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“The Simple Magic of Life”: Phenomenology, Ontology, and Animal Ethics

Believe in the simple magic of life, in service in the universe, and it will dawn on you what this waiting, peering, “stretching of the neck” of the creature means. Every word must falsify; but look, these beings live around you, and no matter which one you approach you always reach Being. — Martin Buber (29)

This paper argues that French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Baltic German zoologist Jacob von Uexküll’s respective investigations into human and nonhuman ontology can make a major contribution to animal ethics. My overarching claim is that phenomenology can help deepen and enrich our understanding of animal ontology, and in so doing deepen and enrich our development of animal ethics. At the moment, Peter Singer’s reductive ontology of animals as primarily suffering beings — and his correspondingly simplistic ethical model, which is focused on preventing suffering — is still arguably the default position among both animal studies theorists and animal activists. Singer’s assertion that the capacity to suffer is the threshold condition for ethical consideration (of a certain kind) is not in dispute here. It is goes without saying that the criterion of sentience is crucial to distinguishing between obligations we might have to *living* beings such as trees and *conscious* and *feeling* beings such as nonhuman animals. It also goes without saying that a being’s capacity to suffer ought automatically to entitle that being to full protection from torture, abuse, neglect, and other forms of physical and psychological suffering. What is in dispute here, then, is whether the capacity to suffer, though a *necessary* criterion, is also a *sufficient* criterion for developing a comprehensive and robust animal ethics. Also in question here is the relatively narrow definition of suffering as physical and psychological pain that Singer seems to take for granted at the expense of the recognition of the phenomenological nuances of animals’ intersubjective experiences as perceptual beings. With a weak conception of suffering at its foundation, Singer’s ethics is unable to account for the substantive positive obligations we might have to other animals. Worse, Singer’s ontology of suffering, not to mention his preference-utilitarian framework, leave him unable to defend *as a matter of principle* nonhuman animals’ right not to be killed. My goal here is to take Singer to task for these failures and to offer an alternative animal ontology and foundation for ethics by drawing on the as yet under-explored work of Merleau-Ponty and Uexküll.

To be sure, various animal ethicists have already offered correctives and alternatives to Singer's reductive ontology and ethics. Martha Nussbaum, for example, outlines a list of animals' discrete capabilities and corresponding entitlements, while Tom Regan points out that many other animals experience a variety of complex emotional and cognitive states and therefore qualify as "subjects-of-a-life" with intrinsic value. Partially as a result of these more nuanced ontologies, Nussbaum and Regan have presented more compelling theories of justice and rights than Singer. There are mHowever, their respective theories are also limited — in Nussbaum's case by her refusal, like Singer's, to reject killing outright, and in Regan's case, by his contradictory appeal, if only strategic, to anthropocentric assumptions.

Animal ethologists such as Marc Bekoff and Jonathan Balcombe, among many others, have also made an enormous contribution to complicating and enriching our understanding of animal ontology and ethics. By providing us with reams of examples of animals' complex emotional states, social needs, and moral capacities Bekoff and Balcombe have probably done more than anyone else to challenge our reductive ontology of animal life and, consequently, to posit a more robust set of ethical commitments. I suggest here that phenomenology can supplement and complement ethology by offering additional insight into animal subjectivity and intersubjectivity. It is unlikely that we can rely entirely on phenomenology to articulate a programmatic ethics. But we can certainly draw from it to help complete the picture of animal ontology and subjectivity that Regan, Nussbaum, Bekoff, Balcombe, and other animal studies scholars have begun to paint with brighter colors and more varied brush strokes than Singer. While we cannot fully understand the internal subjective experience of other animals — and as we will see phenomenology helps illuminate this epistemic limit — phenomenology can help us understand some of the constitutive elements of animal subjectivity, in particular embodiment, perception, and world-making. Out of these insights, phenomenology can offer at least four distinct contributions to animal ethics, which are as follows:

First, by focusing on the shared embodiment of human and nonhuman animals, phenomenology challenges human-animal dualism not only by asserting animals' ethically relevant ontological similarity to humans, but also humans' long-repressed or repressively desublimated animality, the latter of which tends to be glossed over in the effort to justify animals' membership in the otherwise exclusively human community of ethical subjects. Second, and as already noted, by detailing the key features of animal subjectivity outlined above, phenomenology both magnifies the potential delights of animal existence in optimal circumstances, and the profound horrors of animal

existence within the confines of the animal industrial complex. Thus, it offers an even stronger incentive to put an end to animal exploitation. Third, phenomenology provides a powerful basis for including a universal prohibition of killing animals for any reason other than as a last resort in circumstances of extreme and irreversible physical injury, disease, or illness. The fourth contribution phenomenology can make to animal ethics is in a slightly different vein than those I have just outlined: to inspire an ethos of re-enchantment and a practice of epistemic humility towards other animals. By re-enchantment I mean the cultivation of a sense of wonder and awe — not just at “wild animals” and “nature,” but all animals, including the most maligned and abused, such as rats, chickens, goats, mice, pigs, and all the other domesticated and undomesticated animals languishing in laboratories, factory farms, and other sites of violence and exploitation — as a means of challenging their brutal objectification and commodification under late capitalism. Re-enchantment also engenders an epistemic humility, which embraces the limits of human knowledge and sets strict constraints on our epistemic goals and methods, thus offering an antidote to the recklessness and arrogance of modern instrumentalist science.

It is important to clarify at the outset that I am not mobilizing phenomenology here for prescriptive or programmatic purposes — that is, to explore potential institutional or policy changes it could initiate. My goal is more modest than that. While the hope is that a phenomenologically *inspired* ethics will have concrete applications of that nature, my focus here is on the ways in which it can contribute to strengthening the *theoretical foundations* of animal ethics. While phenomenology alone cannot provide the basis for a comprehensive animal ethics, it can certainly complement, supplement, and correct some features of leading models.

I will begin by elaborating on the strengths and weaknesses of Singer’s, Nussbaum’s, and Regan’s ontologies and ethics, before moving on to consider how phenomenology might offer another platform for reimagining animal ontology and rethinking ethics beyond the human.

Singer's Ontology and Ethics of Suffering. Peter Singer is credited for having made the first major intervention into the troubling legacy of Cartesian dualism, which reduces animals to automata that ostensibly lack all the necessary criteria for ethical consideration, such as reason, language, autonomy, and moral agency. In his seminal book *Animal Liberation* (1975), Singer famously argued, following Jeremy Bentham, that “sentience,” especially the capacity to suffer, which all animals with a central nervous

system possess, is the only morally relevant characteristic a being can possess or lack. "If a being suffers," Singer explains, "there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration" (8). Whether or not a being can speak or exercise reason or whether he or she possesses moral agency or autonomy, therefore, has absolutely no bearing on whether he or she is deserving of protection from suffering.

Singer's contribution to challenging age-old prejudices against animals cannot be overstated. The elimination of all other criteria save sentience as the basis for equal moral consideration is a radical move in the history of Western moral philosophy, particularly at the time of Singer's initial intervention, and has important implications. If pigs', chickens', rats', and monkeys' capacity to suffer was actually taken into consideration as not just one, but rather *the* determining criterion for ethical consideration, the entire factory farming, experimentation, fur, and animal entertainment industries would have to be shut down immediately to put an end to the indescribable and interminable suffering they inevitably inflict on other animals.

