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Animal Individuals: a Plea for a Nominalistic Turn in Animal Studies?

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the concept of ‘animal individuals’ and puts forward a nominalistic approach. Nominalism is an ontological thesis (only individuals exist), but also an epistemological claim: the idea that our “nouns” are practical tools for a quick dispatch of things, but do not correspond to anything real. Hence for a consistent nominalist, “animals” do not exist, except as a powerful fiction. First, we show that the word “animal” commits what we call (after Plato) “fallacy of the crane”: it encompasses a huge range of living entities, which have only one thing in common: they are not humans. Differences between our term “animal” and the ancient Greek “zoon” also show the fluctuating boundaries of “animality”. Besides, our ways of speaking systematically deny individuality to non-human animals.

The philosophical meaning of the term “individual” implies a genuine dimension of artistic singularity and a political claim for emancipation. Portrait of apes are striking instances of such individuality, captured by photography, together with art produced by animals. Methodologically, this leads also to collection of anecdotes, and a focus on animal biographies. Eighteenth-century controversy between Buffon and Condillac helps us understand what is at stake in the tension between species and individuals. Buffon claims that each non-human animal species can be represented by a “specimen”; whereas Condillac shows that animal individuals feel like us and that their nature is impenetrable to us. Finally, a focus on individuals is not only a way to renew or extend historical methods. Biologists are also increasingly concerned with individuals. They develop tools to distinguish individuals from one another: “animal bertillonage” for morphology, and question standard norms of behaviour and preferences. This emphasis on animal individuality has not only theoretical, but also ethical, and legal upshots.

Keywords: Individuals. Biographies. Anecdotes. Animal Portraits. Animal Art. Specimens. Nominalism. Bertillonage.

When invited to think about animals and history, some will refer to dogs, others to cows; a few others to tigers, bears or crocodiles. At first, this list strikes by its heterogeneity: most of these animals are domestic —pets, cattle, or game; others belong to major wild species. But at the same time, there is a striking uniformity among those animals, as most of them are mammals, or at least vertebrates. Few would think that “history of animals” refers also to spiders, flies, bees, jellyfishes, worms, or many other barely visible creatures. Our spontaneous understanding of what “animal” means refers to vertebrates rather than non-vertebrates, and to macro-organisms, rather than micro-organisms. So the term “animal” is biased in two different symmetrical ways: we unite under this term a diversity of living entities; but we also make spontaneous assumptions that the only animals who deserve our attention are more or less “like” us, *i.e.* superior vertebrates, like the notorious “big 5” or “big five game animals” (namely the lion, the elephant, the Cape buffalo, the leopard, and the rhinoceros) who now make the fame of African national parks.

The “animal” word is very ambiguous: “they” come under a very broad range of shapes, from moths to whales; “they” make sense only insofar as they are related to “us”: worms are interesting animals only if they are silkworms; mosquitoes only if they are treated as pests and bacteria as diseases, *i.e.* related to human lives in some way or the other. This seems to create a sharp contrast between historical and biological accounts of animals: an history of animals seems to be necessarily human-centred; while a biology of animals (also called a zoology) seems to take into account the diversity of animal lives as such. In biology, the fruit-fly, the xenopus or the nematode are model organisms vested with theoretical relevance. In history, by contrast, the sole valuable insight would be concerned with the human usage of animals, or the impact animals have on humans. This paper tries to overcome this methodological cleft by using the concept of individuals and putting forward a nominalistic approach. Nominalism relies on an ontology of individuals: for a consistent nominalistic view, the only kind of entities that exist is *individuals*. This entails an epistemological thesis: the idea that our “nouns” are practical tools for a quick dispatch of things, but that our general terms do not correspond to anything real. Nominalism is a radical philosophical position, especially as it contradicts Aristotle’s claim that there is science only inasmuch as there is generality. But if a “scientific” knowledge of the individual is prohibited, what of an history of individuals?

First, this paper sets the ground for a nominalistic stance as it stresses the conceptual intricacies of the word “animal” and points at drawbacks pertaining to any classification and terminology (Part 1). Then the paper embraces a nominalistic perspective: it looks for the philosophical or epistemological upshot of taking individuals into account (Part 2). A focus on an eighteenth-century controversy between French naturalist Buffon and philosopher Condillac helps us understand what is at stake in the tension between two different levels: the species and the individual (Part 3). Finally, the paper suggests that a focus on individuals is not only a matter of interest for renewing historical methods, but that it is also a concern for biologists (Part 4).

I/ Out of the Animal Pitfall?

1.1. The *Animot*

Most, if not all, western discourse on “animals” is spoiled by a persistent and all-pervading fallacy, embedded in our use of the word “animal”. They, are the animals, the

brutes, while we are different¹. This entanglement of naming and representing “the brutes” was brought to the fore by Jacques Derrida’s illuminating neologism, his concept of the “animot”. “Animot,” which sounds in French like the plural form of *animal* (*animaux*), is a “mot-valise”, a portmanteau word designating the animal-word². It is an ironical neologism, which captures the moral and cognitive ambivalence of the word “animal”: we use “animal” to describe all living beings *except us* while it has a powerful effect in shaping our views of what (or who) animals are, and in determining our practices towards them.

“Animal” is indeed a very efficient word that empowers us and allows us the magical trick of severing us from all other animals. In the first place, it has the political power of coalescing all differences, bringing together a heap of different beings, under a single category. After all, classificatorily speaking, what do the tiger, the whale, the chicken, the blue tit and the ant have in common: they all are “animals”. But strikingly so, we tend to feel that what concerns animals does not concern us. The word, “animal”, magically sets us aside, preserving us from any defilement. This is the key argument made by a philosopher with phenomenological leanings, Etienne Bimbenet, in a book called, “*L’animal que je ne suis plus*” (the animal that I’m not any longer — a pun on Derrida’s title)³. While acknowledging that we humans share in some (Darwinian) ways a common origin or descent with other animals, Bimbenet discards all sense of kinship as being now irrelevant to understanding the meaning of human activities. The Darwinian argument may be true, Bimbenet argues, but it does not apply any longer: undeniably, we have been animals, but no less undeniably, we are no longer animals, as ethology proves that our perceptions, our worlds are different⁴.

The word “animal” still has a powerful impact on the way we think *of them* as apart *from us*. Using a word like « animal » to designate all living entities except us, is a flawed category. Our words are an act of denial, and Derrida’s *animot* powerfully designates and encapsulates the magical linguistic trick that we play to all (non-human) animals.

1.2. The Greek *zoon*

If Derrida’s *animot* efficiently captures our philosophical entrenchment in the bad habit of separating ourselves from other animals, we have to get a better understanding of what is at stake in the word *animal*. I will now compare our understanding of the concept “animal” with the Greek word *zoon* (plural: *zoa*). Is *zoon* a good equivalent to “animal”, and potentially, another kind of *animot*: a political tool to separate “them” from “us”? To understand this, we must determine if the Ancient Greeks used the term *zoa* so as to include “humans” or, on the contrary, in order to separate systematically *zoa* from humans. What do the word *zoon* stand for?

Francis Wolff argues that the term *zoon* was invented in order to mark a difference with humans: Greeks classically distinguished between humans and *ta alla zoa, the other*

¹ Élisabeth de Fontenay, *Le Silence des bêtes*, Paris: Fayard, 1998.

² Jacques Derrida, *L’animal que donc je suis*, Paris: Galilée, 2006, 73.

³ Étienne Bimbenet, *L’Animal que je ne suis plus*, Paris: Gallimard, 2011. The book was awarded in 2012 the Dagnan-Bouveret prize from the French *Académie des Sciences morales et politiques*.

⁴ In his book, Bimbenet develops a phenomenological reading of ethological research, in order to get a better understanding of “what it is like to be a (non-human) animal”.

