animals will come to shape the future of the wildlife on our planet.

The human bias for species that are aesthetically pleasing is a prime determinant in guiding the conservation support for nonhuman animals. As Small stresses, these biases serve to "mobilise public attention and consequent conservation activities that effectively protect some habitats in which many species at risk occur. But this excludes most habitats and most species at risk, which doubtless have both economic and ecological importance to the future welfare of the world" ("The New Noah's Ark: Part 1" 246). In order to combat, and more appropriately to lend support to those at risk, our natural emotional and aesthetic biases towards a select number of species must be tempered with a more rational program that takes into account support for all habitats and species. Otherwise, funding will continue to be disproportionately directed towards those aesthetically pleasing and cute species at the expense of others. Correspondingly, Small also acknowledges that most agencies involved in wildlife conservation fall victim to these same prejudices and are reluctant to acknowledge their biases (241). A recent study suggests that zoos, which substantially contribute to survival of some species, may indeed house certain species based mostly on the aesthetic beauty rather than conservation needs (Frynta et al.). Although the appearance of certain species is relatively independent of their vital ecological roles (or simply their well-being as fellow vulnerable creatures, as Derrida would say) it does not mean that we must seek to abandon entirely our human biases. As Small concludes: "What is important is not that we suppress our natural admiration for certain life forms, but that we moderate our prejudices with understanding for the value of all species, for the

long-term welfare of humanity and our planet" ("The New Noah's Ark: Part 2" 53), and I would add, the well-being of the individual species themselves as fellow creatures.

**Taking Care.** Considering how human aesthetic biases are considerable determinates of human support and care towards nonhuman animals, one may wonder to what degree any type of human concern for nonhuman animal life may overcome its anthropocentrism. Indeed, if we take Wolfe's emphasis on Luhmann's systems theory seriously, it would appear that the human (or human system) can only create or modify internal representations of the outside world. Since these internal, self-referential representations are always constructed by the human system itself, it would appear that one has little hope for an ethics that would be untainted by the human. Wolfe's posthumanist approach clearly emphasizes the need to recognize the specificities of the nonhuman animal other, but largely neglects to emphasize the humanist remainder — specifically in the form of deep-seated humanist biases — of every posthumanist ethics. Wolfe's readers are left without a theoretical account of the attention and care necessary for an ethics inclusive of nonhuman animal others. An instructive approach to assist in the theorization of caring for the well-being of nonhuman animals — one which more clearly calls attention to the inherent humanist biases involved in such caring — may be found in the work of Martin Heidegger.

Heidegger's attempt to move beyond the closure of Western metaphysics and its corresponding humanism by thinking being (ontology) could arguably be considered a posthumanist gesture. Despite the anthropocentrism that this work retains, the understanding of care — concern for the being of beings — as originating from outside the human constitutes an important resource for a posthumanist approach to caring for nonhuman animal others. The benefit of a Heideggerian inspired formulation of care is the recognition that any desire to care for nonhuman animals must be tempered by a realization of the biases inherent in the one who cares. In other words, caring for the welfare of nonhuman animals may be posthumanist, but every act of care performed by the human is always limited by human biases and self-referential understandings of nonhuman animals. As a brief overview of Heidegger will show, the care humans exhibit towards the other (human or nonhuman), no matter how equitable and non-anthropocentric this care appears to be, remains through and through a humanist projection.

In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger makes the distinction between a stone that is without world, the animal as poor-in-world, and the human as world-forming. In his working through this three-fold distinction, he emphasizes the

unbridgeable distance between the human and the animal by asserting that animals live with the human, however, "this being-with is not an *existing-with*, because an [animal] does not exist but merely lives" (210). The distinction Heidegger makes between existing and living is one regarding the ability to reflect upon one's own being (existence), especially the ability to reflect upon one's own finitude or future death. For Heidegger, only humans are capable of reflecting — through language — on their own existence and finitude. This claim is, at once, the very source of Heidegger's humanism and his posthumanism. On the one hand, by denying the animal the ability to have language, Heidegger reproduces a common humanist in human-animal relations; on the other hand, to deny the nonhuman animal the ability for human-like language could be regarded as a posthumanist gesture which refuses to anthropomorphize the nonhuman animal (Iveson). Heidegger thus asserts an abyss of otherness that cannot simply be overcome by humanity's attempts to understand the nonhuman animal. In other words, Heidegger's posthumanist gesture is to recognize the impossibility of knowing the animal other in the way that the animal understands itself or experiences the world. As such, humanity is irrevocably limited to understanding the animal in human terms, always as a representation of the animal from within the human world. Heidegger's respect for differential being is posthumanist — in the sense of the term used in this essay — in its recognition that the nullification of humanism differentially re-inscribes new forms of metaphysical anthropocentrism. Pursuing an approach that is more inclusive of the nonhuman other, yet still respecting the abyss of differential being, Heidegger develops a conception of care that rests on a less human-centered logic of responsibility. This logic of responsibility is established on an inappropriable abyss and otherness that cannot be reduced to a responsibility simply for another human.