Upon closer examination, however, there are numerous problems with Singer's approach. The first is that Singer ultimately provides a reductive account of animal subjects as primarily suffering bodies, without acknowledging more than in passing other morally salient aspects of their subjective lives. Granted, Singer is doing this at least in part for strategic reasons. That is, he focuses on sentience not least to challenge critics who opt to measure a being's moral value in terms of their degree of self-awareness or other, ultimately arbitrary, cognitive or physical capacities (*Practical Ethics* 64-66). Nevertheless, and despite his best intentions, by focusing on sentience in general and presenting animals as *primarily* suffering beings, Singer capitulates, without meaning to, to his opponents who, for different reasons, proverbially strip animals down to their bare essentials, and in so doing undermine animals' claim to full subjecthood and to full membership in the ethical community of diverse individuals. It is one thing to be sentient, but it is quite another thing to be a psychologically, emotionally, and perceptually complex world-making being. Only when these complexities are recognized will ethics be more than just a feeble hand held up in defiance of the most extreme forms of cruelty, and instead become an entire way of life — that is, a foundation for cultivating and living in thriving and peaceable interspecies communities. Singer's commitment to utilitarianism obstructs his view of this alternative destination for ethics, and he consistently returns to his default position of the necessary condition, which, though strategically useful as an intervention into the dominant, viciously anthropocentric philosophical tradition, can only go so far.

A second and more serious problem is that although Singer recognizes the practical ethical requirement to boycott the industrialized killing of animals because of the suffering it inflicts, his focus on suffering prevents him from objecting to killing other animals, save those such as great apes, elephants, dolphins, and some species of birds, that are lucky enough to qualify as “persons” (or rational and self-conscious beings, aware of themselves as distinct entities with a past and a future) as a matter of principle (94). Singer concedes that other birds, including those we torture and kill systematically in the animal industrial complex, may prove to be persons as well, and therefore may join the list of those whose lives are worth preserving irrespective of other considerations. But for now, the best we can offer them, in the context of consequentialism, is the much weaker argument that by killing them we deprive them of a pleasant or enjoyable life (120). But this leads us into two dead-ends, so to speak: first, it offers no protection from killing to animals who lead lives of misery, which is to say, all the animals routinely killed for food, experiments, and other purposes; and second, it reinforces a tired hierarchy of value that glorifies arbitrary capacities, in this case a sense of self and of the past and future. As Singer puts it, when the chips are down, or “when there is an irreconcilable conflict between the basic survival needs of animals and of normal humans, it is not speciesist to give priority to the lives of those with a biographical sense of their life and a stronger orientation towards the future” (122). Why narrow the scope of value this way? Why not challenge ourselves to accept that having a certain kind of self-awareness and a corresponding sense of the past and future as we understand it is not all that counts? Surely, not even humans’ self-awareness is limited to a rigid and rather superficial sense of the past and future. Surely, like other animals, we too inhabit diverse spatio-temporal configurations shaped us much by perception, emotion, environment, desire, and intersubjective relations as by our plans for the future. Why not entertain the notion that whatever form their sense of self takes other animals inhabit magnificent worlds of meaning of which to deprive them shatters not only their individual lives, but those of others with whom they have co-constructed and created those worlds? This is what phenomenology compels us to recognize. And this is what Singer cannot, by virtue of his utilitarian convictions, abide.

Even if we put this concern aside, another one emerges. As a preference-utilitarian, Singer must concede that the preferences of one group might trump those of another. This could mean that the preferences of animals not to suffer could trump the preferences of humans to consume their flesh and otherwise exploit them, but it could and indeed does also mean that as long as animals’ basic preference not to suffer is

protected, there is no compelling reason not to kill them. And this is exactly the conclusion Singer comes to: if most animals' primary interest is in avoiding suffering, and if they do not have an interest in a continued existence *per se* — an assumption a phenomenological conception of animal subjectivity adamantly rejects — then subjecting animals to a so-called “painless death” for food production is not necessarily in violation of their interests or of the principle of equality (*Animal Liberation* 17). Because he focuses exclusively on suffering, Singer fails to recognize the other harms and injustices that are constitutive to killing, no matter how ostensibly “painless.” In short, if animals are seen as primarily seeking the limited interests of avoiding harm and seeking pleasure, but are otherwise not regarded as having meaningful interior lives, it is theoretically still possible to justify exploiting them as long as one does not violate those basic interests. Any robust or meaningful animal ethics is incompatible with the permission to kill defenseless beings for human satisfaction and/or profit. As Gary Francione aptly notes, “Singer regards most nonhumans as living in a sort of eternal present that precludes their having an interest in a continued existence” (18).

A third and related concern with Singer's approach is that by characterizing animals as suffering beings, much of animal ethics, both in its theoretical and practical manifestations, has focused almost exclusively on how to minimize suffering at the expense of examining other positive duties we have towards other animals. As noted above, in order to prevent animal suffering, as Singer understands it, factory farming would have to be abandoned. As long as the underlying attitude is that animals are ontologically inferior to human beings, the atrocity apparatus will remain in place.

Despite these shortcomings, Singer's ethical theory, with its conception of the animal as a suffering being at its center, remains highly influential among both scholars and activists, and has shaped how we define animals' ethical entitlements and our ethical commitments to them. Images of animal suffering are ubiquitous across the Internet, and are frequently used by advocates to expose people to the brutal truth behind factory farming, animal experimentation, and other atrocities. Efforts at reform tend to focus on how to reduce suffering, and ideally eliminate it. While these are all laudable campaign strategies and goals, there is a danger that emphasizing suffering to such an extent will inadvertently *reify* the majority of animals into little more than potentially or actually suffering beings, while their actual complexity (which, if we take our own blinders off, reveals itself everyday and in every context) remains obscured, to the detriment of real (rather than just token) ethical, and indeed, social, political, and historical transformation.

Beyond Animals as Suffering Bodies: Nussbaum, Regan, and Bekoff et al. A number of other theorists have presented strong alternatives to Singer's account. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine them all in detail, so I will limit my exploration here to a very cursory overview of Martha Nussbaum's and Tom Regan's respective theories of justice and rights, not least because they have resonated almost as widely as Singer's among animal ethicists

Nussbaum on Capabilities and Corresponding Entitlements. Nussbaum has challenged what she refers to as Singer's "homogenizing" tendencies by insisting that, while sentience might be a "threshold condition for membership in the community of beings who have entitlements based on justice" ("Beyond 'Compassion'" 309), other features of animal subjectivity must be taken into account, most notably animals' various "capabilities," the expression of which are necessary to their flourishing and the curtailment of which constitute injustice. In her words, "the capabilities approach finds ethical significance in the flourishing of basic (innate) capabilities — those that are evaluated as both good and central" and "it will also find harm in the thwarting or blighting of those capabilities." She explains further that the "basic moral intuition" of the capabilities approach, "concerns the dignity of a form of life that possesses both abilities and deep needs. Its basic goal is to address the need for a rich plurality of life activities" (*Frontiers* 346). With different capabilities in mind, Nussbaum distances herself from Singer on the question of whether particular species membership has any moral relevance. For Nussbaum, species is important inasmuch as different species flourish in different ways. While, for instance, a mentally challenged child might share some capabilities and needs with a chimpanzee, and while both are certainly sentient, the conditions for their flourishing are in fact are very different ("Beyond 'Compassion'" 310). This is an important distinction, and one that is not present in Singer's more sweeping criterion of sentience. In theory, acknowledging that different members of different species have different capabilities and needs would require that each being is ensured access to the necessary conditions for their *particular* form of flourishing. One problem with Nussbaum's analysis here, however, is her over-emphasis on species at the expense of the individual. Capabilities may differ widely among members of the same species, just as they do among human beings. Species obviously determines the range of capabilities, but not the specific expression or development thereof. Nevertheless, Nussbaum's move here, taken as a whole, is important.