*animals*⁵. *Zoa*, in this case, designates a collective with fuzzy lines, that quite resembles our understanding of what an “animal” is. In support of this claim, Wolff and others remind us that the Aristotelian worldview includes a hierarchical chain of being⁶. Let us consider, on that subject, Aristotle's polemic with Anaxagoras. While Anaxagoras thought that hands helped develop intelligence (thus competing as a possible “forerunner” to Darwin), Aristotle flipped the question upside down, claiming that: it is not because humans have hands that they are intelligent; but the other way around: it is because humans participate to the *logos*, to the rational order of the world, that they were given hands. Similarly, the upright position of humans is interpreted as a sign of their being in harmony with the order of the cosmos. Humans stand upright because their stature corresponds to the order of the universe, which is a sign of their godly nature: by contrast, the plants, which also have a vertical bodyplan, are upside down, with their “mouth” (their roots) at the bottom⁷. In the Aristotelian universe, *telos* (purpose, end) plays a central part: Aristotle refers to “inferior” animals as *atelè*, imperfect, and to humans as “the most accomplished animal” (*teleutaion*). This suggests a hierarchy of degrees of perfection between animals⁸. In short, humans are the highest among earthly creatures; while they are fully living creatures, they raise above life in order to reach the divine world⁹. It is with this in mind that Aristotle emphasizes the idea according to which animals are somewhat “dwarfed”, or “dwarf-like”, compared to man. In *Parts of animals* (IV, 10 686 b 2), Aristotle explains: “By ‘dwarf-like’, I mean to denote that which is big at the top (i.e. big in the trunk or the portion from the head to the residual vent) and small where the weight is supported and where locomotion is effected.” In other terms, *dwarfed* means: the upper parts are bigger and stronger than the lower ones. Being dwarfed insists on the maladjustment of *ta alla zoa* to the order of the universe, while only the human being is the full development of its natural *telos*. Children, like animals, are “dwarfish”¹⁰.

However, this teleological reading is contradicted by Aristotle himself in other texts: for instance, Aristotle states that the categories *zoa* and *humans* overlap, and that *zoon* includes both humans and oxen¹¹. Besides, Aristotle attributes to *zoa* the use of *phronesis* (prudence)¹². Aristotle also seems sceptical about the meaning of the word *zoon*: in chapter 14 of *Metaphysics Z* (1038 b 1-1039 b 19), he denies any existence to the *zoon* “as such”. Aristotle claims that we seem to understand *zoon* in the same sense when we speak of a horse and of a human being (1039 a 29). Thus we understand that the word *zoon* is a unified *logos* (an idea with a clear concept). But as a result, *zoon* designates at times a bipedal entity, and at other times a tetrapedal (four-legged) entity.

⁵ F. Wolff, « L’animal et le dieu, deux modèles pour l’homme », in *L’Animal dans l’Antiquité*, Gilbert Romeyer Dherbey (dir), Barbara Cassin and Jean-Louis Labarrière (eds), Paris : J. Vrin, 1997.

⁶ *History of Animals*, VIII, 1, 588 b 22-24.

⁷ *History of Animals*, I, 15, 494 a 27-b 1; *Parts of Animals*, II 10 656 a 7-13.

⁸ *History of animals*, V 1, 539 a 8-15.

⁹ See *On the soul*, I 4 408b 29 and *Parts of animals*, II, 10, 656 a 7-13.

¹⁰ *Progression of animals*, 710b 9.

¹¹ See Aristotle, *Categories*, chapter I, 1 a 8.

¹² See Jean-Louis Labarrière, *Langage, vie politique et mouvement des animaux: études aristotéliennes*, Paris: Vrin, 2004 ; *La condition animale : études sur Aristote et les stoïciens*, Louvain-la-Neuve-Paris-Dudley (MA): Peeters, 2005 ; see also « Raison humaine et intelligence animale », available online : <http://terrain.revues.org/996>.

This flexible use of the term leaves open the kind of realities of the *zoon* involved in each and every animal (1039 b 14). This intrinsic confusion is an argument why Aristotle rejects the term *zoon* as somehow irrelevant. Besides, it should be noted that this text (the conclusion of chapter 14) is an anti-Platonic argument: for Plato, *zoon* is an *eidos*, a form or idea with a separate existence; whereas Aristotle claims that there is no “idea” (*eidè*) of animal independent or separated from individual animals. In the Aristotelian world, only individual animals exist, and no general “animal”.

Plato himself may support such a nominalistic view of the “animal”. In the *Statesman* (263d), he refers to the *fallacy of the crane* which means, stated simply, that, as soon as any group classifies other living beings, they except themselves from the categories they build. It is always *we* alone against the rest of the animals, as if we do not share anything with them. We classify all beings except us on one side of a Great Divide, and we stand alone on the other side. According to Plato, the crane would probably discriminate and distribute all living beings between cranes and non-cranes, *ta alla zoa* : it would include human beings in the non-cranes, and the general category would be labelled beasts (*theria*). Not very differently from the crane, the Greeks kept the word “humans” for themselves and called all other people “barbarians” — a word that referred to the sounds they were making, a way of animalizing, or brutalizing them. Such a text supports the idea that “animal” is, first and foremost, a political concept, deprived of any grounds in reality.

Besides, there are different texts in which *zoa* and *animals* are not exact synonymous and do not follow the same logic. In Greek, *zoa* are usually opposed to *phyta* (plants), thus covering what we usually understand as animals. But this is not always the case in Classical thought. While scholars have persistently emphasized the analogy between *zoa* and animals, in Plato’s *Timaeus* (77b), plants are included among *zoa*. Let us also mention that, in the same dialog (*Timaeus*, 30cd), the world itself is a *zoon*. In other texts, *zoa* also include gods, which contradicts our usual understanding of what an animal is. Should *zoa* rather be translated as “animate beings”? The Greeks also used the term “*empsycha*”, which designates entities with a soul, and of which *zoa* is not a strict equivalent. So what are *zoa*? They encompass several entities, gifted with sensibility, movement, reproductive powers.

It is clear that the term *zoon* functions in many ways like our word « *animal* ». But the fact that the two concepts do not exactly match, allows a critical outlook on the naturalness of our own category, — which makes the nominalists raise a sceptical eyebrow. As we have seen, humans consider that they are apart from all other animals (“the brutes”) and they label this class with the word “animal”, a catch-all category for all non-human living entities. Similarly, the crane, as depicted by Plato, has an irrepressible tendency to set itself apart from all other living beings. But there is no logical rationale to the fallacy of the crane as *animals* and *zoa* do not exactly match, suggesting that there are different ways of shaping the category of “others”.

1.3. Is “animal” really the source of linguistic abuse?

This comparison between *animal* and *zoon* suggests a nominalist approach of our concepts. However, the ethnocentric abuse of classification cannot suffice to disqualify the human need to classify: after all, can we discard all general terms if we necessarily think in types and tokens?¹³ Here, our nominalistic stance should take a radical guise. It should always be kept in mind that, in contrast to the category “furniture”, divided in

¹³ This point was raised by John Zammito in his comment to the first draft of this paper.

“chairs” or “tables”, the category “animal” (the *animot*) has massive political consequences as it entails a politic of massive killing. The “animal” concept may well be a logical mistake, as it subsumes all animals *except us* in one category. But it has also more practical effects as the slaughtering of millions of animal individuals. This is what I call “linguistic abuse”: the “animot”, the fact that we call them “animals”, allows us to kill them. “Animal” works as a legal category, whose ultimate meaning is that *killing an animal is not a murder*.

However, this argument may be considered too broad: as, for instance, pets are bred, but not eaten or killed, and they may even be protected by anti-cruelty laws. It may be the case that more specific categories could be better targets for political goals. After all, if what Derrida was after with his *animot* was to achieve some sort of “animal liberation”, then a focus on other categories like “cattle” might well be more efficient.

However, there are several shortcomings to the concept of “animals”: it is an umbrella term, where spiders, snakes, worms and elephants are included in one category. As a result we don’t know what we are talking about when we refer to “animals”. Our question is now: is there any good reason for which the “animal” category should not be discarded; are there good ways to refer to “animals”? In 1749, the French naturalist Buffon claimed that all possible criteria fail when it comes to bring about the ultimate difference between animals and plants¹⁴. As a result, he ended up forging a general category of the “organic”, including all plant and animal living entities into one single category: there are no “plants” and no “animals”, only “organic” or “living” matter.

Buffon was probably too radical on this point, but his personal theoretical agenda gave him good reasons to criticize the animal category: he was on his way to creating *biology* and he needed for this, general concepts that would apply to all living things.