In order to revise previous conceptions of responsibility, Heidegger suggests an originary ethics that thinks being first, rather than an anthropomorphic subject or agent. For Heidegger, responsibility is about being, about the responsible decision that responds to a call that comes from outside every individual being. As Francois Raffoul notes, both the call and the decision to respond in Heidegger are phenomena originating from being rather than human subjectivity, and the call's uncanniness points to an otherness within the human self, a self that arises from the call itself (197-198). The subject arising from the call testifies to a dissymmetry and otherness within the human self, a self that is never the same as it was previously, because the other is perpetually inscribed in the structure of selfhood, thus indicating a primordial openness and incompleteness of the human (198-199). A constant unfinished quality constitutes the human, a perpetual lack, which for Heidegger means something remains outstanding in the human's potentiality-for-being (*Being and Time* 220). The structure of

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care is intimately entangled in a new future potential for the human, where the human is fundamentally constituted by its concern for things, its caring for the other, its being with others (180). Care, fundamental to the human, always includes responsibility manifest as exposure to an inappropriable other. Such an inappropriable other for which the human is responsible, as Raffoul carefully articulates, exceeds any predetermined figuration, and as such, can in no way be limited to a responsibility to care for humans only (Raffoul 177). If humanity is, in its very being, oriented towards care for both the human and nonhuman other as inappropriable other, human being thereby necessitates a change in its referential totality in order to accommodate and remain open to the relentless call to care for indeterminable others. Put simply, for Heidegger, human beings are beings who care for others (human and nonhuman) that can never be completely understood. As such, the human must constantly change its representations of itself and other beings in the world, so as to be able to remain open to, and inclusive of, other beings.

Opening to the other to initiate a relationship of care entails a transformation of the human's understanding of the other, yet this transformation, although potentially more inclusive, still remains seated within human understanding. As Heidegger reminds us, care comes before every factical position and attitude of the human, to care is to wish, to project the human's being to itself toward possibilities that remain inappropriable in its taking care of things (*Being and Time* 182). Every access the human has to the other is mediated by its very existential constitution as human and its historical context (204). Discovering new beings is to remain in distortion and illusion, this is because the human expresses itself as "a being toward beings that discovers," where discovery is simply how the human understands its world, by showing itself to itself, or put more simply, by understanding the world and the other from within the world of the human (205). In caring for the other by coming to know it or better understand it, the human appropriates what has already been discovered; even new discoveries of the other are only a departure from "discoveredness in the mode of illusion," and thus new interpretations from the perspective of the human itself (204). The implications here are critical. Heidegger's arguably posthumanist notion of care, which comes not from the human subject but from being, is restrained by recognition of the human's (humanistic) limitations in performing care. What arises from being (care) is fundamentally restricted in its usage by the human. To return then to the central argument of this paper, part of caring for the nonhuman animal as a posthumanist ethical project also means caring to attend the human biases which limit its posthuman character.

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To venture into a posthumanist ethical project of caring toward the inappropriable other, human or nonhuman, is to take care in our caring, a caring that Wolfe's posthumanist approach disregards. To be careful in writing the posthuman is to weave together two general motifs, motifs that draw on Derrida's cautions in challenging humanism (*Margins of Philosophy* 135). As Derrida argues, the desire to leap beyond humanism must be joined with the recognition that we still remain in the shadow of humanism. A new writing — like a posthumanist writing — must amount to speaking "several languages and [producing] several texts at once" (ibid.). Therefore, any posthumanist writing must attempt to get out of humanism, while recognizing it is itself still within it; it is to speak to the ghost of humanism that casts over us its shadow. This call to recognize humanism is to expose and weaken it. As Badmington argues, quoting Derrida, one must "'lodg[e] oneself within traditional conceptuality in order to destroy it'" (qtd. in Badmington 15). Even if the post- of posthumanism may never mark an absolute break from humanism's legacy, it must work through and within humanism as the only way that it may overcome humanism (21-22). Working through a history of the human means paying attention to human intellectual and cultural history, but also to the human's embodied nature, and the biases involved therein. Wolfe's intent on cutting the visual from its indexical relation to the human can only ever be one part of a posthumanist project. What Wolfe neglects in his posthumanist account is care, the care which provides the impetus to look back at ourselves as embodied beings with particular biases, and to be critical of how certain biases — like the human visual aesthetic bias — may disrupt the development of more inclusive ethical approaches to the nonhuman animal.