The recognition of the wide variety of animals' capabilities generates entitlements that go far beyond the right not to suffer. Nussbaum lays out a detailed list of entitlements

that other animals should be guaranteed — entitlements that loosely correspond to those afforded to human beings — including “life,” “bodily health,” “bodily integrity,” “sense, imagination, and thought,” “emotions,” “play,” and “control over one’s environment” (314-317). Nussbaum boldly asserts that the protection and violation of these entitlements are issues of global justice, and calls for their entrenchment in national and international constitutions and agreements (317). These entitlements are comprehensive enough to protect animals from the most brutal forms of violence to which they are now routinely subjected in the animal industrial complex, and carry with them positive duties of justice to actively create the conditions for other animals’ flourishing.

And yet, as with Singer, a lingering anthropocentrism undermines Nussbaum’s commitments to her otherwise compelling theory of interspecies justice. Although “life” is the first guaranteed entitlement, it appears that, in the end, it is not universally applicable and only protects against certain kinds of killing, namely, “gratuitous killing for sport” and “killing for luxury items such as fur” (314f). “The question of killing animals for food” is, Nussbaum claims, “very difficult” to resolve. “The reason these cases are so difficult,” she argues, “is that animals will die anyway in nature, and often more painfully. Painless predation might well be preferable to allowing the animal to be torn to bits in the wild or starved through overpopulation” (315). To suggest that the institutionalized killing of other animals does them a favor by providing them with a comparatively less violent or even painless death than they would meet in nature is nothing short of perverse, given the brutal methods required to kill thousands of animals *en masse* on any given day. The absurdity of Nussbaum’s argument aside, her reluctance to oppose killing is inconsistent with her own theory of justice. In principle, Nussbaum’s capabilities approach should provide a strong theoretical and practical basis for protecting animals from harms — including killing — and ensuring the conditions for their particular forms of flourishing are in place. Yet her own biases prevent her from taking her own theory of justice to its logical end.

Regan on Subjects-of-a-Life and Intrinsic Value. Tom Regan, for his part, avoids the pitfalls of Singer’s approach by positing that any being that qualifies as a “subject-of-a-life” has “intrinsic value” and is therefore always already deserving of protection from both exploitation and killing. Like Nussbaum, Regan offers a more nuanced account of the subject than Singer. He maintains that all beings are subjects-of-a-life who “see, hear, believe and desire, remember and anticipate, plan and intend,” who have a sense of the future and care about what happens to them, who experience “fear and contentment, anger and loneliness, frustration and satisfaction, cunning and imprudence,” who

exhibit “preference- and welfare-interests,” and who have “psychophysical identity over time” (xvi). While some of the criteria listed here are specific to human-like cognition and consciousness, most of them are not, and in fact apply to a wide variety of other animals. Therefore, Regan argues in favor of universal veganism or a boycott of institutionalized harm and killing (xviii).

However, in a disappointing move, Regan redraws an arbitrary metaphysical (and ethical) line in the sand by suggesting that only “mentally normal mammals of a year or more” qualify as subjects-of-a-life. While his wish to avoid the unproductive debate about whether amoebae and paramecia ought to be granted the same ontological and ethical status as mammals is certainly valid, particularly in light of recent posthumanist musings on the agency bacteria and other microorganisms (see Weisberg 106-109), excluding animals under one year of age is a bizarre move, given that the majority of animals tortured and killed in the animal industrial complex are no more than a few weeks or months old. While Regan draws this line for strategic purposes, and clearly recognizes that animals under it are subjects-of-a-life, his concession to the anthropocentric tradition undermines the strength of his otherwise compelling case for animal rights.

Another concern is that Regan reasserts human exceptionalist presuppositions by claiming that “human life contains within it the possibility of a richness not to be found in the life of other animals because, for example, of our advanced cognitive, aesthetic, moral, and spiritual capacities” (xvii). He does at least concede that this superiority has no moral weight and “provides no basis whatsoever for our exploitation of other animals.” However, as long as one species of animals is considered somehow ontologically superior to all the rest, there is always the possibility that it will claim more moral, legal, and other entitlements for itself at the expense of others. Again, as with Nussbaum, Regan's ethical theory is not itself necessarily flawed. It is his inadvertent and/or strategic anthropocentrism that undermines his otherwise important, if incomplete, contribution.

Ethologists on Animal Emotionality, Sociality, and Morality. More recently, ethologists such as pioneering primatologist Jane Goodall, Marc Bekoff, Jonathan Balcombe, Jeffrey Moussaiff-Masson, as well as other authors with scientific backgrounds such as Jennifer S. Holland (not to mention the growing number of animal caretakers and companions at sanctuaries and interspecies communities), have made especially meaningful inroads

into animal ethics by revealing the complexity and profundity of animal emotionality, sociality, and morality.

Building both on Darwin's work and on founding ethologist Donald Griffin's insights into animal consciousness and behavior, contemporary ethologists have offered ever more in-depth and thorough observations and analyses of the ways in which mammals, birds, and fishes experience these and other emotions, including "grief, excitement, anticipation, bliss, rapture, embarrassment ... comfort," as well as terror, trauma, boredom, depression, psychosis, loneliness, ecstasy, betrayal, curiosity, and many others (Balcombe 33). Dairy cows, for example, will struggle desperately to prevent their calves from being taken away from them, and will grieve for days once their babies are gone (having since been turned into veal calves, or future dairy cows and hamburger meat). Other cows will often attempt to console a grieving mother by encircling her ("The Hidden Lives of Cows"). The ethical implications of this richer ontology are already clear: insight into dairy cows' experience of grief ought to give anyone who consumes dairy products under the assumption that the production of dairy is entirely separate from and/or not as harmful as the production of meat serious pause.

Balcombe also asks that we pay more attention to the importance of pleasure in other animals' lives — in part so as to avoid reducing animals to suffering beings as Singer does — and focuses much of his ethological work on exploring animal pleasure. Balcombe describes the jubilation that dolphins express when they manage to disentangle themselves from fishing nets: they do nothing less than "leap repeatedly into the air, as though in joyful celebration" (166). He notes that, "when first let out into the fields following a long winter confinement, tear about the field, kicking their legs into the air" (166). Again, the important ethical implications are immediately apparent. Among other things, the recognition of animal pleasure draws attention to the grave injustice committed by a system of production that strips animals of everything *but* their suffering. But the recognition of animal pleasure, and the variety of ways it manifests itself, also provides a foundation for establishing how to enable pleasure. Though I cannot enumerate a list of concrete entitlements or rights for reasons of scope, suffice it to say that the recognition of the vicissitudes of animal pleasure would entitle them to live in environments that are most conducive to experiencing pleasure (e.g., interspecies communities for domesticated animals, where they can choose where to roam and forage, who their friends are, and who they would rather avoid, what kinds of foods they would like to eat (not without due consideration of nutritional value, of course), and what activities they would like to engage in).

Ethologists are also providing increasing evidence of many nonhuman animals' profoundly moral sensibilities. For instance, in the following passage Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce list several examples of animals going to great lengths to offer aid and assistance to other animals in need:

Eleven elephants rescue a group of captive antelope in KwaZulu-Natal; the matriarch undoes all of the latches on the gates of the enclosure with her trunk and lets the gate swing open so the antelope can escape.... A male diana monkey who has learned to insert a token into a slot to obtain food helps a female who can't get the hang of a trick, inserting the token for her and allowing her to eat the food reward (ix).