But beyond Buffon’s critics, it should be reminded that *animal* is above all a very ordinary concept : a quick way to dispatch things in boxes, and a useful tool for knowledge. One could argue that “animal” can be a useful way to describe a form of life: as opposed to plants or rocks, as when Linnaeus divided “*naturalia*”, natural beings, into three kingdoms: *animalia*, *vegetabilia*, *mineralia*¹⁵. It seems that there are two major intuitions underlying our understanding of “animal”: (a) a living being (hence not a mineral), that is not a plant; (b) a living being that is not human. If we want to circumvent the fallacy of the crane, and consider that there are human and non-human animals, we need not discard altogether the “animal” category: we can criticize (b) but retain (a). We may keep the word “animal” (as different to plants) and use it as a subject for new rights and protections. Strikingly enough, this is what most animal rights supporters do. They ask why human beings are mysteriously excluded from the “animals” — so they reject (b); and they reclaim new rights for “others”, “non-human animals” —so they assume the animal category as (a).

Derrida’s neologism targets the animal word in general, but maybe abusively so. There is obviously something potentially wrong with our language, but maybe “animal” should not bear all the burden of guilt on its own. Surely enough, in the long course of history, “animalizing” human beings has been a common path leading to extermination¹⁶. But several other linguistic abuses have been repeatedly noted by philosophers. Issues of

¹⁴ Buffon, “*Comparison of plants and animals*” (1749), in *Histoire Naturelle générale et particulière*, Paris, Imprimerie Royale, 1749-1788, 36 vol, vol. 2.

¹⁵ Carl Linnaeus, *Fundamenta botanica*, Amsterdam: Salomon Schoutten, 1736.

¹⁶ See for instance, Sven Lindqvist, *Exterminate all the brutes*, New York : New Press-Norton, 1996.

language have been a constant concern to supporters of the animal cause, who have measured the impact of naming practices. Feminists like Ruth Herschberger have repeatedly emphasized how the power of naming informs our practices of domination: “The names you uncaged primates give things affect your attitude to them forever after”¹⁷. In 1823, Jeremy Bentham stressed the bias of legal terminology: whereas human beings are called *persons*, non-human animals are debased into the class of *things*¹⁸. By the end of the nineteenth century, vegetarian essayist Henry S. Salt (1851-1939) also noted: “Something must here be said on the important subject of nomenclature. It is to be feared that the ill-treatment of animals is largely due—or at any rate the difficulty of amending that treatment is largely increased —by the common use of such terms as “brute-beast,” “live-stock,” etc., which implicitly deny to the lower races that intelligent individuality which is most undoubtedly possessed by them.”¹⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer also highlighted the fact that humans use the neuter pronoun “it” to refer to highly organized beings such as the dog and the ape²⁰. The implication is that we should extend to non-human animals the practice of referring to them by the pronouns he/she (instead of it) and the possessive adjectives his/her (instead of its). Those various linguistic abuses point towards the same core: our language is not only wrong by excess of generality and the term “animal” is not the sole responsible of our wrong moral behaviours; our ways of speaking of “them” tacitly involve a massive denial of animal individuality. In order to avoid the *animot* fallacy, it seems that one route that could be taken points towards animal individuality.

II/ The Animal Individual Route

I want to explore now the focus on individuality as one of the most powerful strategies that contemporary thinkers have marshalled against the conceptual mistake of the *animot*.

I want to understand how, and in what measure, the individualistic view can help us circumvent the shortcomings of the “animot”. However, I do not ignore that there are several limits to making the focus on “animal individuality” a sound way for thinking with animals.

First, we have to break a powerful epistemological taboo, as, since Aristotle, the knowledge of the individual is prohibited. All scientific knowledge necessarily deals with generality. The individual can only be depicted, artistically, but not really or scientifically “known”. This epistemological obstacle raises the issue of our preconceptions of what science is, and what it should seek. Especially, is history constrained by the same type of methodological agenda?

Secondly, the idea of animal individuality may easily lead to anthropomorphizing the non-human animals. The animal individual route would be a form of deep anthropomorphism.

¹⁷ Ruth Herschberger, *Adam's rib*, New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1948, quoted by Donna Haraway, *Primate visions. Gender, race and nature in the world of modern science*, New York: Routledge, 1989, 1.

¹⁸ Jeremy Bentham, *An introduction to the principles of morals and legislation*, London: Pickering, 1823.

¹⁹ Henry S. Salt, *Animal's rights considered in relation to social progress*, London, 1894.

²⁰ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The basis of morality*, London : S. Sonnenschein & co., 1903, 219-221.

Thirdly, there is no clear evidence that there is a strong tie between an ontological stance like the individualization of animals and some alleged ethical positions: individualization does not necessarily entail ethical or political generosity towards animals, and it is equally compatible with brutalizing. It should also be claimed that individuality may be a spatially and historically situated way of looking at things. I have to answer some of these claims and to stress the operability of considering the “animal” as an individual, as it involves forcing humans to confront their own perceptions of what an animal life is, and how much it’s worth. Elisabeth de Fontenay published a 1978 article entitled “La bête est sans raison” (The brute has no reason) which was dedicated to “Leyla, cocker spaniel”²¹. In contrast to soulless, animal “brutes”, Leyla was the embodiment of an actual dog, one who shares the “*domus*”, the home, one with whom I have a personal, intersubjective relationship, one whom I would never consider soulless. In a similar fashion, in her *Companion Species Manifesto*, Donna Haraway doesn’t speak of “dogs” in general but of one specific dog: Mrs Cayenne Pepper, with whom she has had a sustained and meaningful kissing relationship, which she playfully labels “oral intercourse”. This personal characterization of Miss Cayenne Pepper contrasts sharply with anonymous “dogs” which exhibit reflex action, as in Buffon’s *Discours de la nature des animaux*, or which salivate at will, as in Pavlov’s experiments.

As we can see, for both Haraway and De Fontenay, individualizing is a philosophical tool used to fight against Cartesianism and the reduction of animals to brutes and of brutes to matter. Interestingly enough, Descartes himself cared for a dog, whom he called “Monsieur Grat”²². Not only Descartes had a dog, but he called him « Monsieur », like a human person.

As Jacques Bouveresse ironically commented: “it would probably never have occurred to him to call his clock ‘Madame Une telle’, even if he thought that animals are nothing but clocks, although much more complex than ordinary clocks”²³. Whatever the value of these objections may be, there seem to be a clear individualistic turn in animal studies that should be brought to the fore.

2.1. What is an individual?

A first way to answer the objections earlier raised, is to consider that there are several competing definitions of the individual. We don’t need to go too far in the analysis of the concept of the individual, but some of the major features of this concept may be underlined.

A common claim is that *individual* derives from the Latin *individuus*: what is such that division won’t destroy its essential properties. So the crucial experiment of individuality is division: for instance, if you divide a human being in four parts, he/she dies, and each of his/her parts also dies. Thus understood, the individual relates to the category of

²¹ Élisabeth de Fontenay, « La bête est sans raison », *Critique*, vol. 34, n°375-376 (1978), 707-729.

²² Adrien Baillet, *La Vie de Descartes* (1691), reprint Hildesheim ; New York : Olms, 1972, vol. 2, 456.

²³ Jacques Bouveresse, *Descartes et son œuvre aujourd'hui*, Sprimont: Mardaga, 1998, 119. This anecdote has gained considerable popularity among supporters of the animal cause. See for instance Robert Maggiori, *Un animal, un philosophe*, Paris: Julliard, 2005, 53; Vinciane Despret and Jocelyne Porcher, *Être bête*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2007, 18.

indivisibles²⁴. This claim may be supported by the fact that for Cicero, *individua corpora* are the Latin translation for the Greek *atomos*, or, in other terms, *indivisible*²⁵.

The discovery by Abraham Trembley in 1744 that freshwater polyps have the capacity to regenerate, or to multiply when sectioned, was a radical challenge to the idea that animals are individuals, leading Buffon for instance to redefine individuals as composed of individuals²⁶.

