

The Political Animal: Species-Being and Bare Life

Laura Hudson

Over the past few decades, the rise of environmentalism, ecology, and the animal rights movement in the United States seems to have hijacked the left much as religious fundamentalism has hijacked the right. In general, Marxism seems to regard this shift with suspicion, as a distraction from the centrality of questions of the mode of production or class conflict. Both environmentalism and animal rights depoliticize struggles for social justice, replacing the goal of restructuring social organization and production to be more democratic and just with the injunction to "Save nature!" or "Save the animals!" Most Marxists are duly skeptical of the ability of either environmentalism or animal rights to go beyond their niche concerns and address human socioeconomic issues. However, with the recent shift away from labor as a category of resistance in the West and toward what we might regard as the peripheral concerns of non-human nature through the rise of the environmental movement and animal rights, it is increasingly necessary that Marxism address the challenge these areas offer if it is to offer a viable alternative. While there has been a recent surge in interest in reconciling Marxism and ecology, the uneasy marriage of Marxism and animal studies is less well represented. Theoretical engagement with these areas often falls into the trap of trying to "rescue" Marx for either ecology or animals, or chastising Marx for historical blindness. But the question of the relationship between Marxism and animals, or Marxism and nature, is not a matter of forcing theories together, hoping they do not contradict one another. Environmentalism and animal rights question what our relationship to the natural world and to animals should be. Their focus on non-human nature represents a utopian desire for a better world, but too often redirects revolutionary effort into reform movements that fail to address the importance of

capitalism in creating crises affecting not only human beings but the very earth that sustains them and the beings with which they share it. Rather than radical critique of the socioeconomic forces that have led to the global domination of capital, such movements tend to focus on particular problems viewed through an ahistorical lens. The problem with environmentalism is that it uses the same structure of thought that allows us to dominate nature while attempting to restructure society; despite its attempts to decenter human interests, all environmentalism (even the purest of deep ecologies) remains anthropocentric and based in the primacy of the individual that structures capitalism. Animal rights accepts the framework of liberal humanism wholesale, only seeking to widen a circle that would continue to have the human, more or less, at its center. Marxism must offer a means of addressing these issues that offers a real alternative, rather than marginalizing them as secondary effects of the mode of production and assuming that they will rectify themselves.

Despite their ever-increasing, very vocal constituencies, neither environmentalism nor animal rights are yet accepted as dominant, mainstream concerns. However, their growing power over political discourse has reached the point of requiring public debate and explicit refutation of their claims to hold them at bay, as demonstrated by Luc Ferry's Prix Medicis de l'Essai-winning book, *The New Ecological Order* (1992). Ferry suggests that ecology, environmentalism, and animal rights are threats to liberal humanist democracy, effectively redirecting public discourse away from human social problems in favor of looking at our relationships with nature and other animals.¹ He argues that the turn toward ecology and animal rights is tied to the post-1960s disillusionment of the left; ecology and animals become bearers of revolutionary meaning that has failed. This failure is tied to the emergence of the theories of post-structuralism, which, in making all values relative, come to identify difference itself as positive. This valuation of difference materially manifests in cultural relativism, animal rights, and the ecological emphasis on diversity, suggesting that different rules apply to different societies, animals, and environments. Human beings, like animals, become rooted in their environments, with duties to maintain the land that stem from natural laws rather than from human rationality. Human cultures become outgrowths of their natural environments, and animals are accorded their own cultural achievements. Ferry thus launches into a critique of the authoritarian impulses of these "anti-humanist" movements by invoking the specter of the Nazis. He notes the troubling way in which this shift echoes the Nazi philosophy of "blood and soil," and the expulsion of those deemed incapable of being assimilated to the "biotic community" as alien species. The echoes of Nazism are loudest in the tenets of deep ecology, where

biocentrism reduces human claims to bare equality with other animals, even other "natural entities" such as streams or ecosystems. Ferry reads this reduction of human claims as a thinly veiled hatred of humanity as such. For Ferry, deep ecology, in its veneration of nature, represents the most extreme example of the collusion of threats to liberal democracy from both the right and the left: "Despite their inherent differences, fascism and communism ... share the same wariness of formal democracy, the same repugnance toward the market and the plutocratic society it naturally engenders, the same concern with producing a new man, the same myth, essentially, of uncompromised and uncompromising purity."² Deep ecology lacks a politics outside its veneration of nature; into the political void enters a strange mixture of romantic nostalgia and progressive egalitarianism. This movement, which views itself as radical, is also deeply reactionary.