Meanwhile, Jennifer S. Holland tells us of a macaque who adopted a stray kitten in Indonesia (91), of a Papillon dog who adopted a squirrel into her litter (131), and of pit bulls and a bulldog who consoled and cared for a grieving ferret (47). Examples such as these abound in ethological literature, and demonstrate that many nonhuman animals are compassionate, empathetic, altruistic and caring, and have a strong sense of justice and fairness (Bekoff and Pierce x-xi). As a result of their participatory observations of animals' lives, ethologists like Pierce, Balcombe, and Bekoff dispense entirely with any last traces of anthropocentrism and unambiguously reject those hierarchical valuations of life which Singer, Nussbaum, and Regan either deliberately reinforce or accidentally fall prey to.

All of these authors provide glimpses of a richer ontology of animal subjectivity, a keener sense of the existential depth of animals' lives. However, these glimpses too often appear as simply add-ons to, or qualifications of, the original Singerian ontology of suffering, rather than offering a worked-out alternative conception of animal subjectivity. As we will now see, Merleau-Ponty's and Uexküll's phenomenological analyses of subjectivity contribute to this project of elaborating upon animal ontology by introducing a whole new conceptual apparatus by which to capture yet more of the splendor of embodied existence. Of particular relevance to our discussion are embodiment, perception, and world-making, to which we will now turn.

Phenomenological Illuminations into Animal Ontology.

Flesh of our Flesh: Embodiment. The first fundamental contribution of phenomenology is to emphasize the significance of animals' embodiment. Embodiment here does not primarily refer to the fact of physical vulnerability — that after all is well-recognized in Singer's ontology — but rather to emphasize how subjectivity is tied to the perceiving body. Jacob von Uexküll and Maurice Merleau-Ponty help rescue other animals from the oblivion of objectified existence to which they have been condemned for hundreds of years by relocating consciousness in the perceiving body. One of the chief goals of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological project was to uncover the dynamism, intricacy, and depth of human, and to a lesser extent, nonhuman subjectivity, which idealist, empiricist, and behaviorist perspectives had respectively occluded and/or denied. From *The Structure of Behavior* (1942) to his last posthumously published book, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964), Merleau-Ponty's main objective was to break out of these molds and blaze the trail towards an entirely new understanding of human and nonhuman animal beings as shaped primarily by their perceptual experience of and embeddedness in the world, a project Uexküll was also devoted to, albeit from a scientific rather than a philosophical perspective. Merleau-Ponty was heavily influenced by Uexküll's zoological writings and borrowed key concepts from him.

Merleau-Ponty insists that the body is the seat of consciousness and that the embodied subject is always already in the world, never set apart from it: "Rather than a mind and a body, man is mind with a body, a being who can only get to the truth of things because his body is, as it were, embedded in those things" (*World of Perception* 43). The body is not passive, inert, mechanical, and unthinking; it is not a composite of parts or a sensory receptor, which through some kind of linear process computes sensory data into something meaningful for the subject, nor is it extended substance. The subject is not at one remove from its body. Using himself as an example, he maintains, "I am not in front of my body, I am in it, or rather I am it" (*Phenomenology of Perception* 173). By insisting that he is his body, rather than merely in his body, Merleau-Ponty delivers the final blow to Cartesian dualism. The body can no longer be regarded as a vessel for the mind and/or soul, nor are the body and the mind or soul inextricably linked: they are one and the same thing.

This is a radical ontological claim and one that has major implications for animal ethics. For a start, with the body as the ground of subjectivity, it is no longer tenable to exclude animals, no matter what their proverbial species stripe, from membership in the community of subjects, or to hierarchize different creatures on the basis of their

possession or lack of any given set of traits, qualities, or capacities (such as the usual anthropocentric combination of reason, verbal language, and/or soul). To put it into crude syllogistic form, if animals are bodies, and bodies are subjects, animals are subjects. Of course, animals' historical designation as bodies qua sheer materiality, matter, and/or immanence, is part and parcel of their ruthless desubjectification and objectification. But, as we have seen, the body in Merleau-Ponty's analysis means something very different than sheer materiality. Embodiment is condition of embeddedness in an infinite range of other phenomenal worlds teeming with meaning-making beings. The body, Merleau-Ponty asserts, is "a nexus of living meanings" (175). The embodied subject is always already engaged in meaningful encounters with and in the world and the objects and beings it encounters (170).

Merleau-Ponty's theory of embodiment, which prioritizes the role of perception over cognition in shaping subjects' lives, provides us with a new perspective from which to understand animal ontology. Some might object here that if cognition is no longer relevant, then there is no meaningful ontological or ethical difference between trees, rocks, and animals. This would be a disastrous claim indeed, if this is what Merleau-Ponty is suggesting. But it is not. In fact, the crucial point Merleau-Ponty is trying to make is precisely the opposite: that the (human and nonhuman) animal body-subject is ontologically *distinguished* from other living beings and inanimate entities by virtue of its embodiment, which unlike the (differently valuable) existence of the aforementioned beings/things, is always already *conscious* and *intentional*, which is to say constantly generating meaning. Traditionally, cognition is considered the distinguishing feature between not just living beings/things and animals, but between "higher" and "lower" animals. Merleau-Ponty gets around this problem, too, not by disavowing cognition, but by putting it in its place, as it were, as one among many rather than as *the* defining feature of subjectivity. While cognition is one element of human subjective experience, perception, as we will see below, takes precedence over cognition as the intermediary between subject and world (*Phenomenology* 239). Crucially, unlike cognition, which by certain definitions may be ascribed only to human beings or certain mammals, perception is something that all embodied subjects partake of.

Merleau-Ponty's analysis of embodiment is also important for animal ethics because, as Ralph Acampora explains, it shifts the burden of proof from the defenders of animal ethics and rights to its detractors. If we begin by acknowledging that we are always already caught up in the experience of being a lived body thoroughly involved in a plethora of ecological and social interrelationships with other living bodies and people,

we “effectively transfe[r] the burden of proof from what has been denigrated as ethical ‘extensionism,’ or expansion ... to, instead, what we should rightly refer to as ethical isolationism or contraction (i.e., homo-exclusive anthropocentrism)” (5). In other words, in the framework of a philosophy of embodiment it is no longer a question of proving why other embodied subjects should be included in the ethical circle, but rather of proving why they ought to be excluded from membership in the first place.

Another important implication of grounding subjectivity in the body is that it potentially “re-animalizes” the human subject, an issue that is typically given much less attention in animal ethics than “humanizing” animal subjects (i.e., proving how similar they are to us). Merleau-Ponty makes this re-animalization of the human explicit in his later work. At one point, he proposed writing a book that would include “a description of man-animality intertwining” (*Visible* 274). Elsewhere he refers to “interanimal flesh,” or “interanimality,” which he defines roughly as “humanity that grounds the animal as animal, and animality that grounds man as man” (Smyth 178). We can understand this idea of “animality that grounds man as man” not in the sense that recognizing animals’ animality reinforces humans’ non-animality, but rather that humanity is nothing without animality (i.e. embodiment). Bryan Smyth notes that in his work on interanimality, “Merleau-Ponty was developing a view that revised the traditional hierarchical distinctions between human and non-human life and redrew them laterally as so many ways of being bodily with the common element of ‘flesh’” (178). It is through, or rather as, flesh that one body-subject relates to or with another: “The thickness of the body, far from rivaling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh” (135). Flesh is not a physical substance but an “‘element’ of Being,” like earth, air, water and fire, “a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being” (139).