French philosopher André Lalande (1867-1963) answered to this view and distinguished *individuals* from *indivisibles*. He argued that, for instance, although a factory is in some way indivisible, it is not an individual. Even if the different parts resulting from the division of a human being were alive, those parts would not be as many different individuals, Lalande claims. Why is that so? For Lalande, an individual is above all a logical term, designating the *genus minimum*, the level beyond which no other subdivision is possible. For instance, Greeks can be logically divided into Athenians, Beotians, etc. ; Athenians into citizens, slaves, etc.; citizens into Socrates, Plato, Critias, etc. But Socrates or Plato cannot be divided again. In other words, the individual exists only in relation to a genus and a species, within the framework of logical division. Individuals are a matter of classification and subdivision between elements and classes. Eventually, the question of individuality raises the question of *heccéité*, the fact of being here and there, of being this one which I can point at. In the case of the parts resulting from the division, Lalande claims, the pieces are not the species of a genus: there is no logical division involved, no sense of individuality. So where is true individuality to be found? For Lalande, true individuality is epitomized by the artist. When we refer to the individuality of the artist, we do not mean he/she is indivisible: we refer to a personal, original way of seeing things:

“Individualism is the affirmation of what one is, in opposition to what one is not, of the self in opposition to the non-self. This is the heart of the idea. This is the tendency towards what distinguishes the beings one from the other, the opposition to what merges or combines all beings in one solidary action; the opposite of socialism for instance, in the field of politics; or the opposite of the taste for imitation and fashion in the mondaine world. *Si omnes, ego non* [If all, then not me], this is the motto of individualism: freedom for each, is the first claim of its program.”²⁷

From Lalande’s analysis, we understand several important points relevant to the question of individuality.

First, individuality is undeniably a political term; historically situated, in connexion to liberalism. As such, it may be an appropriate tool to achieve the political goals of defeating the “*animot*” fallacy, as it focuses on each singular individual and reclaims “freedom for each”.

Secondly, individuality also has a broader philosophical meaning. As a logical term, individuality is not contradictory to generality: individuality denotes the ultimate term of a logical division: it makes sense only *in relation to* (rather than *in opposition to*) some general concepts. In other terms, focusing on animal individuals is not departing from

²⁴ For instance, Félix Le Dantec, *L’individualité et l’erreur individualiste*, Paris, Alcan, 1898.

²⁵ Cicero, *De Finibus bonorum et malorum*, Book I, section 6.

²⁶ Buffon, *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*, vol. 2, 19.

²⁷ André Lalande, *La dissolution opposée à l’évolution dans les sciences physiques et morales*, Paris: Alcan, 1899, 76-77.

the Aristotelian dictum that there is only knowledge of the general. Talking of individuals is just a change of focus.

Finally, individuality is undeniably linked to personality. If individuals are not objects, they are also not metaphysical persons —endowed with an immortal soul. Personality is best understood with a reference to art. The artist epitomizes at best the meaning of individuality, giving us a good hint to identify where to look for animal individuals in culture. Disruptive behaviours, misbehaviour or resistance, might be good markers for individuality.

2.2. The Portrait of an Ape

The reader of Frans de Waal's *Peacemaking* is struck by two kinds of illustrations in the book²⁸. It opens with an illustration of monkeys, and no caption: a few pages later, one comes across a double page featuring four different species of apes: chimps (*Pan troglodytes*), bonobos (*Pan paniscus*), Rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta*), Stump-tailed macaque (*Macaca arctoides*). In these pictures, an animal individual stands for "the" chimp, as if the individual was only a token of a type. In the remnant of the book, most of the pictures describe an individual with a personal name: for instance, Tepel jumps over his son to protect him against an attack from Dandy. The fact that those chimps have names conveys the idea that they are individuals, with peculiar behaviours, with their own sets of interests and emotions, and a personality.

Philosopher of science, photographer, and friend of apes, Chris Herzfeld embodies this way of confronting the viewer with animal individuality. In an article that asks *what it is like to be face to face with a great ape*, Herzfeld presents photographic portraits of great apes, like Victoria, a 28-year-old female gorilla, that Herzfeld met in 1996, at the Antwerp zoo. Herzfeld maintains that portraits underscore both the individuality and the autonomy of the animal, a tradition of portraiture that dates from the Renaissance²⁹. Portraits of individual apes are not restricted to high art and museum galleries. Apes as animal individuals are also everywhere in the press: one well known example of this was the mourning of Gana, an 11-year-old female gorilla at the Zoo of Münster, Germany, who held her dead baby for days in August 2008. Old bestiaries suggest that animals have funeral rites, and that they grieve for their losses³⁰. As Vinciane Despret notes: "Photographs awaken stories; as to portraits, they make it into history, or rather, they make one enter into history. Only those who matter are portrayed, — even if they begin to matter only because they have lent themselves to the portraitist's interest."³¹

Plates with specimens, individuals standing for their group or species, open the wider question of visualization: How can a painting or picture stress the individuality of the individual? How can an individual animal be made, through visualization, a specimen, an emblem of its species? A specimen is a *lieutenant*, an old French word which comes from *tenir lieu de*, to stand for, to be a substitute for. The specimen, as a lieutenant, stands for all its congeners; it is a symbolic organism within the same group. But who are the

²⁸ Frans de Waal, *Peacemaking among Primates*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

²⁹ Chris Herzfeld, "Victoria", in Pascal Picq, Dominique Lestel, Vinciane Despret & Chris Herzfeld, *Les Grands singes. L'humanité au fond des yeux*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 2005.

³⁰ See my « Funérailles animales. À propos de bêtes qui savent enterrer leurs morts », *Études sur la mort*, special issue « L'Animal et la Mort », n°118 (2000), 99-119.

³¹ Vinciane Despret, "Portrait de personne avec fourrure", in *Les Grands singes. L'humanité au fond des yeux*, 75-119.

“congeners”? And what does the individual primate stand for? Following the work of Donna Haraway, let’s consider the corpse of the individual gorilla shot in 1921 in the “heart of Africa”: he was, Haraway writes, “transfixed into a lesson in civic virtue in the American Museum of Natural History in New York City”³². This ape does not stand for himself: he stands for his own species. But more than this, he stands for us humans; he stands for a certain form of civilization: the alpha male reigning over his docile mates. As Haraway notes: “in European, American, and Japanese societies, monkeys and apes have been subjected to sustained, culturally specific interrogations of what it means to be ‘almost human’”³³. When I see an ape, I don’t see an ape as such: I see a representation of the origins of man; I see a cousin, or a “brother” — with a tendency to anthropomorphism that we should probably tame, or caution against. I see a representation of what it means to be “98% human”³⁴.

A representation of such animals can never be innocent. With apes, “the bodies and lives of third world’ animals” serve as ‘surrogates for man’³⁵. Haraway comments on a painting by Tom Palmore: *Reclining Nude* (1976), currently owned by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. At first sight, the gorilla is individualized by the setting and by the fact that it is presented as a classical female nude. Here the gorilla portrait underscores the status as animal as individual since we immediately associate such representations with individuality. But Haraway’s comment bears on other features of the canvas: she takes the painting as evidence that “western primatology is simian orientalism”³⁶. This opens the question of the connexion between animal studies and post-colonial studies. Animals, Haraway convincingly argues, stand for something else. In the wake of post-colonial studies, the question of who’s entitled to speaking in the name of animals has become increasingly important. Indeed, the notion of *standpoint* has become a powerful tool in the hands of the supporters of the animal cause. To a certain extent this harkens back to Marx, who wrote in the context of an analysis of the concept of “class”, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: “They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented”. This question dovetails with Gayatri Spivak’s seminar essay “Can the subaltern speak?,” where she distinguishes between two meanings of representation: *vertreten*, as in politics, to speak for somebody else; *darstellen*, or pictorial representation³⁷. The individualization, or *Darstellung* of animals taking place in contemporary culture is certainly a political gesture of voicing the subaltern, a step towards *Vertretung*, an ideological attempt designed to give voices to those who must be represented. An effective ways of avoiding the pitfalls of *representing* (*darstellen*) has

³² Donna Haraway , *Primate visions*, New York: Routledge, 1989, 2.

³³ *Primate visions*, 2.