Ferry's assessment of deep ecology echoes that of many of the movement's critics on the left. Most critics recognize that the central features of deep ecology are tied to authoritarian rule and that its fantasies of the "new man" living in harmony with nature are just that: fantasies. One key problem is the elusiveness of deep ecology's "return to nature" mantra. There can be no "return" to nature because nature is not merely a thing but also a concept that varies as society does. As Raymond Williams notes in *Keywords*, "Nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language."³ With a variety of meanings that run the gamut from the world in its entirety (Nature with a capital N) to the specific characteristics of an individual (e.g., it is not in her nature), any use of the term is likely to have unintended resonances. For deep ecologists, Nature is a romantic version of the world as it might be if untouched by human hands, a pure Nature that has been polluted by human technological domination and overpopulation. Nature as it should be, according to deep ecology, is located in a mythic past and must be redeemed in a glorious future. It is an essentialist's view of the natural world, presuming to know what Nature really is and what it is that Nature wants, both of which are seen as absolutely separate from human desires. Timothy Luke describes the underlying thrust of deep ecology as a revision of the myth of "man's fall": domination of nature has corrupted the original innocence of "primal" societies, but redemption is possible if we follow the example of the "primitive cultures" that continue to live in harmony with nature. Quoting deep ecologists Bill Devall and George Sessions, Luke notes, "When deep ecologists claim that primal peoples unfaithfully used Nature so that a 'richness of ends was achieved with material technology that was elegant, sophisticated, appropriate, and controlled within the context of a traditional society,' red flags must be raised."⁴ The hagiographical accounts of "primal peoples" offered by deep ecology are blind to the real inequalities of such

societies and ignore the difficulties they face. The harsh realities of a world structured by the principle of self-preservation are overlooked. It is hard to believe that the lives of either prehistoric or primal peoples would be marked by the immersion in meditative and contemplative encounters with natural beauty on isolated mountaintops that deep ecologists seem to advocate as “appropriate” to interaction between human beings and the natural world. It is likely that people would have been far more occupied with the daily tasks of survival — finding food, shelter, and water and avoiding predators — than with the contemplation of the aesthetic qualities of the natural world.

Seeing Nature as essentially innocent, deep ecology suggests that humanity is an evolutionary mistake, “a fatal disease of nature” that must be contained.⁵ Deep ecology argues that nature is in need of salvation or recuperation from the insatiable drives of the human world that infect nature’s body like a cancer. But this presupposes that the natural world is whole and complete prior to the introduction of human beings as an alien, destructive force. Nature becomes a romantic illusion when we forget the role that human beings play in shaping the world, or forget that we are a part of the natural world as well as apart from it. Any attempt to “return to nature” is doomed: our concepts concerning the natural world necessarily reflect the social relations of the time when they emerge. We cannot separate the concept of Nature from the social form in which it functions. Nature exists as an “outside” to the modern world because culture and society exist as the claustrophobic “inside”: Nature is not a static object but a dynamic category whose meaning has evolved in intercourse with human beings. The necessity of saving Nature only makes sense in the midst of a period of ecological destruction that threatens not the natural world, which will continue in some form regardless of what we do, but rather our *ideas* about what the natural world *should* be. Nor can our ideas about nature be separated from our ideas about *human* nature. Any time a desire to save the earth, or save the animals, is asserted, what is truly to be saved is *our version* of the earth, or *our concept* of the animals, both of which are deeply implicated in our ideas about *ourselves*. It is because humanity begins to seem like a disease or pathogen that the natural world becomes increasingly innocent and idealized. It is our own salvation, our own human world, our own tainted innocence we want to redeem through projecting it onto the natural world. If we follow deep ecology to its logical conclusion, the salvation of Nature would be best accomplished by the removal of the corrupting force of human beings: “if humans are *the* problem, then killing most of them would be *the* solution.”⁶ Indeed, some of the deepest green of deep ecologists invoke the imagery of the “population bomb” and argue for limiting or massively reducing human population, demonstrating the irony that the salvation of

humanity seems to require the destruction or restriction of a large number of its members. The confusion of deep ecology seems to end up either, as Ferry argues, invoking a thinly veiled fascism where an enlightened few dictate the tenets of appropriate interaction with the natural world, including the potential depopulation of the earth, or emptying itself of any content through according intrinsic value to everything “natural,” making the weighing of decisions or options against one another murky at best. The very idea of intrinsic value depends on concepts of value inculcated by capitalism, even if only in a reactionary way. In valuing the concrete, material world where everything is invested with intrinsic value, deep ecology challenges the abstraction of capitalism where value is only produced through the system of exchange. Yet, if everything has intrinsic, natural value, then what reason is there to value one form of life over another? Why bother trying to save humanity at all?

In many ways, Ferry’s critique of deep ecology rings true: he points out the same logical inconsistencies in deep ecology’s biocentrism, and the same fascist tendencies suggested by its unexplained mechanism of social control, that critics in general recognize. But in exploring the questionable ideological underpinnings of deep ecology, Ferry reveals his own ideological investments. He defends the separation between nature and culture that deep ecology and animal rights both question by asserting the ineffable human quality of freedom. In fact, his defense of liberal humanist democracy and the Enlightenment blurs into a defense of the corresponding economic form of capitalism. Thus, he represents deep ecology’s “love of nature” as hatred of humanity because he regards the human being as “the anti-natural being par excellence.”⁷ For Ferry, the humanness of the human being “resides in his freedom, in the fact that he is undefined, that his nature is to have no nature but to possess the capacity to distance himself from any code within which one may seek to imprison him.”⁸ If human beings are, by definition, anti-natural, then love of nature becomes opposed to human freedom. Nature is the realm of *determinations*, while human beings exist in the realm of *situations*. This distinction causes Ferry some trouble: he is forced to explain why we should care about humans who seem determined by their situation, such as the old, the infirm, the mentally retarded, and, most problematic, the very pre-colonial, pre-industrial peoples after which deep ecology models itself.⁹ The natural codes or instincts that Ferry claims are determinations for animals are the very things from which humanity has triumphantly distanced itself, making room for history and politics. Describing humanness as fluid, essence-less, particularly situated but never universally determined, knowing no boundaries: he might be quoting the passages of Marx’s *Capital* that describe exchange value. Free market capitalism is the backdrop for the kind