*A Posthumanist Autoimmune Attack.* In maintaining a realistic point of view on social change, engaging in a tokenism which raises awareness for the aesthetically disenfranchised by presenting aesthetically unappealing species as endangered, as spectacle, or re-presenting them as simulacra that "beautify" them may, paradoxically, be necessary approaches for short-term change, even if it deceptively preys on the humanistic biases that have resulted in the aesthetic prejudice to begin with, while continually re-inscribing a harmful liberal humanist bias. Much like his views on the Great Ape Project ("Before the Law"), even Wolfe admits that more inclusive steps to animal equality, even when couched in humanistic frameworks, constitute "monumental and historic step[s] forward for our relations with animals within the political purview of liberal democracy and its legal framework" (104). What Wolfe ultimately fails to explore in his posthumanist ethical approach is the ability to use our own humanist biases against ourselves, to the advantage of nonhuman animals.

The character of revealing one's own mechanisms of protection — much the way the visual humanist aesthetic bias aids in predisposing humans to care for those that exhibit baby schema — in order to expose these mechanisms to attack exhibits a particular quality associated with Derrida's notion of the autoimmune: "As we know, an autoimmunitary process is that strange behaviour where a living being, in quasi-suicidal fashion, 'itself' works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself against its 'own' immunity" ("Autoimmunity" 94). According to Derrida, for any system to remain open to critique, heteronomy, time, the event, the other, it must, in the cruelest fashion, attack and infect itself, an unavoidable autoinfection present in all auto-affection (*Rogues* 109). In other words, in order to improve the system, the system must engage in an attack against itself. To critique the current anthropocentric attitudes pervasive in current ethical approaches to nonhuman animals necessitates the development of such an autoimmune attack on the human. In his essay, "The Ends of Man," featured in *Margins of Philosophy*, Derrida calls for a new writing featuring an autoimmune mechanism which attempts an exit from the system not by changing terrain, but by using the instruments already available in the system against the edifice (135). Within the context of this essay, this means utilizing tools already available within the human (human preferences for the aesthetically pleasing) in order to overcome the current anthropocentrism pervasive in the human. This posthumanist autoimmune attack — involving the use of humanist biases to develop a more posthuman character to human-animal ethical relations — I argue, would involve commandeering human visual aesthetic biases to redirect them in ways that are more inclusive of visually unappealing nonhuman animal species.

**Practical Strategies for Neutralizing the Humanistic Aesthetic Bias**. The potential strategies for moderating the humanistic aesthetic bias in animal ethics are profuse, and open up the possibility of a multitude of approaches. Despite the fact that the most forthright approach would be to educate the government, wildlife organizations, and the general populace on the inequitable treatment of nonhuman animals that do not fit particular aesthetic frames, this may not be the most efficient catalyst for short term change. To be clear, I do not reject any educational strategies that wish to advise or caution the populace about the humanistic aesthetic biases discussed here; in fact, the long term objective would be to disperse information related to these humanistic biases as widely as possible. However, we must also recognize the difficulty in disseminating intricate ethical messages meant to educate the populace, such as time, money, effective avenues for reception, and so on. Hence, what is offered here is a preliminary meditation on supplementary short-term strategies that raise awareness of the so-called aesthetically "ugly" nonhuman animals in the public purview. These strategies

paradoxically involve utilizing the very human aesthetic biases discussed here against ourselves, in order to increase the visibility of the excluded.