³⁴ Jonathan Marks, *What it means to be 98% Chimpanzee : apes, people and their genes*, Berkeley ; Los Angeles ; London : University of California press, 2002. In French, see also the debate between E. de Fontenay, « Variations sur le 1% », in G. Chapouthier (ed), *L’Animal humain. Traits et spécificités*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2004, 13-27, and Alain Prochiantz, « Mon frère n’est pas ce singe », *Critique*, n°747-748, 2009 (732-744).

³⁵ *Primate visions*, 2.

³⁶ *Primate visions*, 10.

³⁷ Gayatri Spivak, « Can the subaltern speak? », in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1988.

involved a growing interest in art produced by animals³⁸: if animals are artists, then they are individuals since artists embody radical individuality.

2.3. A bestiary of anecdotes

In the early-modern bestiary, individual animals often stood for their species and each species stood for a definite virtue. Pierre Bayle's seventeenth-century *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, opened the question of contradictory moral virtues by conflating two different kinds of animal models: if we should live under the moral guidance of animals, which one should we take as a moral example, the coy and pure dove or the profligate sparrow or pigeon?

But strikingly enough, more than species symbolizing virtues, the old bestiaries are replete with anecdotes. Samuel Bochart in his *Hierozoicon* (II, LVI) presents the case of the dog of the cemetery of the Saints-Innocents, who slept for three years on the tomb of his master³⁹. The Jesuit Noël Regnault also remarked the abundance of individual cases that was carried by tradition: "Every day, we make new observations on animals. Plutarchus, Eliaen, and Pliny, have whole volumes stuffed with such cases. In these books, once a dog is so angry that he discovers the man who murdered his master; another one lets himself die from hunger and grief; this one follows his master on the pyre into the middle of the flames; another dog drinks in the Nile only while running, from fear of being eaten by crocodiles; another dog plays a part in a play on stage, and gets applauded by all spectators..."⁴⁰

In contemporary ethology, a new bestiary gives a prominent place to the *anecdote*. The role and perhaps even ontology of the anecdote has been addressed by Mark Bekoff, whose book, *The emotional lives of animals*, is dedicated to two animal individuals: Jasper and Pablo. Jasper was an Asiatic black bear, who came to the Animals Asia Moon Bear Rescue Centre in Chengdu, China, from a bear farm, where he had been kept in a tiny cage, so the farmer could extract lucrative bile from his gall bladder⁴¹. Pablo, born in 1970, also known as matricule CH-377 was a chimp who wound up at the Institute for Primate Studies at the University of Oklahoma and was later transferred to the LEMSIP⁴² in 1981. In 10 years at LEMSIP, CH-377 was darted 220 times and had over 30 punch liver, bone marrow and lymph node biopsies.

For Bekoff, such case-studies are personal animal life histories. They should not be called "anecdotes", as they are, rather, documents and tools for a philosophical challenge to the *animot*.

Philosophers, however, often reject reasoning by means of "anecdotes" as suffering from *anthropomorphism*, or artificially representing animal behaviours as more human than

³⁸ See Thierry Lenain, *La Peinture des singes*, Paris, Syros, 1990, and his article: Thierry Lenain, "Animal aesthetics and human art", in J.B. Bedaux and B. Cooke (eds), *Sociobiology and the arts*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1999, 239-250. D. Guvwa et J. Ehmann, *To whom it may concern. An investigation of the art of elephants*, New York: Norton & Cie, 1985.

³⁹ Samuel Bochart, *Hierozoicon, sive Bipartitum opus de animalibus Sacrae Scripturae* (1663), fourth ed., Leyden, C. Boutesteyn & S. Luchtman, 1712, 2 vol.

⁴⁰ Noël Regnault, *L'origine ancienne de la physique nouvelle*, Paris: J. Clousier, 1734, vol. 1, 289-290.

⁴¹ <http://www.all-creatures.org/articles/ar-beartapping.html>

⁴² The Laboratory for Experimental Medicine and Surgery in Primates (LEMSIP), a New York University research facility founded in 1965.

they really are. Nonetheless, anthropomorphism is a compelling way to suggest that the animal is, like us, an individual subject⁴³.

The perspective of writing the lives of animal individuals, famous or anonymous, opens new roads for historical research. Zoographies, like biographies, have been and could be written.

Not only the life of Alexander but that of his horse Bucephalus; not only the life of the Duke of Wellington, but that of his horse Copenhagen⁴⁴. That would lead to a collection of biographies of great (non-human) individuals. Like portraiture, biography is a genre with its own rules. Several writers have been playing with and against the literary conventions of the biographical genre, applying it to animals. Virginia Woolf wrote the biography of a literary dog, Flush, the charming little cocker spaniel who shared the life of the poetess Elizabeth Barrett while she was confined to her sickbed. Franz Kafka wrote the autobiography of an ape in his *Report for an Academy*⁴⁵.

Of course, not all animals may be susceptible of such a biographical treatment. Our biased understanding of what “animal” means is easily conveyed by the term “animal individuality”: “animals individuals” are, almost necessarily, vertebrate macro-organisms. When it comes to “mosquitoes” their empire has been described, but not in terms of individuality⁴⁶.

Let us note however that there is also a growing trend towards “biographies of things” or “of techno-scientific objects”⁴⁷. Like Corbin’s *Monde retrouvé de Louis-François Pinagot*⁴⁸, a focus on animal individuals might elicit new attempts to recover in details, the lost richness of sunken worlds. As Erica Fudge makes clear in our own contribution to this volume, there is no such thing as “the” cow, there are only individualized cows, personal acquaintances in the household, leading to a kind of micro-history à la *Ginzburg*. Attention to individuals and to the group to which they belong is central in the work of Japanese primatologists, who have stressed the importance of individual variations of behaviours in macaques, and the way they originate new “subcultures”⁴⁹.

3. What does a portrait stand for? Reading the Buffon/Condillac controversy

⁴³ See Lorraine Daston et Gregg Mitman, *Thinking with animals. New perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

⁴⁴ See Gary Shaw’s paper, this volume.

⁴⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Flush, a biography*, London : published by L. and V. Woolf at the Hogarth press, 1933. I am indebted to Kari Weil for the example from Woolf. Kafka’s *Report* plays a prominent role in Weil’s book, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

⁴⁶ J. R. McNeill, *Mosquito empires: ecology and war in the greater Caribbean, 1620-1914*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2010.

⁴⁷ Lorraine Daston (ed), *Biographies of scientific objects*, Chicago : University of Chicago press, 2000.

⁴⁸ Alain Corbin, *Le monde retrouvé de Louis-François Pinagot : sur les traces d'un inconnu, 1798-1876*, Paris, Flammarion, 1998; translated by Arthur Goldhammer, *The life of an unknown : the rediscovered world of a clog maker in nineteenth-century France*, New York : Columbia University Press, 2001.

⁴⁹ Syunzo Kawamura, « The process of subculture propagation among Japanese macaques », *Primates*, 2 (1959), 43-60.

The focus on animal individuals is by no means a novelty or an invention of primatology. In the eighteenth century, artists quite commonly painted the portrait of individual animals. For instance, Alexandre-François Desportes (1661-1742) painted Louis XIV's favourite dogs on decorative wooden panels for the doors and the anterooms of Marly's castle. In the portraits of dogs by Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755), individual animals are portrayed: Misse, Turlu, Luttine, Lise or Gredinet. These individualized animals contrast markedly with the engravings in Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*⁵⁰. Although Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* is related to the culture of aristocracy (several animal corpses were bequeathed by their former aristocrat owners to Buffon for the King's Cabinet), the engravings, which illustrate his work, have a totally different meaning from the artistic renderings of favourite pets. Buffon denies that animals have a face: he claims that they only have "the mask of a human figure"⁵¹. The mask is an illusion: it conceals the mental emptiness of apes and monkeys under the guise of individuality.

3.1. Representing the species

Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* is richly illustrated. But what do those various animals stand for? Its engravings do not depict animal individuals; they depict specimens, *i.e.* each animal is portrayed as *a lieutenant of his/her species as a whole, or at least, of a definite group or type within the species*. In Buffon's plates, only types are depicted: the Ox, the Horse, the Ass... Most of the time, one individual is enough for depicting the whole species. Presentations of females are rare. *The Panther* is an exception. Sometimes subspecies or breeds are isolated and fixed by the engravings: for instance, twenty-one varieties are isolated within the Dog species (the Doguin, the Islandic Dog, the Greyhound...).