of freedom he imagines, masked by his attempt to ground philosophically humanity's moral status in some special capacity other than species membership. Human ability to *break free* from nature pits humanity *against* nature in a battle for mastery; in order to prove our uniqueness, we must resist natural codes, resist being merely use-values for Nature's overarching Subject. Ironically, Ferry suggests that proof of our separation from natural codes lies in our ability to commit suicide: we are so free we can die of our freedom. What might this mean for human society as it enters a period of ecological crisis? Would continuing along a path that seems sure to lead to our destruction as a species be the grandest proof of Ferry's hypothesis, or its ultimate negation? The triumph of capital seems to tend toward achieving universality in death: in death we are all equal. And this is the problem: Ferry's "freedom" is so ill defined that it is difficult to tell exactly what it entails aside from its reactionary resistance to natural codes — how we are to separate natural codes from anti-natural impulses is never explained. So-called human freedom is disconnected from the lived experiences of real human beings for whom exploitation and oppression continue unchecked. Only a select few have the material means to enjoy the full benefits of the system and thus experience full humanity. Basing his understanding of freedom in Kantian philosophy, Ferry's analysis runs into the same problem that plagues Kant. Freedom becomes an abstraction divorced from the unfreedom experienced by human beings through their reification as commodities. He fails to address the actual conditions in which "freedom" is experienced, avoiding sustained discussion of the material, social, and economic conditions that might limit human freedom in ways analogous to natural codes, as a second nature. If deep ecologists err in attempting to make an idealized Nature the arbiter of morality, Ferry commits a similar error in supposing that the market offers a better model. Deep ecology is problematic for Ferry not just because it challenges human autonomy but because it challenges the market by suggesting that some things are not for sale: the anti-modern impulses of deep ecology are also anti-capitalist. His alternative to the restrictions of radical ecology is reform based not in a revision of values but in the ability of the market to adapt.

Reconciled with the State, which gives it its own ministers, with democracy, which offers the possibility of non-violent change, ecology ultimately blends into the market, which naturally adapts to new consumer demands. The forest is threatened by automobile emissions? No problem, we'll build catalytic converters, which are more expensive but less polluting. ... clean industry is developing by leaps

and bounds, creating competition among companies to obtain the "green" label.¹⁰

Where deep ecology argues for a transformation of morality to include the biosphere as a whole, Ferry argues for the wisdom of capitalism in regulating morality along with other human desires. Democratic values are championed only in order to relinquish them to the market, never mind that the market is responsible for the ecological problems that gave rise to the interventions of deep ecology in the first place. If enough people care about the environment or animals, he seems to argue, then reform will occur *naturally* through the infallible forces of supply and demand.¹¹ In asking us to place our fate in the invisible hand of democratizing capitalism, Ferry demonstrates a quasi-religious belief in the inherent justice of the market that compares to the quasi-religious celebration of Nature he decries among deep ecologists. This seems doubly disingenuous as he himself notes a certain dissatisfaction with "the consumerist dynamic": "Without getting too religious, one suspects that man is not on this earth to buy higher and higher performance cars and televisions; though our final destination may remain a mystery, this, certainly, is not the ultimate goal."¹² The final irony is that his screed against deep ecology and its fascist tendencies, highlighted by the extended comparison with the nature worship and animal welfare protections of the Nazis, is motivated by his opposition to the growth of Green Party politics. According to Ferry, the environment does not need its own political party: the appropriate role for ecological concerns is as "a pressure group expressing a sensibility which, though shared by the immense majority, does not have a claim to power in and of itself."¹³ How democratic!

Deep ecology sees capitalism as a system of domination of the natural world but fails to recognize that its concept of a pure Nature is an effect of that domination. It is bound to the Enlightenment conception of the free individual but sees freedom as only achievable within Nature as the freedom of unfettered contemplation of natural beauty and biodiversity. Ferry, however, sees the natural world as a system of domination that is antithetical to freedom and democracy. To submit to the authority of natural codes is to surrender to fascism. Ferry is right to be skeptical of the role of ecology in politics, and not just because Green Party members might be secret eco-Nazis. Deep ecology suggests that we replace the egoistic individualism that the market inspires, and the masked drive toward self-preservation that it engenders, with a reverence for life. Rather than finding meaning in high-performance cars and televisions, we might find meaning in living in accordance with natural laws and in working to preserve not just nature and animals but life in all its forms. Contained within this reverence for life,

Ferry argues, is a politics of fear of the multiple ways we might destroy the planet: the reverence for life fades into fear of death. Since politics is founded on human anti-naturalness and willingness to risk going against natural codes, Ferry argues that we must protect ourselves from the insertion of nature into politics. The political realm marks the distinction between human and non-human life; including life and death as primarily political concerns collapses this distinction.