Also pointing to the ethical potency of a theory of embodied intersubjectivity as laid out by Merleau-Ponty, Elizabeth Behnke suggests that, while Merleau-Ponty was not particularly concerned with the fate of nonhuman animals as such, his theories of intercorporeality, interanimality, *Ineinander* (i.e. “intertwining” or “interpenetration,” a concept first introduced by Husserl) and flesh clear the path for an “exploration of an intercorporeal/interspecies practice of peace” (94). She defines this practice of peace as the

particular shift in bodily comportment [that] simultaneously transforms this situation from a spectacle I confront (and attempt to dominate from

the outside) to a co-situatedness, a situation of which I myself am a part and in whose dynamics I am always already participating, whether I realize it or not (96).

The human-animal relationship manifested thus is not hierarchical, adds Benkhe, “but a lateral relation of kinship, *Einfühlung* [empathy], and *Ineinander* among living beings” (99). Although Merleau-Ponty did not develop the ethical implications of this notion of *Ineinander*, he certainly demonstrated that his iteration of phenomenology is mutually exclusive with species prejudice.

It should be noted that the concept of flesh in particular is not without its problems. The principal risk is that it implies a collapse of ethically relevant ontological distinctions between human and nonhuman animal subjects and living beings such as trees and plants and other entities such as rocks. As noted above, it would be catastrophic for animal ethics if the substantive ontological distinctions between human and nonhuman animals and other beings and entities were ignored. It is unclear how far Merleau-Ponty was going with this conception of flesh as a universal element of Being. However, one aspect of his theory of flesh can be mobilized to deepen our understanding of human and nonhuman animal ontology as characterized in part by a phenomenological corporeality, or conscious embodiment.

The call to revive (or perhaps reinvent) the incarnate principle, which we have long since abandoned (or perhaps never upheld) is compelling. Under the rule of Cartesianism we have exiled ourselves from the raw, pulsing universe of enfleshed beings into an imaginary realm of pure spirit. From this lonely and awkward place, as if in punishment for our cosmic error, we have lost touch with the very source of Being, which, as our everyday experiences and the most important aspects of our lives — our relationships with human and nonhuman loved ones — remind us, is touching flesh with flesh. Flesh is the source of connection, affection, love, creation, movement, activity, and of course also pain and loss. Animals are flesh of our flesh, and we theirs. That said, the danger of the concept of flesh outlined above might be so grave that it is best to leave it behind. Certainly, there is plenty more in Merleau-Ponty’s theory of embodiment upon which to build a more robust ontology and ethics, especially his theory of perception and world-making, the latter of which he borrows from Uexküll.

Tasting Yellow, Touching Blue: Perception and World-Making. Perception takes precedence over cognition in the phenomenological account of the subject. Merleau-Ponty explains

that the awareness of color and taste, for example, stem neither from ideas, nor from responses to stimuli, but rather from perceptual experience. Merleau-Ponty illustrates this aspect of perception by pointing to Jean-Paul Sartre's famous discussion of a lemon in *Being and Nothingness* (1943). The subject's perception of the yellow color of a lemon cannot be severed from its perception of the sour taste of the lemon. As Sartre puts it, "It is the sourness of the lemon which is yellow, it is the yellow of the lemon which is sour" (qtd. in Merleau-Ponty, *World* 48). The same goes for the perception of other foods and other objects. Sartre continues, "The fluidity, the tepidity, the bluish color, the undulating restlessness of the water in a pool are given at one stroke, each quality through the others." Not surprisingly, Uexküll makes a similar point when he suggests that "the sensation 'blue' becomes the 'blueness' of the sky, the sensation 'green' becomes the 'greenness' of the lawn, and so forth" (48). The awareness of blueness and sourness neither stem from ideas, nor responses to stimuli, but rather from perceptual experience.

We also learn that perception is never a one-sided affair. It is a multi-party exchange, which reconciles the perceiving subject and the objects of perception in a mutually enriching and reinforcing relation. David Abram emphasizes the activity of both subject and object and also of the multiple ways a single subject can perceive and experience the same object, depending on the former's mood. The subject and object are forever entangled in a dance, the steps of which are never quite the same with each passing moment (*Spell of the Sensuous* 57). The phenomenological recognition of the involvement of all the senses in participatory subject-object encounters also undermines both empiricist and idealist claims that we are passive recipients of sensory data or that we impose our own categories of understanding onto the world as sovereign subjects. In contrast to the objectivist position, which regards the world as passive and inert, the phenomenological position holds that both perceiver and perceived are actively involved in an intentional co-constitutive exchange. This is not to attribute false agency to objects. But rather to emphasize that perception mediates and shapes the subject's relationships with objects. The object itself "participates" in the exchange as a presence that is there prior to any conceptualization.

Further putting lie to the notion that animals simply react to external stimuli like a well-oiled mechanism, Merleau-Ponty and Uexküll both observe that each embodied subject dwells within a "perceptual field" or unique perceptual environment to which it relates as an extension of itself (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 4) — what Uexküll termed the *Umwelt*, a term that resonated deeply with Merleau-Ponty. The *Umwelt* is not the *earth* as physical substance, but world of a living being, the world of significance. The *Umwelt*

is not made up of objective phenomena. Rather, as Uexküll writes, “each and every living thing is a subject that lives in its own world, of which it is the centre” (52). Moreover, the *Umwelt* is never neutral, universal, or incidental, but is specific to each subject. What shines forth in one *Umwelt* for one subject might fade into the background for another, depending on the subject’s mood or perceptual infrastructure (Uexküll 97; Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 4). Each animal in fact co-constitutes its *Umwelt*. There is “a mysterious relation with the animal and the milieu it resembles” (Merleau-Ponty, *Nature* 185). It is as though each subject not only inhabits its *Umwelt*, but blends in with it, as a part of it, and as its co-creator. This “mysterious relation” is both ontologically and ethically significant. An animal removed from her optimal environment in which she can co-create meaning with the subjects and objects around her in a way that provides her with the greatest fulfillment, and placed into a sub-optimal environment or worse, where she is forced into a new kind of phenomenological relationship that undermines the fulfillment of her phenomenological entelechy, is done a great injustice. As a concrete example, we might think of an orca removed from the ocean amongst its pod, and placed in a foreign environment, say a small tank at a water park. The orca continues to have a mysterious relation with its new *Umwelt*, but the relationship is inevitably hostile, dysfunctional, and a source of misery.

Uexküll sheds further light on how animals create meaningful worlds for themselves in his discussion of objects as “carriers of meaning.” He explains that an object becomes a “carrier of meaning as soon as it enters into a relationship with a subject” (Uexküll 140), and every carrier of meaning in turn “becomes the complement of the animal subject” (146). Indeed, animals (human and nonhuman) never actually relate to “objects” per se but only to carriers of meaning, which they co-constitute (140). “Every subject spins out, like the spider’s threads, its relations to certain qualities of things and weaves them into a solid web, which carries its existence” (52).