In doing so, Buffon is being provocative : he does precisely what Claude Perrault refused to do. In a forerunning project supported by the Paris *Académie Royale des Sciences*, Perrault followed a true Baconian method: he depicted the animal individuals one after the other and refused to generalize. A diachronic analysis of the different editions of the *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire naturelle des Animaux* (1671, 1676...)⁵², brings clear evidence of Perrault's resistance to general views. For instance, the 1671 depiction of the "Coati Mondî" becomes in 1676, "depiction of two coatis". Perrault never goes as far as depicting "the" coati.

Buffon, on the contrary, depicts all species but few by one specimen type. An exception to this is the Giraffe, which Buffon considered insufficiently known at the time (He provided his readers with an engraving in the Supplementary volumes). Another quite striking exception to the "one species, one engraving" rule, is the human species. Strikingly enough, Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* does not include any representation of the human species. What will be presented, throughout the nineteenth century, in the guise of Adam-and-Eve-like pairs, is absent from Buffon's original work. Absence of specimen shows that Buffon believes that when humans are presented, they are always singularities, with an individual name. Individuals may stand as representation of a pathology or monstrosity — always a singularity. They never stand for a general

⁵⁰ See my *Buffon illustré. Les gravures de l'Histoire naturelle (1749-1767)*, Paris: Éditions du Muséum national d'histoire naturelle, 2007.

⁵¹ Buffon, *Nomenclature des singes* (1766), in *Histoire Naturelle*, vol. 14, 41.

⁵² Claude Perrault, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire naturelle des Animaux*, Paris, Imprimerie royale, 1671; 2nd ed, 1676.

category called “humans”, or even for any natural sub-group of humans that could be called a “race”.

Buffon depicts several cases of extraordinary humans in the *Supplements*: the “white *négresse*” Geneviève, a female albino named Maria Sabina, who Buffon examined in May 1777⁵³; and a young girl suffering from vitiligo and a series of other human monstrosities or anomalies.

In the main body of the *Histoire Naturelle*, the human species is not pictured, although Buffon devotes more than a hundred pages to the study of the varieties in the human species. This is a clear sign of Buffon's commitment both towards the unity of the human species and towards the spirituality of the human soul (hence, the radical individuality of each human being). In fact, in place of a human specimen, Buffon only gives a table, taken from the *Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society*, which represents the various passions of the soul⁵⁴. On the contrary, an entire non-human species is encapsulated in a single individual in Buffon's iconography. Buffon contrasts human *individuals* and non-human animal *species*. For Buffon, each human being is a singularity endowed with a spontaneity, and acts differently from all other humans: this is linked to the fact that each human being has a personal soul.

What Jacques de Sève's engravings capture is also perceptible at the level of the behaviour. Buffon considers that all animals in one species behave in the same way (what is usually termed: “instinct”). As a result, Buffon tries to account for what he considers the unity of behaviour among the various individuals of one single species: “if one wanted to attribute a soul to animals, one would have to make only one soul per species, to which each individual would equally participate, hence, this soul would be necessarily divisible, and therefore, it would be material and very different from ours”⁵⁵. If animals had a soul, it would be only one soul per species, as they all behave in a similar way. As a result, all animal individuals would have to partake to the one soul of their species, and thus this soul would have to be somewhat divided between them. Such a soul would be totally different from a human soul, which is indivisible.

3.2. Condillac and the “nature of animals” debate

In the mid 1750s, Buffon and his contemporary the Abbé de Condillac engaged in one of the primary debates related to the potential individuality of animals, namely, the question of animal souls. What we analyzed earlier through the Derridean “animot”, is framed during the Buffon/Condillac controversy in a constant discussion of the “nature” of animals.

In his *Traité des animaux* Condillac accuses Buffon's description of animal sensibility as lacking consistency. He argues that one can detect a tension in Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*, which combines both an interest for animal intelligence and a materialistic mechanistic stance. For instance, Buffon praises the intelligence of the elephant, while depicting animals as soulless machines. For Condillac, however, there are only two

⁵³ This albino woman was born on 12 October 1736, in Matuna, a plantation that belongs to the Jesuits in Carthage. Her parents were two black slaves, named Martiniano and Padrona. Although the caption on this “piebald girl” clearly indicates two black genitors, the man who sent the portrait to Buffon suggests that she is the offspring of a black woman and a white man; to which Buffon replies (13 October 1772), that he thinks she actually is a crossbred offspring of a *blafarde*, or white *négresse*, and a black *nègre*.

⁵⁴ See *Histoire Naturelle*, vol. 2, plate 8, 536.

⁵⁵ *Histoire Naturelle*, vol. 2, 441-2.

possible (and consistent) philosophical positions related to the animal question: the continuous scale of Aristotelian faculties (which supports animal sensibility and intelligence in a gradual fashion) or Cartesian dualistic mechanism, which denies both sensibility and intelligence to all animals except humans. Any mixture of the two (like Buffon's), he argues, would be doomed to collapse from its inner contradictions. It is striking that Buffon supports contradictory claims on the question of the "nature" of animals. As previously noted, Buffon's *Comparaison des animaux et des végétaux* (1749), shows that there is no radical difference between animals and plants. He challenges the common understanding of what "animal" stands for and concludes that the animal/plant dichotomy should be replaced by a broader concept of the organic. But when it comes to comparing non-humans and humans animals, then Buffon argues that we can say something of what animals are. Buffon boldly entitles his text "*Discourse on the nature of animals*" (following his "*Discourse on the nature of man*"). Buffon compares animals and plants, and explains their different relationships; but when it comes to human and non-human animals, then Buffon simply *negates* instead of *comparing*: by "negation", I mean that Buffon states something positive on humans and then simply denies it to all other animals (for instance: human soul, is *indivisible*, while animal souls are *divisible*)⁵⁶. In an explicit contrast to Buffon's hybridic program, Condillac explicitly denies the possibility of such metaphysical discourses on "natures"⁵⁷. For Condillac, interestingly enough, the term "animal" is just an abstraction, which artificially extracts the common features existing between different notions that we have of various creatures ("dog", "horse", etc.)⁵⁸. In addition to that, Condillac thinks that we simply cannot feel the way *they* feel: sensations are always a first-person experiment and subjectivity is not substitutable. Hence, access to "natures" is denied to us. However, a sound assumption is that, if they feel, they feel like us: there is only one way of feeling.

A similar opposite divides both authors on the question of animal souls: if animals have a soul, do they have an individual soul? Or do they have only one soul per species? Buffon attributes one soul per species, a stance that Condillac rejects. Instead, he tries to explain any resemblance between individual behaviours as an effect of their common set of needs.

In his *Treatise on sensations* (1754), Condillac paints the development of an individual being (a statue) by granting it one sense after the other. First the statue is endowed with the smell, then with hearing, taste, sight, and then, finally touch. Consequently, each individual is endowed with the ideas that he/she has received through his/her senses: individuals who lack one sense have less ideas or different ones⁵⁹. Condillac's statue is

⁵⁶ I analyzed this ambiguity as resulting from two different methods: the "way of comparison" and the "way of negation". See my *Buffon: Histoire Naturelle et Philosophie*, Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005, 675 *sqq.*

⁵⁷ See Condillac's preface to his *Traité des animaux* (1754), Corpus des Œuvres de philosophie en langue française, Paris: Fayard, 1984, 312.

⁵⁸ *Traité des Systèmes* (1749), Corpus des Œuvres de philosophie en langue française, Paris: Fayard, 1991, chapter 1, 3-4.

⁵⁹ This theory was supported by Diderot in his 1749 *Letter on the Blind*. Diderot described the blind English mathematician Nicholas Saunderson (1682-1739): what do the blinds know? Or, to put it the other way around: is the sight responsible for the development of mathematics? Or do we owe our sense of abstract geometry to other senses (namely the touch)? Saunderson, whom Diderot stages for various philosophical purposes, helps us understand that his lack of sight is not an obstacle to the acquisition

also a powerful tool to understand how various individuals can have similar ideas. Regularities within the human species point to similar perceptions among different individuals, and are explained by the resemblances between perception and bodily organisations. Given the fact that several individuals share the same body configuration, the argument goes, they will probably acquire similar sets of ideas, and thus be able to communicate.