But the question is whether it is possible to maintain this separation any longer. In *Homo Sacer*, Giorgio Agamben argues that there has been a shift within politics, even that which presents itself under the name of *democracy*, which seeks to bring life itself (and thus nature) more and more directly under administrative control. The nation-state and the capitalist democracy that Ferry argues is up to the task of managing the natural world without interfering in the self-actualization of individuals are relics of the past: nature can no longer act as the “outside” to human politics, in part because it has always been the unacknowledged ground of the inside. According to Agamben, the concept of *sovereignty* is always based on an inclusive exclusion, whether in the figure of the sovereign or the *homo sacer*, both of which are both within and without the law. For Agamben, this state of exception, existing both inside and outside the law, finds its most direct example within the space of the concentration camp, a space where the law of society no longer operates except through its absence. Those within the camps are not subject to the law — guards may punish or kill inmates with impunity — yet it is the law that places them there. Agamben argues that the concentration camp is thus not an anomaly — it is the space where the drive of sovereignty finds its ultimate expression. People, or subjects, are reduced to bodies lacking any significance except through their determinate exclusion from the law. The drive of all sovereignty (for according to this argument both Ferry’s democracy and deep ecology’s latent fascism would tend toward the same goal) is to subject its subjects more directly to political power, to bring *zoē* or “the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods)” into the realm of political administration, or *bios*.¹⁴ If we react with horror to the effects of the camps, we should recognize the extent to which the life of all subjects under political power replicates in some degree the state of exception found in the camps.

The rise of environmentalism, deep ecology, and animal rights can be seen as effects of this inability of law, or the Law, to distance the “natural world” as a state outside itself. Natural objects reappear within the political realm not as political actors but as markers of bare life. Sovereignty, in seeking to establish a political life separate from the state of nature, produces

both political life as the life proper to the citizen (the “good life”) and bare life, which occupies a space in between *bios* and *zoē*, evacuated of meaning. The state of nature is not separate from political life but a state that exists alongside political life, as a necessary corollary of its existence. Political life is alienation from an imagined state of nature that we cannot access as human beings because it appears only in shadow form as bare life. The state of exception is that which defines which lives lack value, which lives can be killed without being either murdered or sacrificed. Agamben’s examples of the inextricable link between political and bare life focus on the limit cases of humanity rather than the ideal, providing an analysis of precisely the cases that prove problematic in Ferry’s liberal humanism. The exception, as that which proves the rule, cannot be avoided. It is necessary to look to the figure of the refugee, the body of the “overcomatose” or the severely mentally impaired, and, under the Third Reich, the life of the Jew to see how the law fails in the task Ferry sets for it. These cases demonstrate the zone of indistinction that Agamben elaborates as the zone of “life that does not deserve to live.” The refugee demonstrates the necessity of a link between nation and subject; refugees are no longer citizens and, as such, lack a claim to political rights: “In the system of the nation-state, the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man show themselves to lack every protection and reality at the moment in which they can no longer take the form of rights belonging to citizens of a state.”¹⁵ Confronted with the figure of the refugee, human rights are faced with their hidden ground in national origin, where, as Agamben notes, the key term is *birth*: men are *born* free, invoking the natural codes from which law was to separate us. This freedom is, in actuality, a function of citizenship and incorporation in the nation-state rather than a fact of being human: “citizenship names the new status of life as origin and ground of sovereignty and, therefore, literally identifies ... *les membres du souverain*, ‘the members of the sovereign.’”¹⁶ This makes the link between that which is proper to the nation and that which is proper to the citizen the determinant of the zone of sacred life: those who do not fulfill the role of the citizen are no longer guaranteed protection or participation in political life, their so-called human rights void in the absence of national identity. The refugee or refugees as a group have a claim only to bare life, to being kept alive, but have no political voice with which to demand the rights of the citizen. Agamben, while noting the same trend toward politicizing natural life that concerns Ferry, demonstrates that this politicization is already contained within the structure of politics itself. This corresponds to the position of animals in human society: the exemplar of the limit case, they have always existed in the state of exception that founds the political. There is thus a connection between the plight of the refugee and that of the animal:

neither participates directly in the political, though both are absolutely subject to political decisions in which they have no voice. The establishment of a realm outside the political, where lives have no value and thus may be killed, is marked by the difference between the human and the animal.

This link is clarified when we investigate Agamben's analysis of euthanasia and Nazi biopolitics. He does not address the ethical dimension of euthanasia but explores the politics and rhetoric of euthanasia as a policy of the state: "More interesting for our inquiry is the fact that the sovereignty of the living man over his own life has its immediate counterpart in the determination of a threshold beyond which life ceases to have any juridical value and can, therefore, be killed without the commission of a homicide."¹⁷ Justification for euthanasia rests in the determination that life may be devoid of purpose or meaning. This determination may be either a conscious decision by an individual that his or her life is no longer worth living or a decision by proxy, as in the case of individuals lacking the self-awareness to recognize their condition or voice a desire for either life or death. In the second case, it is left to the state to measure the parameters of the life not worth living. This decision of which lives are not worth living does not depend on the desires or potential for pleasure or pain of the individual but on the determination by the state of whether the individual exhibits the kind of life proper to the citizen and the nation. This decision makes life itself political and makes politics the arbiter of life's value. The case of the "overcomatose" demonstrates the way that politics increasingly brings bare life under juridical control. From Agamben's perspective, it matters less what the decision of the courts is than that political and juridical power are increasingly invited to decide the value of life, or that something like "brain death," an example of the bare life he describes, can become an issue debated by experts and legislators. The political necessity of determining which lives are not worth living thus makes the Nazi state into the prime exemplar of a new horizon of biopolitics in which every modern state is implicated. The shift that takes place here is what leaves the state incapable of resolving ecological questions — the state of nature has penetrated politics, making the questions raised by ecology and animal rights central to the determinations of political life.