The idea that specific carriers of meaning “carry” each animal’s existence is compelling because it highlights just how richly textured every moment of an animal’s life is, whether in optimal or sub-optimal circumstances, or anything in between. It also draws attention to the uniqueness of every animal life: different objects carry different meanings for different individuals. These same carriers of meaning may not even be noticed by other subjects, let alone related to in the same way, for each subject has its own carriers of meaning (Uexküll 140). With this in mind, we have yet stronger grounds for abandoning anthropocentric biases that lead to the hierarchical valuation of human above nonhuman animal life. What counts is not *what* meaning each object has to each

subject, but the fact *that* each object has some kind of meaning (or not) for each subject. Overall, the concept of *Umwelt* is important for rethinking human-animal relationality because it points to the holistic nature of animals' subjective experience. This provides a better framework from which to construct an ethics that properly attends to all aspects of animals' well-being — not just the physical or psychological, but also the phenomenological.

The Ethical Upshots

Magnifying the Delights and Horrors of Optimal and Exploitative Conditions Respectively. One of the ethical upshots of this recognition of the perceptual complexity of animal existence is that if we acknowledge that the objects in the world form tapestries of meaning for other animals, just as do they do for us, and that each animal inhabits its own multidimensional world, it is that much more incumbent upon us to create the conditions for other animals to have free and unlimited access to these meaningful objects and worlds. By way of phenomenology, we have a better sense, in other words, of what constitutes delight, flourishing, and fulfillment for other animals, and are therefore in a better position to protect animals' phenomenological well-being.

Merleau-Ponty and Uexküll's characterization of human and animal subjects as embodied purveyors of meaning accords ostensibly mundane or instinctual activities such as foraging for and consuming food with a kind of *existential* depth, something that other theories of the subject do not necessarily capture, or at least not as vividly. We learn from phenomenology that in the process of rooting for food, or rolling in the mud, a sow is not simply blindly rehearsing a set of pre-established behaviors, but is in fact becoming and being who she is. The pig's sense of satisfaction upon achieving her goal is not merely a result of being sated or cooled, but also an indication that she has just expressed herself meaningfully to, in, and with the world in general and her world in particular. When a hawk soars through the sky, he is not simply getting from point A to point B, but inhabiting what we might call from our (limited human) perspective a sky-world, but which, of course, he experiences in a way we cannot begin to fathom or explain with words. In short, phenomenology teaches us that other animals' worlds are filled with multitudinous colors, sounds, tastes, and textures and therefore meanings we may not have access to. There are qualitative differences between how human and nonhuman animals experience their worlds, but so too are there qualitative differences between how each human experiences its world(s). An interspecies ethics celebrates this infinite variety as the wellspring of creative activity, connectivity, curiosity, and even ecstatic transcendence, albeit not transcendence over and above the body, but with it

and through it. To reiterate, we can never know the precise contents of an animal's conscious or lived experience — nor should we aspire to for this will be impossible without engaging in invasive and violent practices, which in any case would only yield distorted results — but, with the help of phenomenology, we can perhaps see a little more clearly how imbued with meaning and depth the most seemingly banal activities are for other animals.

For example, we might surmise that in addition to taking on a secure “dwelling tone,” to borrow yet further from Uexküll’s esoteric terminology, a hen’s nest may take on a “love tone,” for she knows her young, to whom she is tending so gingerly, will emerge from it one day. When she feels and hears the first pecks through their hard protective covers, the nest may take on a curiosity and excitement tone. And, of course, the same nest will take on an entirely different tone for each chick discovering it for the first time — the “effect tone,” perhaps, of the unknown. A cow munching on grass is not just revitalizing her store of energy. In the process of acquiring her next meal, she is not simply blindly rehearsing a set of pre-established behaviors. Rather, she is becoming who she is and ought to be. Her sense of satisfaction upon achieving her goal is not solely a result of being sated, but also an indication that she has just expressed herself meaningfully to and in the world. In their daily activities, animals are expressing their very essence, however fluid in evolutionary terms that essence might be.

With the phenomenological conception of the subject in mind, we have to account not only for the absence of suffering, or even simply for what provides animals with pleasure, satisfaction, and the ability to develop their capabilities, but for the presence of species- and individual-appropriate carriers of meaning. It also creates a new degree of attentiveness in us to other animals’ subjective experiences, thus inspiring yet more meticulous care and concern. It is not possible here to tease out in concrete terms what this new attentiveness would amount to, but it is clear that once we recognize the richness of animal existence and their perceptual sensitivity, nothing short of a complete transformation of their conditions of existence is necessary. At the moment, we entrap them in cold, sterile, drab worlds with carriers of meaning that, though we may not be able to capture the precise phenomenological experience, undoubtedly carry distressing meanings such as unwelcomeness, aloneness, sadness, and alienation, among other things.

While phenomenology moves us away from the focus of animals as primarily suffering bodies, it does not eliminate suffering from its purview. Rather, and indeed to the

contrary, it provides *greater* insight into the phenomenological aspects of suffering, which are typically ignored. It thereby raises the stakes of the struggle for animal liberation. For example, when analyzed through a phenomenological lens the cruelties we inflict on other animals within the animal industrial complex are magnified ten-fold. In a phenomenological account, it becomes immediately and irrefutably apparent that to deprive animals of even one meaningful object (e.g. grass or sunlight) is already to strip them of several layers of meaningful experience, to say nothing of the devastation we cause when we deprive them of *all* their familiar carriers of meaning. New carriers of meaning undoubtedly present themselves in labs, factory farms, and other sites of violence. The white coat of the lab technician, for example, might be the white of terror, dread, fear, pain, and betrayal for a dog, cat, rabbit, macaque, or rat cowering in his cage or container. The smell of blood and gore emanating from the slaughterhouse is very likely the smell of desperation and anguish for the cow or pig waiting her turn. For the chimpanzee, the barren cage or crate very likely carries the effect tone, not of housing or protection, but of isolation, deprivation, boredom, and loneliness. For the circus elephant, the grey of her concrete cell is the grey of misery, while the grey of her fellow elephants, if only she could be reunited with them, would be the grey of security and contentment. For the self-mutilating mink in his outdoor cage on a fur farm, the white of snow is no longer the white of home and kin, but of hopelessness.

Thus, phenomenology reminds us that animals not only suffer physical pain and emotional anguish, but are also subjected to a process of total phenomenological distortion whereby every object in their environment, and indeed their own bodies, are a source of their own existential negation. Since the animal is irrevocably shaped and transformed by her environment, if the environment and the activities possible within it are out of synch with what comes naturally to her, her life is stripped of the meaning that makes it worth living. It becomes abundantly clear that the only ethically sound solution from a phenomenological standpoint is to eliminate the infernal hellholes that constitute the animal industrial complex and to provide sanctuary and refuge to animals in welcoming spaces that are designed to provide optimal opportunities for their phenomenological unfolding as perceptual beings.

Fostering an Ethics of Empathy. In the end, phenomenology urges us to nurture and develop our repressed empathy for other animals. Maurice Hamington observes that Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh in particular kindles universal empathy, an empathy for others who are, in some sense, also constitutively a part of oneself. "On this account," Hamington writes, "experience is understood as open ended both temporally and laterally across other bodies" (211). As different as each being is ontologically, we

all partake of the same elemental substance, and therefore can be said to share each other's joys and pains. This fundamental mutuality is at the core of interspecies intersubjectivity, for it implies a community of embodied, enfolded beings, who, as ontologically alien as they might otherwise be, are nevertheless always already conjoined by the shared experience of mortality. Kenneth Shapiro maintains that empathy "is the general access to the intended world of the other" (191). While conventional usages of the term empathy refer to feeling another's suffering, a phenomenological usage refers to participating in another's world, if only partially. He explains that from Merleau-Ponty's perspective, "empathy is a second-order application of the notion of intentionality. Empathic experience involves appropriating a second body that then becomes my auxiliary focus. Though my lived body, I accompany yours as it intends an object" (191). Empathy thus understood is much more comprehensive than simply feeling bad for another's suffering or imagining oneself in their proverbial shoes. Phenomenological empathy involves perceptually accompanying another's body through its lived experiences, good and bad.