To raise awareness and to bring attention to those creatures that have gone unnoticed on account of the human's aesthetic preferences for particular nonhuman animal species would involve, firstly, public acknowledgement of those species that are endangered. In a study by Gunnthorsdottir, it was found that unattractive animals were rated as more attractive by participants if they were framed as an endangered species. The increased attractiveness of these animals then resulted in an increase in conservation support. As she states: "Greater perceived attractiveness of an animal means more fundraising dollars and generally more support for its cause" (211). Publicizing particular species with less than pleasing aesthetic qualities as endangered leads most people to rate these species as more aesthetically pleasing, and increases support for their conservation. In order to use this information effectively, various forms of media (wildlife, news and general interest organizations and networks) could create educational programming and articles on television, radio, or online that produce relatively immediate emotional affects that could increase funding and general support for at-risk species. "Ugly" animals may be able to employ similar strategies to those of aesthetically pleasing animals by taking advantage of those cognitive mechanisms in the human that code for empathy and caretaking behavior. It is important to recognize though, as Gunnthorsdottir does, that the increased support from framing "ugly" species as endangered involves more than just simple aesthetics, but also likely involves additional mechanisms involving empathy more generally. Simply framing aesthetically appalling endangered species as endangered is an honest and effective means to consider as a potential strategy for increasing the visibility and support for these at-risk creatures.

A more direct strategy that exploits the human aesthetic bias may involve "beautifying" or "cute-ifying" those species normally deemed ugly. Public service announcements or children's television cartoons/family programming involving those species deemed ugly may too increase the public profile of certain animal species. Drawing and animating animals with the specific intention of re-conceptualizing them to include the baby schema may in turn increase visibility, awareness, and conservation support for those actual species. Baby schema itself could be considered a symbol of vulnerability, much like human babies are vulnerable, so too are many animal species. To reconceive vulnerable species with the addition of baby schema is to visually mark these species as vulnerable, and in need of care.

The final preliminary strategy proposed by this project involves celebrating the ugly as ugly. Such a strategy would include the communication and circulation of entertaining media that focus on a broader notion of wildlife conservation, centering not on those "charismatic megafauna" or "superstar species," but on other, aesthetically appalling animals in dire need of assistance. Simon Watt, biologist and science communicator, founded an organization called the Ugly Animal Preservation Society which seeks to increase the visibility of ugly endangered species through humour. Watt's organization takes a new approach to nonhuman animal conservation to penetrate additional avenues to conservation never before conceived, like stand-up comedy. As their website states, "The panda gets too much attention," and they intend to promote ugly animals that go under the radar (Ugly Animal Preservation Society). The mission statement is to raise the profile and general awareness of some of the more "aesthetically challenged" creatures by gathering together comedians and scientists who create humorous and educational skits, each focused on an ugly species in danger of extinction. Examples of such ugly animals include the blobfish, the dromedary jumping-slug, and the proboscis monkey. Following each show, the audience votes for one of the animals, in order to choose that region's "ugly mascot." With the belief that the vast majority of life is ugly and not particularly exciting to the average person, Watt champions the ugly in order to bring these species recognition. By engaging entertainment media, Watt has discovered a supplementary avenue that raises awareness of aesthetically unappealing creatures in need of conservation assistance, and just as important, educates how humanistic prejudices have lead humanity to ignore the majority of species in need. Much like Watt's, this essay advocates for new avenues of dissemination that increase the visibility of conservation messages for animals not considered aesthetically appealing to the human eye.

Each of the strategies listed above, in some form or another, involve the presentation of animals in media discourse. The presentation of animals in media risks portraying these species as objects for consumption, rather than as individual beings with specific motivations and experiences. A study by Gouabault, Dubied, and Burton-Jeangros, determined that there is a high degree of ambivalence in contemporary representations of animals in Western media. They argue that the personification of many animal representations in media end up perpetuating anthropocentric sensibilities, rather than zoocentric sensibilities. The social representations of animals in ways that rely heavily on various forms of personification may further what they call a "pet relationship model," which maintains an image of animals' dependence on humans. A more appropriate strategy, they suggest, is the adoption of a "companionship model," where the animal can be considered in and for itself. While personification may provide

positive images of nonhuman animals, it may do so at the cost of omitting the lived reality and specificity of these animals. As such, there must be a concerted effort to consider the diverse motivations, experiences, and specificities of each animal or species represented in the media, whenever possible.