Agamben's analysis of the Nazi program of euthanasia draws out the interpenetration of bare life and political life. The program of euthanasia morphed into a program of genocide, in part, because the lives of Jews were determined to be lives devoid of political value and, as such, not worth living. The Nazi program of euthanasia against the mentally infirm, Agamben notes, was carried out in spite of its unpopularity and in spite of the burden it imposed on the Nazi war effort. Its importance lay not in the

practical considerations of preventing the incurably ill from reproducing but in cementing the sovereign power of the Nazis and the Führer to determine the value of life, and in confirming the drive of modern sovereignty to make life *immediately* political, without the addition of other values. Those placed in concentration camps were no longer citizens, no longer protected by the laws of the nation. Their deaths were not murders because their lives had already been determined to have no value. Thus, Agamben argues, it was not as a punishment that Jews were to be sent to the camps, nor, within Nazi biopolitics, was their treatment there considered torture: "The truth — which is difficult for the victims to face, but which we must have the courage not cover with sacrificial veils — is that the Jews were exterminated not in a mad and giant holocaust but exactly as Hitler had announced, 'as lice,' which is to say, as bare life."¹⁸ The political separation of human beings from non-human nature thus constructs a code that can all too easily be deployed against other human beings. Nazi politics was not directed against Jews as citizens or even as an ethnic group, but was a politics in which Jews (and others) were no longer considered human. The difficulty confronting modern politics is the inability to distinguish clearly between the biological and the political realms. People are increasingly seen less as citizens invested with political rights than as bodies in need of administration. Not only are they denied the promise of the "good life," they cannot even expect a "good death."

The confusion between life in general and political life for human beings creates a correlating confusion for animals. The political does not include the animal: political life is proper to humans alone. But as political life becomes increasingly indistinguishable from the (animal) life of the body, so are animal lives, once excluded from direct consideration in the political realm, increasingly subjected to political force. Animal cruelty laws, the Endangered Species Act, the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act, the banning of force-feeding: all of these bring the lives of animals under the rule of law as more than mere property at the same time that laws increasingly apply themselves to the administration of human bare life. One of the grand ironies of Nazism is that while initiating genocide, it passed some of the strictest legislation for animal welfare ever seen.¹⁹ The fate of animals is also the fate of the animal bodies of human beings. Thus the increase in animal legislation may be less a cause for celebration of our increased enlightenment than an omen of things to come: *the inclusion of animals in the political realm marks the extent to which human beings have themselves been reduced to bare life.* Agamben suggests that the traditional mechanisms of nation and law that regulated the space of exclusion become increasingly indistinguishable from the concentration camp, "the sign of the system's inability to function

without being transformed into a lethal machine.”²⁰ Spaces of exclusion overwhelm the normal order, and “whether or not atrocities are committed depends not on law but on the civility and ethical sense” of those who temporarily act in the role of the sovereign. In describing our duties toward animals, Ferry suggests that treating them well is a matter of politeness and civility rather than a categorical imperative.²¹ That his argument now seems to apply to human beings who are easily stripped of their “human rights” in rapidly multiplying spaces of detention demonstrates that the collapse of the distinction between human and inhuman nature is not the result of the political pressure from outside, as Ferry suggests is the case with deep ecology, but the unfolding of the logic of sovereignty itself. If we consider the questions raised by deep ecology and animal rights, we must recognize that human life more and more resembles the lives of animals in factory farms. The political realm now focuses on bodies, fingerprints, statistics, or packages of DNA. We become more and more like cattle, tagged and marked and sent out to a freedom that is always already an enclosure, already only a step away from the slaughterhouse or the camp. In trying to ensure a “good death” for animals, activists are simultaneously raising the issue of “good death” in general, and perhaps reacting to the state’s involvement in determining the value of human life.²² Rather than blaming deep ecology or animal rights for muddying the political waters by conflating human and non-human forms of life, we should see them as arising out of the confusion between human and non-human that is central to politics itself: the life worth living depends on existence of the life without value.

Agamben acts as an antidote to Ferry’s liberal humanism. If deep ecology is incoherent in confusing the rights of humans with the rights of animals or nature, Agamben provides reasons to believe that the confusion is part of the structure of society as a whole rather than the ravings of a fringe group. Hidden behind the rhetoric of humanism and liberatory rights is the specter of the concentration camp. Yet, horrific as his analysis seems, Agamben’s bare life is not wholly without a glimmer of hope. If *Homo Sacer* emphasizes the absolute negation of bare life, in *The Open: Man and Animal*, Agamben expands his explanation of bare life in ways that demonstrate its positive potential. If bare life is life excluded from both the natural world (by virtue of its implication in politics) and the political world (as life marked by its lack of political value), it is equally life that is neither precisely human nor animal. Agamben suggests that bare life is produced at the moment that the concept of “the human” is produced through the separation of human from animal within the body of the human being. The original political moment is also the original human one. Biologically, the human being is merely another animal, as animal activists and ecologists are wont to point out. But concep-

tually, the human is something more. Agamben suggests that rather than seeing the human as an animal plus this or that (language, rationality, politics, or anything else), the human emerges from the radical separation of the human as concept from the animal as body.