The relocation of the subject and consciousness in the body intensifies our empathic attentiveness to other animals' vulnerability. Acampora suggests that the phenomenology of embodiment enjoins us to develop our intrinsic "corporal compassion" and cultivate a "post-humanist ethos of somatic sympathy" (237). Regardless of the myriad variations among species, even a "minimal mutuality of common carnal nature suffices phenomenologically to establish compassionate concern for the other." Just being a body (i.e. an animal) is enough to warrant the adoption of a compassionate comportment, not as a matter of choice, but as a matter of permanent obligation. He echoes ecofeminists such as Josephine Donovan, Carol Adams, and Lori Gruen among others, who remind us that we are already empathically oriented towards other animals, but that our empathy has been actively suppressed as a means of perpetuating their exploitation.

Killing Subjects, Losing Worlds: The Insurmountable Injunction against Killing. More than just inspiring empathy, phenomenology inspires a prohibition on killing not least because it uncovers the radical violence and injustice that killing entails, something which, as we saw above, Singer and Nussbaum fail to do, and which Regan could do better.

A phenomenological ethics inspired by Merleau-Ponty and Uexküll, however, does not allow for this kind of lingering and vicious anthropocentrism to undermine the

commitment to protecting the lives of all embodied beings, irrespective of their capacity for future planning or even self-awareness. From a phenomenological perspective, whether or not an animal can be killed painlessly, as Singer surmises, is irrelevant. To kill is, as Regan insists, to subject an animal to the harm of deprivation. But, unlike Regan's deontology, which despite itself lapses into anthropocentrism by according greater value to human life, the deprivation is equal for any embodied being precisely because, as we have seen, each animal's world is as meaningful to it as another world is to another animal. Killing, simply put, is not a matter of extinguishing a life within a split second and never looking back. Killing is a practice imbued with phenomenological meaning of its own, both for the killer and the killed. The killer shatters the continuity between himself and the animal he murders. He cuts off, as it were, his own flesh despite himself, which he then cannibalizes in the destructive act of consumption. He shatters his own creative world and replaces it with a death-world.

One of the lessons we learn from Merleau-Ponty and Uexküll's phenomenology is that to kill a subject is to kill a whole world — indeed, an infinity of worlds. We have seen how animals co-create meaning with objects and subjects in their environments. As we noted above, perceptual embodiment is participatory, which means that it requires other subjects for it to take place. Each time we extinguish an animal subject we extinguish the worlds she inhabited and also the worlds we and other embodied subjects would have co-created with her. To kill a single animal, then, let alone tens of billions, is to tear asunder the world, and the worlds that make it up.

In his phenomenological analysis of species extinction, Mick Smith argues that extinction is "senseless" because it cheats the still living of the multitudinous "senses" the departed invited us to partake in while still of the earth (22). Smith enumerates five devastating losses: (1) *"The loss of a species of appearances in the world — of the innumerable ways in which beings become materially manifest in the world such that others sense their presence"* and the loss of the possibility of "touching and being touched" by the extinguished ones; (2) *"The loss of species of creative involvements in the world — of their unique contributions to and effects upon others and of the material possibilities offered through their worldly interventions"*; (3) *"The loss of a species of significance for the world"* and the "curtailment of that species' (bio)semiotic potential"; (4) *"The loss of a species of openness on the world — of phenomenological experiences of a sensed world,"* that is, the loss of a particular phenomenological way of experiencing the world (as, for example, in "the dodo's mode of experiencing the ecology of Mauritius"); and (5) *"The loss of a species constitutive of ecological community — where ecological community might be understood in terms of the combination and sharing of*

all these senses (appearance, effect, meaning, phenomena) of the relations between all of these and all other things that together compose the world" (22).

In other words, no loss is limited to the vanquished species themselves, but constitutes a phenomenological, as much as an ecological, loss for all. The first loss is the loss of the possibility of novel sensuous encounters, the second of the worlds that only the extinct could have co-created, the third the loss of a layer of "significance" that only the absent species (and its individual members) could have conveyed, the fourth is the loss of a particular world that would have been inhabited by the annihilated species, and thereby enriched the worlds of others, and the fifth is the loss of a member or members of a community whose flourishing depends on the presence of all.

We can take Smith's argument a step further and argue that not only extinction, but also the mass murder of animals in the animal industrial complex — and, by extension, the homogenization of animals by way of selective breeding and genetic engineering — constitutes another profound loss: the loss of the brilliant constellation of unique worlds that we would co-create with animals were they able to construct their own worlds in a way that is continuous with their telos and phenomenological unfolding. The loss of each and every individual animal to our insatiable appetite for their flesh and body parts, to our callous indifference, to our sadistic fascination with violent power is a loss of the gentleness, respect and compassion that is integral to the survival of our species and of the Earth itself.

The injustice of killing is the injustice of robbing an animal of the meaningful life it would have otherwise led. Phenomenology, in other words, compels us to recognize that killing an individual being is not an isolated act, but, if you will, an act of total and irreversible destruction against an entire community of phenomenological subjects. One can never recreate the world another created, even if one participated in its creation. A community is hurt not just by losing a friend, a mother, a sister, or a brother, but by losing the thick world of meaning the slain invited them to enter and with which their own worlds were built. We cannot rebuild the worlds we have lost, but we can prevent the loss of more worlds by adopting a phenomenologically grounded ethics of non-killing.

Towards an Ethics of Re-enchantment and Epistemic Humility. While providing insight into the perceptual dimension of animal subjectivity, and thus offering a stronger foundation for developing an interspecies ethics, phenomenology also beckons us, and

indeed requires us, to renounce any false sense of omniscience we might have, and instead to accept that only partial knowledge about other animals is ever possible. This in turn paves the way for a re-enchantment of the world.

Re-enchantment has been advocated by a variety of thinkers over the past two hundred and fifty years — from the Romantics from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, to the early Frankfurt School in the early to mid-twentieth century, and to contemporary ecophenomenologists such as Neil Evernden and David Abram. The significant historical and contextual circumstances that distinguish the various thinkers from the traditions outlined above notwithstanding, they collectively aspire to restore a sense of awe, wonder, and humility towards the natural world and its inhabitants, which Enlightenment rationality, industrialization, and, more recently, technological rationality — which reduces beings to objects of calculation and control in service of capital — have seriously undermined. For critical theorists generally, and ecophenomenologists in particular, the hope is that by engendering a renewed sense of appreciation for the magnificence of nature and nonhuman beings, a broader cultural shift will ensue which will redirect late modern society away from systemic barbarism and towards respectful, non-exploitative, and mutually reinforcing engagement with human and nonhuman beings.

The assumption underlying the call to re-enchantment is that the drive for “progress” (qua industrial development, “economic growth,” scientific innovation and increasing control over and manipulation of nonhuman life) has produced a totalitarian apparatus of violence against nonhuman animals. Re-enchantment can help counter these trends by offering an opportunity to revalue nonhuman beings from an entirely different vantage point. To be sure, re-enchantment is a seemingly abstract and intangible aspiration. But re-enchantment is not meant to be programmatic or to provide concrete solutions to the civilizational crisis we are facing. As Evernden insists, “even to deal in terms of problems and solutions would defeat [the] purpose” of a discussion of re-enchantment, because “it is in thinking in such terms that characterizes the conventional [instrumentalist] world-view and condemns us to continue in this path of existence” (140). In this vein, I argue that, while it cannot and ought not to provide practical solutions to various crises of our civilization, a progressive re-enchantment of the world can serve as the backdrop for the radical historical transformation that is required to overcome our culture of cruelty. Overall, the goal of re-enchantment is to help us once again to “believe in the simple magic of life,” and so to salvage what remains of the dying world and its inhabitants.