To reiterate, in order to see the efficient recognition of the prejudices of the human aesthetic framing, there may be a need to inundate the populace with a variety of educational strategies that paradoxically exploit the very humanistic biases that have been responsible for the exclusion of unattractive animals. By exploiting these biases, at least provisionally, we may be able to attend to the previously excluded that are in *urgent* need of relief. Though effective and efficient in the short term, the simple act of "beautifying" the ugly or appropriating the ugly for entertainment purposes is itself ethically questionable given our earlier discussion. Simply making these animals more aesthetically pleasing would mean falling victim to the human aesthetic bias that this work aims to dispel. Which is why, in a vein similar to Wolfe's, a more appropriate long term ethical strategy would focus not on characteristics of beauty or public notoriety, but instead, becoming more ethically responsible for the nonhuman other based on what all life seemingly shares, a vulnerability and finitude, a not-being-able that links ethical considerations across species boundaries.

**Recognizing the Obstruction of the Human Aesthetic Bias**. Wolfe's posthumanist approach provides an essential and much needed re-conceptualization of animal ethics which attempts to understand ethical relations with nonhuman animals from a perspective that is not exclusively human. His proposal, to de-hierarchize human sight and visuality in order to engage the entire sensorium of human and nonhuman animals, fails to recognize pervasive modes of human sight and conceptions of human visuality that retain an anthropocentric character. As this essay has sought to expose, Wolfe's posthumanist ethical approach to the nonhuman animal requires a supplementary posthumanist endeavor of care to assess and minimize the humanist biases that may impede its implementation. In so doing, this essay identified a humanist bias that impedes the practical dissemination of Wolfe's posthumanist proposal: that practical work in animal ethics regularly imparts an unrecognized framework of speciesism which privileges those species most aesthetically appealing to the human.

As Badmington rightfully establishes in his particular conceptualization of posthumanism, a complete detachment of humanism (be they cultural, embodied, biological, etc.) from posthuman discourse is naïve. Posthumanist discourse invariably re-inscribes humanism each and every time, and because of this we must take care to attend to this re-inscription and determine how we are to move forward in such a way

as to be more responsible to the nonhuman other amidst these biases. After the realization that humanist biases are inevitable, the paradoxical use of humanist biases against ourselves — in the form of a posthumanist autoimmune attack — may be a necessary strategy in which to be more open to the nonhuman other. If this process of autoimmunity does indeed find itself within the structure of the posthuman, to weaken its residual humanism, it seems to correspond to the positive implication of autoimmunity, that is, autoimmunity works to keep an entity open to the wholly other to come. Conceivably, such an openness that an autoimmunity of posthumanism affords may be a welcoming of the nonhuman other to come. Regardless of the potential for the posthuman to exhibit an autoimmune structure, the issue at hand in posthumanist discourse, we have learned, is not simply a moving-away-from humanism but also a movement back towards humanism. This second movement, a movement of care that Wolfe's posthumanist approach neglects, is one which relentlessly pursues the humanist structures which have and continue to bias our posthuman yearning of openness to the nonhuman other. It is only by returning to the human in posthumanism that the human is able to work through itself, through its humanism, so that it may overcome its humanism.

**Notes**

1. Theories which engage the nonhuman vary widely in terms of approach and concern, and frequently conflict with one another. Some of the most prominent theories that focus on the nonhuman include: object-oriented ontology (Latour; Harman), systems theory (Luhmann), deep ecology (Næss), and a variety of approaches under the generic title of posthuman theory (Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*; Hayles; Morton).

2. This essay aims to problematize discourses which ground ethical codes on how similar (or dissimilar) the cognitive abilities of animals are to humans. Much of these ethical approaches deny faculties such as language, reason, thoughtful response, and the cognitive abilities necessary to make or use tools; however, there is a growing body of research in comparative cognition which suggests that many animals do indeed have the ability to reason and use tools, as well as utilize language (see for example, Menzel and Fischer).

3. Wolfe's chapter on disability and autism, "Learning from Temple Grandin, or, Animal Studies, Disability Studies, and Who Comes after the Subject" (in *What is Posthumanism?*) features his clearest and most articulate work on the topic of de-hierarchizing the human sense of sight and visuality.

4. Estimates for the rate of species extinction vary widely, and as such, there is no clear consensus as to the actual numbers of extinctions occurring per year. The World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) estimates a range of between 200 and 100,000 species become extinct each year ("How Many Species?").

5. In economic and biodiversity preservation literature, the problem of deciding which animals are most worth saving — in order to preserve the greatest diversity on a limited budget — is called the "Noah's Ark Problem." The name of this model of biodiversity preservation brings to mind religious imagery, often associated with the superiority of humans in relation to their animal counterparts.

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