In our culture, man has always been thought of as the articulation and conjunction of a body and a soul, of a living thing and a *logos*, of a natural (or animal) element and a supernatural or social or divine element. We must learn instead to think of man as what results from the incongruity of these two elements, and investigate not the metaphysical mystery of conjunction, but rather the practical and political mystery of separation.²³

The gulf between the human and the animal is unbridgeable precisely because it does not lie in either biology or conceptuality but in the gap between them, which appears as bare life — a zone of indistinction produced by the conceptual workings of the “anthropological machine” and irreducible to merely one or another of its components. The political realm develops to address the “human” element of this split, leaving the animal body to the private sphere, but as the personal becomes political, politics encroaches on the bare life of the body.

Agamben’s analysis of bare life is of value less for what it reveals about our real relationships with nature and other animals than in revealing the structure of our *concepts* of humanity, nature, and other animals. He is not speaking directly of the plurality of actually existing animals, which is obvious from his repeated use of the singular — *the animal*, not animals. Meanwhile, the specific examples of animal interaction with the environment that he describes depend on the virtually automatic functions of the insect world. Spiders, ticks, and bees stand as representatives of the animal’s essential captivity by its environment rather than mammals, whose behavior seems more similar to our own. The biological continuity between human beings and mammals would blur the conceptual difference between the human and the animal that is central to his argument. By focusing on the simplest forms of animal life, Agamben makes the conceptual difference between the human and the animal evident. The link between the human and the animal is actually a void: for example, the ape-man is a fictional missing link that depends on imagining the human minus some ephemeral quality that makes it human: “In reality, the passage from animal to man, despite the emphasis placed on comparative anatomy and paleontological findings, was produced by subtracting an element that had nothing to do with either one, and that instead was presupposed as the identifying characteristic of the

human: language.”²⁴ The category of the animal can only be imagined as a lack in relation to the human, not as a fullness of being in its own right. There is a rupture that occurs whenever we attempt to imagine the transition from animal to human because what separates the animal from the human does not rest in biology. We can only imagine a biologically human being from which some abstract feature such as language has yet to historically emerge or a humanized animal that has all the features we ascribe to the human being, yet lacks some ineffable quality that would enable the transition to full humanity. In either case, the category of the human is presupposed in the existence of the non-human, the inhuman, or the animal and the mode of the transition remains open, a caesura in our thought. It is this caesura that allows us to lump all animals in their vast complexity into a single category and makes every articulation of the human a political one. The attempt to determine the missing link between the human and the animal can produce only bare life, the man-ape or the ape-man can only be suspended between human and animal while separated and excluded from both.

The categories Agamben explores in *Homo Sacer* reappear in *The Open*, for the refugee, the Jew, the overcomatose, and the werewolf are reduced to animalized humans that nonetheless are marked by the shadow of humanity and thus cannot merely be animals. They represent the missing link, the figure of the not yet or not fully human. It is apparent, for example, that language is not what distinguishes the human from the animal: it matters little what those excluded from the political realm say for they are not *heard*. The refugee, the Jew under the Third Reich, the overcomatose patient, or the slave has as little *political* voice as any animal. Little more than animals in human form, they demonstrate the difference between the speaking and the living being. Yet the human is not merely the speaking being, the political voice, but also the living, animal being. True humanity is not found in rearticulation of a separation of “the human” from “the animal” but in the zone between them which is both and neither. Agamben cites a comment by Walter Benjamin to highlight this possibility of redemption: “[T]echnology is the mastery not of nature but mastery of the relation between nature and humanity.”²⁵ To rephrase, humanity is not mastery of the animal within the human, but mastery of the relation *between* human and animal. It is through this step that Agamben is able to hint at the possibility of redemption through bare life, despite its appearance as absolute destitution in *Homo Sacer*, making this zone of indistinction into a positive alternative to the eternal return of the rupture between human and animal, political life and natural life. Bare life, in revealing the poverty of the concepts of “the human” and “the animal,” gestures toward the possibility of the truly human — a human-

ity that is not so much *reconciled* with nature as excluded from its own exclusion from nature.