Condillac's statue stands not only for a human being: it is a much more general model, encompassing all sorts of sentient beings, endowed with various sets of senses. Through the experimental device of the statue, Condillac's understanding of perception and bodily organizations extend to non-human animals. But unexpectedly, Condillac also embodies the paradoxical case of a philosopher who affirms both a continuity and a discontinuity between human and non-human animals⁶⁰: we humans owe all our ideas to our sensations, but although animals share the same senses and feel exactly like us, if not, at times, more acutely than us, they remain different from us and somehow inferior to us. Condillac's text is pervaded with an unjustified sense of human self-importance. For Condillac "brutes compare, judge, have ideas and memory", and therefore can't be assimilated to automats⁶¹. But brutes are unable to abstract, and are deprived of capacity of "reflection", that Locke had defined as "that notice which the mind takes of its own operations"⁶². Humans, on the other hand, are able to "go in and out of themselves" ("*il rentre en lui-même, il en sort*")⁶³. Hence, breaching his own commitment to the idea that natures are beyond our reach, Condillac concludes that "if we could penetrate into the nature of these two substances [*i.e.* the soul of a human and the soul of a brute, TH], we would see that they differ infinitely. Our soul is not of the same nature as that of the brutes⁶⁴." In spite of his defence of animal sensibility: Condillac failed in his effort to replace the logic of the *animot* with a more encompassing view where there is no strong divide between them and us. He also developed philosophical tools to pluralize our notion of what an animal is, and on the other side, to unite all animals (including us) in a common way of feeling, but he eventually fell back in the animal pit and declared that their nature and ours are by no means the same.

4. Biological relevance of animal individuals

Part 2 has dealt with the question whether a nominalistic commitment to individuality leads to the rejection of all general terms. Part 3 with a focus on the Buffon/Condillac debate opened the question of the type of relationship between the individual and the species. Do all individuals in one species follow the same morphological/behavioural patterns? Or is there any space left for singularity within the species? Part 4 will now

of abstract geometry. Saunderson's exquisite sense for mathematical abstraction belittles what we thought we owed to our eyes.

⁶⁰ On this, see Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005, 248.

⁶¹ Condillac, *Traité des animaux* (1755), chapter I, 5. Corpus des Œuvres de philosophie en langue française, Paris: Fayard, 1984, 333.

⁶² John Locke, *An Essay on human understanding*, chapter II, 1, edited with a foreword by Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford : Clarendon Press; New York : Oxford University Press, 1979, 105.

⁶³ Condillac, *Traité des animaux*, II, 5, *ed. cit.*, 382.

⁶⁴ Condillac, *Traité des animaux*, II, 7. *ed. cit.*, 397-398 : « si nous pouvions pénétrer dans la nature de ces deux substances, nous verrions qu'elles diffèrent infiniment. Notre âme n'est donc pas de la même nature que celle des bêtes. »

answer the (Aristotelian) challenge that a focus on animal individuality would be “unscientific”. I now want to show that the idea of animal individuality is not confined to philosophical cenacles or conferences of postmodern scholars appointed to humanities faculties. Similar trends towards an individualistic perspective on non-human animals can be identified in recent biology. First biologists have developed tools to identify individuals. But secondly, several biologists have recently attempted to challenge the idea of stereotyped animal roles, especially female roles and male roles, and have called for a notion of animal singularity.

4.1. Animal bertillonage

Researchers on animal behaviour and conservationists have developed methods for identifying individual animals in order to 'capture' their singularity. In ecology, the purpose is often to give an accurate census of a population; ethologists are concerned with knowing who is who in order to describe the life history of an individual animal or to make inferences about his/her home range. When needed, artificial tagging has always been a practical tool to accomplish both of these tasks. But naturalists have also devised a set of natural marks, a sort of non-human equivalent to Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914)'s fingerprints and system of identification⁶⁵.

French philosopher and ethologist Dominique Lestel (born 1961) developed a notion of “individuality without a face”⁶⁶. He analyzed the techniques developed by naturalists in order to recognize individual subjects. For instance, he noted that elephants were individualized by different parts of their body: by the shape of their trunks, or by the edge of their ears; zebra by the unique structure of their stripes; sperm whales also have special marks on their fins, etc.

A 57 page monograph entitled “Marking and tagging of aquatic animals” by L. Emery & R. Wydoski, compiles 166 references on biological marks of identification (with an emphasis on fish)⁶⁷. B. Würsig & T.A. Jefferson's “Methods of photo-identification for small cetaceans” provides a good review on the methods for identifying whales⁶⁸.

American mammalogist, and field naturalist George Schaller (born 1933) identifies gorillas by their nose-prints⁶⁹. He writes: “During our first encounters with gorillas, [a colleague] noted that their noses appeared distinctive, and later I found that the nose was the best single character for recognizing individuals. [...] The nasal region between brow and nostril is highly distinctive. Most gorillas have a divided nose bridge separated by a shallow trough. Occasionally only one ridge is present and sometimes there are three (fig. 11, n°9). The trough between the ridges is usually furrowed and wrinkled. Figure 11 (n° 1-13) illustrates roughly the most prominent wrinkles of the nose in all juvenile and adult members of group VII.”

⁶⁵ In French, the word *bertillonage* or *système Bertillon* designates the technique in criminological anthropometry, which identifies the subject by a set of physical measurements, together with two photographs, front and profile.

⁶⁶ D. Lestel, “Visages animaux en ‘faces de soi’”, in *Les Grands singes. L'humanité au fond des yeux*, 57-73, here 63: “individualité sans visage”.

⁶⁷ L. Emery & R. Wydoski, “Marking and tagging of aquatic animals: an indexed bibliography”, Washington : United States Department of the Interior, 1987.

⁶⁸ B. Würsig & T.A. Jefferson, “Methods of photo-identification for small cetaceans”, *Reports of the International Whaling*, 1990, 43-52.

⁶⁹ George Schaller, *The Mountain Gorilla: Ecology and Behavior*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1963.

To the extent that we want to identify animal individuals, it appears that there are many ways to perform what we might call animal *bertillonage*: the art of distinguishing one animal individual from others, by a collection of individual markers.

4.2. Dissolving the behavioural patterns

A focus on animal individuals can help us overcome some congenital biases in biological research. Philosophers of biology have criticized a tendency to essentialism in biology⁷⁰: species were considered as types, and, in Buffonian fashion, individuals were only instances, standing for (or *lieutenants*) of their species. On one hand, the Darwinian standpoint has given strong incentives to overcome this essentialist bias. Darwin's focus on variation rather than on essences or types is a strong argument in favour of rethinking animals as individuals.

But on the other hand, Darwin's concept of sexual selection has dramatically changed our views on animal sexuality leading to the concept of "normal sex roles". These normalized roles do not apply to a species as a whole, but within the species to all individuals belonging to one sex. "Males" and "females" appear to be the relevant categories for analyzing animal behaviours, following two universal trans-specific patterns: *coy females* and *eager males*. This pattern was experimentally searched for by British geneticist Angus J. Bateman in his 1948 paper on "Intrasexual selection in fruit flies"⁷¹. It was later expanded in the works of biologists, like Robert Trivers and Geof Parker. According to the standard narrative, evolution has produced two different strategies for producing gametes: costly ova and cheap sperm, leading to two different behavioural patterns: coyness/eagerness. These patterns of behaviour would be found in all biological species, from arthropods (insects like *Drosophila* fruit flies) to anthropoids, and especially humans. This led science writer Matt Ridley to claim that there was not one "human nature", but two different ones⁷²: what the popular magazine *Elle* has described as women being "hardwired to 'size up' and appreciate male competition"⁷³. The idea of fixed sex-roles constant in whichever species is considered, was met with a lot of scepticism, especially by feminists⁷⁴. Primatologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy showed that coyness was far from being a universal pattern applying to all female behaviours: on the contrary, the belief in female coyness has worked as very powerful blinders for ethologists on the field⁷⁵.

⁷⁰ See for instance, David Hull, « The effects of essentialism on taxonomy : two thousand years of stasis », *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 15 (n°60, Feb. 1965), 314-326 and 16 (n°61, May 1965), 1-18, reprinted in Marc Ereshefsky (ed.), *The Units of evolution. Essays on the nature of species*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992, 199-225.