Phenomenologists' explorations into the structure of animals' experiences in general, and of suffering and flourishing in particular, foster re-enchantment by restoring depth and meaning to other animals' lives, and also potentially augment our capacity for interspecies empathy. I suggest that phenomenology also nurtures re-enchantment by restoring a sense of mystery to the natural world and its inhabitants, which the project of modernity has made a concerted effort to destroy. By affirming that there is always already something that exceeds the grasp of our totalizing knowledge, phenomenology challenges us to proceed with perpetual humility.

To claim to fully know another is to claim ownership over it, to dominate it, and to disenchant the world. To recognize and appreciate the other's radical otherness, on the other hand, its ultimate uncontainability, unknowability, is to preserve the other's freedom and to reveal the "the simple magic" of existence. Uexküll's project was to unearth the truth about the as yet unknown or misunderstood nonhuman world, but at the same time to revel in its inscrutability. He suggests, for example, that his phenomenological biology is meant to lead us on "a walk into unknown worlds," not only to try to know those worlds, but also to enjoy the perpetual unknowability they confront and seduce us with (Uexküll 41). Merleau-Ponty maintains that in breaking free from the confines of objectivism, the phenomenological reduction uncovers the "magic," the nuances and unbridled vitality, of the phenomenal world (Merleau-Ponty, *World* 39). Like modern artists such as Paul Cézanne, the phenomenologist brings the world and the perception of it back to life so that we are newly "*filled with wonder*" at the world. From this novel vantage point, the world appears "strange and paradoxical," not in a derogatory sense, but rather in the sense of producing a feeling of *rapture* (*Phenomenology* xv). Abram, meanwhile, contends that we live in a magical world inhabited by an infinite number of beings we might (or might not) be able to perceive, but may not necessarily ever truly *know*. For Abram, magic does not necessarily consist in contacting the supernatural or spirit-world *per se*, but rather in acknowledging that the world is inhabited by "multiple intelligences" whose intelligences are apparent, but not entirely accessible (*Becoming Animal* 269). Simply by virtue of being a world populated by other perceiving subjects, the world is a magical place. This magical world is not a world projected in fantasy, but the world in its dense and exuberant materiality. The task is simply to open ourselves up to appreciating its splendor on its own terms (Abram, *Spell* 10).

In restoring the earth and its nonhuman animal inhabitants to their resplendence by way of the phenomenological foray into their only partially accessible Umwelten, re-

enchantment provides a powerful form of resistance to technological rationality, which is expressly geared towards eliminating all the magic from living beings and reducing them to economic calculations of value. In the infinite repeatability it revolves around, mass production operates on a logic that is diametrically opposed to life itself. "The mass-produced artifacts of civilization, from milk cartons to washing machines and computers," Abram explains, "draw our senses into a dance that endlessly reiterates itself *without variation*" (*Spell* 64). The repetition of form and content is the hallmark of late capitalist modernity, which spews forth not only identical inert objects, but also, barely-living-slave-commodities. As mass-produced objects in biotechnological laboratories, factory farms, and so on, nonhuman animals are condemned to a torturous uniformity and a ceaseless repetitive tedium. The re-enchanted world, on the other hand, is infinitely variegated and constantly surprises she who beholds it. "The patterns on the stream's surface as it ripples over the rocks, or on the bark of an elm tree, or in a cluster of weeds, are all composed of repetitive figures that never exactly repeat themselves" (64). This unrepeatability and unpredictability of which Abram speaks breaks every rule of rationalization. Certainly, for animals to flourish as subjects, they must have the opportunity to engage with the world spontaneously and creatively.

The recognition of another's unknowability is also ethically powerful because it evokes and requires a renewed sense of humility from the human subject in the face of the not-fully-knowable nonhuman other. The empathic understanding that one can "extrapolat[e] from Merleau-Ponty's corporeal epistemology is always partial, always incomplete, should always reflect a certain humility given its ambiguities, and yet it exists" (Hamington 216). Humility is a core value of any phenomenologist. "The philosopher [viz., the phenomenologist] ... is a perpetual beginner, which means that he takes for granted nothing that men, learned or otherwise, believe they know" (*Phenomenology* xv). What assures me that there is more to the other than meets the eye is that it existed "before," or exists "outside" and beyond my encounter with it, and also that others perceive it too in ways that are meaningful for them, but not necessarily for me (Abram, *Spell* 39). Furthermore, if we are "carnally embedded within the sensuous field," we are bound by the limits of our own corporeality, and therefore "we have only a partial view of each entity or situation that we encounter; there is no aspect of this world that can be fathomed or figured out in its entirety" (Abram, *Becoming* 269). The acknowledged limits of the phenomenological analysis are indication enough that there is always so much more to the world than we can grasp at any given moment.

In response to the instrumentalization of knowledge and animals in his time, Michel de Montaigne argued that it is a grave error to arrogantly assert "*Je sais tout*" ("I know

everything”) rather than humbly asking the perennial rhetorical question: “*Que sais-je?*” (“What do I know?”) (13). By admitting there will always be something in the other animal which remains beyond our grasp, there is less incentive to subject animals to cruel experiments in an attempt to extract every last iota of information we can from them in our mad rush for increasing scientific and technological power

Behnke maintains that embracing other animals’ unknowability is part and parcel of the “interspecies practice of peace.” By renouncing the claim to total knowledge about an animal other, one becomes more “responsive” to what it might be communicating to us. As she puts it, “adopting an interrogative attitude that relinquishes the project of knowing in favor of a responsive comportment ... contributes to improvisational comportment in general and to the practice of peace in particular” (Behnke 107-108). The “improvisational comportment” is critical to creating peaceable relations because it allows both parties to break out of the molds into which they have been cast based on incorrect and prejudicial — but nevertheless widespread — assumptions. Thus, while phenomenology inspires us to learn more, it also inspires us to take a proverbial step back, to relate to the nonhuman through a kind of humble disengagement, a letting-go and a letting-be.

Conclusion. Without a rich ontology, a rich ethics is impossible to develop. Phenomenology cannot provide this ontology or ethics on its own, nor need it do so. There are other accounts of animal ontology in animal studies literature that we can draw upon to develop stronger ethical frameworks than Singer offers. But without phenomenology’s insights, our understanding of animal subjectivity will remain unnecessarily limited, and so will our ethics. I have sketched out what a phenomenologically inspired ethics would consist of: a firm prohibition of killing other animals and a stronger and more comprehensive commitment to ensuring that they have all the means possible to fulfill their phenomenological entelechies. Adopting a phenomenological ethics also means letting go of our pursuit of knowledge-as-power over animals and relishing instead the mystery and magic of their existence.

Acknowledgments. The publication of this paper would not have been possible without the generous support of the Abby Benjamin Postdoctoral Fellowship in Animal Ethics and the invaluable guidance and feedback I received on various drafts from Will Kymlicka, Sue Donaldson, Asher Horowitz, John Sanbonmatsu, and Robert C. Jones.

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