Bare life appears as the absence of the human in a horrific void of de-subjectified being. But the redemptive possibilities contained within bare life are surprisingly revealed in Agamben’s discussion of the relationship of the animal to its “disinhibitors,” aspects of its environment that initiate action or response. He investigates Jakob von Uexküll’s experiment with a tick to demonstrate the way the relationship of the animal to its environment is articulated.²⁶ The tick waits in a state of suspended animation until activated by its environment. It has a blindness to the disinhibitors (the temperature of blood, the smell of butyric acid, etc.) that absolutely overcome it but also an intense relationship with its environment that humans lack. The tick does not “know” what its disinhibitors “really” are, thus it can be tricked into latching onto any membrane that is the temperature of mammalian blood. Similarly, Uexküll describes an experiment between a bee and a cup of honey: “If, once it has begun to suck, the bee’s abdomen is cut away, it will continue happily to suck while the honey visibly streams out of its open abdomen.”²⁷ Both the tick and the bee are wholly caught up in a world that is closed to them: they recognize only the triggers that captivate them into interaction with the environment. Human beings have the ability to separate from the intensity of experience; there is a gap between the experience of captivation, of being captivated, and reflection on that captivation, which is represented by the potential for boredom. The tick may exist in suspended animation until activated by its disinhibitor, but so does humanity exist in perpetual distance from its environment based on the self-induced boredom with captivation in nature: though the suspension of the tick between living and nonliving seems like another articulation of the barrenness of bare life, I read this as analogous to the suspension of humanity between the concept of the human and the concept of the animal. If the animal is described as lacking the human openness to the world, the human likewise lacks the ecstatic interaction with the environment that the animal has. It is boredom that inspires humanity to find tasks that approximate the intensity of animal captivation. The distinction between human and animal has been a driving force throughout Western metaphysics, reconstituting the difference in multiple ways throughout history as “the conflict between man and animal, between the open and the not-open” to produce an historical mission for humanity. But now, “The traditional historical potentialities — poetry, religion, philosophy — which ... kept the historico-political destiny of peoples awake, have long since been transformed into cultural spectacles and private experiences, and have lost all historical efficacy.”²⁸ Agamben seems to suggest that it is the logic of sovereignty or humanism that has exhausted these historical potentialities,

yet it is under capitalism that spectacle and private experience replace the search for historical meaning. We become captivated, like animals, by the spectacles of consumer culture; no longer actively seeking meaning for our lives, we passively await the stimulation of our man-made disinhibitors.

Despite the wide historical scope of Agamben's work, he only touches on various epochs to take what he needs, then quickly shifts to a zone of abstraction that empties his work of historical specificity. Ultimately, it is the ahistoricism of Agamben's analysis that leads to the sense of airless doom that stifles the potentially positive implications of the concept of bare life. He claims there is no return to clear-cut distinctions between *bios* and *zoē*; the waters are too irredeemably muddied to dream, as Ferry does, of unpolluted political categories. Yet, there also seems no clear way forward. Even the hope of an eventual redemption is whispered into a timeless, messianic void. It is almost as if history itself had ceased to exist, collapsed into the singular unfolding of the logic of sovereignty or the concept of humanity that was always the hidden ground of any political theory; indeed, its presence is found in the emergence of the sovereign subject itself. All we can hope for is to bring sovereignty and the anthropological machine to a standstill. But what Agamben reads as the force of sovereignty cannot be separated from the social forms in which it is embodied. That is, sovereignty as he imagines it depends on a confluence of politics with technology and the economy that give it its particular form. If sovereignty tends ineluctably toward totalitarian control, then there can be no escape or alternative within politics. Clearly articulating what kind of positive development might come from the analysis of bare life requires an understanding of capitalism as the implicit grounding factor to Agamben's analysis. Focusing with pinpoint accuracy on politics, Agamben seems to have none of his own. It is neither "sovereignty" nor "the anthropological machine" that is to blame for the world's ills, but the extent to which these factors are bound up in the historical development of capitalism itself.

The animalization of the human is not merely the result of an historical drive of sovereignty but the result of the particular forms that political organization has taken in the wake of the expansion of capital. As Ferry's free sovereign subject is a construct of capitalism, the ideal bourgeois individual whose freedom is based in the exploitation of others, so Agamben's sovereignty bears similarities to the structure of capitalism. As a self-moving, totalizing force, sovereignty in Agamben appears as the Subject of history rather than an effect of historical motion. Looking back into history, we may see the roots of our current conception of sovereignty in the Greeks, but to suggest that it has remained essentially unchanged over the

course of thousands of years is to reify the concept, mistaking it for the thing itself. Seeking the origin, we do not see the alternative that might have led away from the particular model of sovereignty we face today. Without a clear conception of history, Agamben's sovereignty becomes deterministic and all-encompassing. In fact, the sovereignty of the modern state and its investment in biopolitics are shaped by capitalism, which seeks to insert itself within the cycle of natural reproduction through patenting seeds, DNA, strains of cancer, viruses, and animals. The insertion of capitalism into the natural realm of reproduction results in confusion over what is proper to human beings in the political sphere and what is proper to nature. Ecologists' concern over genetically modified seeds cannot be reduced to fear of technopollution or anti-modern sentiment, though that is often the form of the rhetoric employed in the debate over genetic modification. They are equally struggling against the totalitarian drive of capital to turn everything into a commodity: what was once offered freely by nature is now shaped into an artifact of capital. Furthermore, even the traditional historical potentialities that have provided meaning to human lives have become commodified and emptied of significance. The only remaining task seems to be the management of life itself through the absolute control of the natural world and the natural body.