⁷¹ Angus J. Bateman, « Intrasexual selection in *Drosophila* », *Heredity*, 2 (1948), 349-368.

⁷² Matt Ridley, *The Red Queen. Sex and the evolution of human nature*, London: Viking, 1993; New York: Harper Perennial, 2003, 13.

⁷³ Quoted by J. Roughgarden, *The Genial Gene*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009, 20.

⁷⁴ See for instance, Ruth Hubbard, M.S. Henifin and Barbara Fried, *Biological woman. The Convenient myth*, Cambridge (MASS): Schenkman, 1982.

⁷⁵ Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *The Langurs of Abu: female and male strategies of reproduction*, Cambridge (MASS): Harvard University Press, 1977; Sarah B. Hrdy, *The Woman that never evolved* (1981), Cambridge (MASS): Harvard University Press, 1999.

In contrast to these views, field studies by Jared Diamond seem to prove that each female may have her own private aesthetic⁷⁶. Male bowerbirds of New Guinea and Australia build decorated structures called bowers that resemble thatched huts at which they display to females. A female chooses the male in whose bower she deposits eggs, on the basis of his bower. Because of the conspicuous role for female choice in bowerbird courtship, they have long been used as exemplars of sexual selection. But what Diamond's work demonstrated was that there is no single best bower. The most complex bower is made by males of the Vogelkop Gardener bowerbird that lives on five remote mountains of Indonesian New Guinea. Bower styles differ among species, among populations of a species, and between individuals of a population. According to Diamond, these differences in bower preference among females arise from intrinsic differences among birds rather than local differences in objects available for decorating bowers. In the words of Diamond: "individual birds prefer some colours over others, individuals and populations differ in these preferences, certain objects are placed in specific parts of the bower, and birds steal chips from neighbours. Bower style may be partly learned. Hence, geographically varying bower styles may be a culturally transmitted trait, like human art styles". The implications of this are actually quite interesting. If females within a specific species have private and even idiosyncratic preferences for different males within that same species, then we must interrogate the overall sexual-selection narrative that we have generally accepted via Darwin.

Building on Diamond's field observations, evolutionary biologist Joan Roughgarden has made a general argument against the typical narrative according to which all males are necessarily eager, and all females are coy — a caricatural scheme that she calls provocatively "Darwinian *sexual selection*." Roughgarden asks whether there is any common pattern between the individual preferences of each female. In other terms, is "quality of mates" a shared value? Or does each and every female have her personal opinion on which mate is outstanding. Roughgarden claims that females choose, but that they do not choose "good" or even "compatible" genes; they choose cooperation⁷⁷. The question here is the opposition between what I call "group aesthetics" and "private aesthetics". According to "group aesthetics": preferences are not an individual matter, but are a collective feature, a characteristics of the species as a whole, or rather a feature of all individuals belonging to one definite sex. For instance, if all females really shared conventions, they would all go for the same potential mate; while gung-ho males would go for any female until they die from exhaustion, in love or in combat with their potential rivals. In that standard narrative, it is not *this* female, which has *this* or *that* preference, it is *all* females as a group who should have preference for the same males. Roughgarden wants to replace that framework with the idea that Sally the peahen prefers Fred the peacock while Betty the peahen prefers Bill the peacock; she develops mathematical models to avoid the assumption that both should go for the same individual.

Exactly as evolutionary biologists have rejected group selection, "group aesthetics" should also be discarded and the traditional (Darwinian) narrative should be replaced by the belief that each individual has her/his own private preference. To summarize,

⁷⁶ Jared Diamond, "Animal art: Variation in bower decorating style among male bowerbirds *Amblyornis inornatus*", *PNAS*, 83 (1986), 3042-3046.

⁷⁷ B.D. Neff and T. Pitcher, "Genetic Quality and Sexual Selection: An Integrated Framework for Good Genes and Compatible Genes," *Molecular Ecology*, 14(1): 19-38(2005).

Part 4 has demonstrated that biologists have developed an interest for animal individuals in their methodology: they have been very keen on looking for markers of individuality, be they physical (in terms of bertillonage) or behavioural (in terms of preferences or choice).

Conclusions

Nominalism is a theoretical ghost that immediately triggers philosophical outcry. However, nominalism may work as a warning, or as an incentive to caution ourselves against our own words as they stand for conceptual/intellectual tools. Throughout this paper, I have followed three different threads and examined contested concepts/words: the word “animal” has led us to the problem of anthropocentrism, and has revealed our hidden tendency to set us apart from all other living beings, what I called, after Plato, “the fallacy of the crane” (parts 1 and 2); the question of the relation of the individual to the species raised the issue of essentialism, or the “typical” approach to what species are and how an individual may be said to belong to a definite species (part 3); the question of unified sex roles has revealed the question of gender bias and male chauvinism (part 4). In each of these cases (“animal”, “species”, “sex”), a nominalistic stance can help us understand that any “one” individual (preferentially a male) cannot always be a good enough “lieutenant” or proxy for his/her own group. Even if (or precisely: because) we necessarily think with words, and words are our own tools, we have to be especially cautious about the words we use. Throughout this paper, I have emphasized that variation is not a fluke, but actually something meaningful to which historians and biologists should pay attention.

As already mentioned, there are many challenges to the “individual animal” route, but they may be answered. First it is commonly assumed that there is no knowledge of the individual, and that all science necessarily deals with the universal. But the assumption that “individuals” are contradictory to general concepts is not grounded: in fact, Lalande’s analysis shows that individuals exist within a hierarchy of concepts and in relation to broad, general terms. So our nominalism is a moderate one, not a radical one. Besides, what is knowledge? If the animal individual can be depicted, this depiction may be another name for history. If animal individuality prohibits any “scientific” (mathematical?) grasps on animals, maybe history is an efficient way to tackle with this level of reality. As we just showed, there is also within biology a growing tendency to overcome generality and to focus on the individual.

Finally, the emphasis on individuality in animals has not only theoretical upshot, but also ethical, political, and legal consequences. Increasingly we are now asking the question: who counts as a person? Some non-human animals are becoming “persons”, in the human, moral, and even legal sense. Animals can be bequeathed in wills, along with money and properties, by their former “owners” or “masters”, or, to respect correct parlance on this matter, “their caregivers”. They are entitled to have their fortune administered by a legal guardian⁷⁸. However, a focus on individuality may not be enough to overcome the *animot*. This is clearly shown by a strange and perplexing anecdote⁷⁹:

⁷⁸ On non-human persons, see Philippe Descola, *La nature domestiquée*, Paris: MSH editions, 1986. Sergio Dalla Bernardina’s concept of “quasi- personnes”: see “Une personne pas tout à fait comme les autres. L’animal et son statut”, *L’homme (revue)*, 120 (Oct-Dec. 1991), 33-51.

⁷⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, “Nom d’un chien ou le droit naturel” (1975), reprinted in *Difficile liberté*, 3rd edition, Livre de Poche, 2007, 231-235; John Llewelyn, « Am I obsessed by

the story of Bobby, a dog that Emmanuel Levinas met while a prisoner in the camps of Nazi Germany. Bobby showed up at the morning gatherings; then in the evening, he often waited for the prisoners, cheerfully barking and jumping: at a time when all humans were denying the prisoners their human status, Bobby was the only creature on earth that made them feel alive and human. More than that: Bobby is called by Levinas “the last Kantian in Nazi Germany”, in other words, Bobby was the only creature who still heard the “categorical imperative” and fulfilled the requirements of moral action. However, in a radical gesture, Levinas intellectually and morally relegated Bobby on the other side of the Great Divide, in the infra-moral world of brutes. No animal has ever been closer than Bobby to access the status of moral subject, and at the same time Levinas eventually changed his attitude, and radically denied animal morality. This last example shows the limit of the animal individual route as a political argument. If a focus on animal individuality might open new roads for historical (and biological) methodologies, the political efficiency of the nominalistic turn is less evident. It seems that ethical decisions must be taken on a level that is independent from ontology, and that moral outrage can be raised against various, and at times contradictory philosophical stances.

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