Though in Agamben's analysis bare life often seems only negative, an absence or a void, the positive potential in the concept might be more clearly conveyed by placing it in conversation with Marx. In many ways, bare life seems to be the negative iteration of Marx's early definition of species-being and may provide a clearer understanding of what species-being might become. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Marx distinguishes between human being and mere animal being on the basis of free production: "The animal is immediately identical with its life-activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is its *life-activity*. Man makes his life-activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life-activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life-activity directly distinguishes man from animal life-activity."²⁹ Like Ferry, Marx suggests that self-consciousness allows human beings to separate themselves from the immediacy of instinct. Yet, in contrast to Ferry's anti-natural, rootless, and steadfastly individualistic man, Marx suggests that human beings are likewise "species-beings," characterized by social organization as well as free, conscious production rooted in interaction with nature and with each other. It is because humans can produce freely and consciously, beyond what is immediately necessary for their natural life (the drives of self-preservation and reproduction), that they are different from other animals.³⁰ This conscious activity takes place within the realm of the

natural world, for humans act on and transform nature. Species-being is not merely another name for human nature, nor does it simply indicate the biological characteristics that make any animal a member of a species. Humans are species-beings because they not only produce what is necessary for their own existence but also because they understand themselves *as* members of a species, enabling them to produce socially, in concert with one another. They produce not only goods but concepts: species do not “exist” in nature but in the human imagination. That the human being is a species-being is important, because it is clear that the cost of species-being is alienation from nature; the ability to look on nature as the raw material for human creative expression allows for a level of freedom, but it also isolates humanity from the longed-for harmonious unity with the Nature of deep ecology. Alienation from nature is a rupture that cannot be wholeheartedly celebrated; but the result, at least potentially, is the full development of human capacities for creative production beyond the satisfaction of individual needs.³¹ As in Agamben, Marx suggests that the harmony of the human animal with nature is lost, but in its place is the potential for the universality and fellow feeling of species-being.³² Species-being thus both describes what the human *is* by definition as a member of the species *Homo sapiens* and describes the human potential to be something *more*: a true humanity based in the whole of human society rather than merely its particulars as nations or individuals, and including both the natural and the conceptual life of human beings.

This potential is shaped by social forms. Under capitalism, human beings are alienated not only from nature but from the potential to reconcile with nature that is the foundation of species-being. Commodities confront us as alien forces rather than as expressions of human creative potential. In producing commodities, the worker also produces the social relations of commodification, under which labor itself is a commodity. The free, creative production that would allow us to become true species-beings becomes the force under which we must labor in order to live — that which frees us from the unconscious life-activity of the animal world becomes that which enslaves us. Alienated labor under capitalism requires human beings to produce in order to maintain and reproduce themselves, like animals. The alienation from nature that provides the basis for human freedom is shaped into a second nature that creates a new realm of necessity and self-preservation. Human beings are pitted against one another in the struggle for survival, producing competition and antagonism rather than universal freedom. That which is to have distinguished us from animals is obliterated: “For the starving man, it is not the human form of food that exists, but only its abstract being as food; it could just as well be there in its crudest form, and it would be impossible to say wherein this feeding-activity differs from that of

animals.”³³ We are again captivated by our environment, failing to see it for what it is: a product of human social and economic organization rather than an immutable force. It is capitalism that blurs these boundaries rather than sovereignty. But the reduction of human potential to animal needs is not the worst that faces workers.

Man returns to living in a cave, which is now, however, contaminated with the mephitic breath of plague given off by civilization, and which he continues to occupy only *precariously*, it being for him an alien habitation which can be withdrawn from him any day — a place from which, if he does not pay, he can be thrown out any day. For this mortuary he has to *pay*. ... Light, air, etc. — the simplest *animal* cleanliness — ceases to be a need for man.³⁴

Marx suggests that capitalism does not merely strip human beings of the capabilities that make them unique in the animal world but denies them even the basic dignity of other animals. At the same time that humans produce commodities and the social conditions of the exchange economy, they produce concepts that bolster these conditions. Human rights granted by contract with the nation become abstract concepts that have little bearing on the material lives of unfree citizens. The civil liberties promised by the nation are a fiction; stripping them away is a mere formality when the worker is already little more than bare life. This state of affairs is an inversion of his previous position; it is now ironically the animal in nature that is *more* free than the human in “free” society. The formal freedom granted to human beings under liberal democracy leaves them destitute, lacking any recourse to lord or law, and entraps them in a second nature just as driven by the needs of self-preservation as the natural world of animals.

In his discussion of religion, Marx argues that the recognition of religion as the alienated self-consciousness of human beings allows humans to “know” themselves: “I therefore know my own self, the self-consciousness that belongs to its very nature, confirmed not in *religion* but rather in *annihilated* and *superseded* religion.”³⁵ Marx argues that Hegel’s negation of the negation, which is to lead in a positive progression toward the Absolute, is actually the negation of pseudo-essence, not true essence: “A peculiar role, therefore, is played by the act of superseding in which denial and preservation — denial and affirmation — are bound together.”³⁶ Religion is the misrecognized, abstract, and alienated form of human self-consciousness. In recognizing this, and in superseding it, a better understanding of human self-consciousness and potentiality is revealed. Rather than waiting for reward in the next life, we must change our lives in the material world. Religion is a

human construct, not a force from outside. Humanism appears as the annulment of religion, but it, too, remains an abstraction until brought into relation with the natural world. Extrapolating from Marx here, we might say that the concept of “the human” occupies the same space in our conceptual framework as religion does: The supersession of the concept of the human as an essence based in a political identity, or even an anti-naturalism, requires that we recognize that the concept is the result of the alienation of human beings from their sensual, living selves: the concept of “the human” is not the thing-in-itself. Nature as presented in Hegel was only the alienated form of the Absolute and, as such, remained an abstraction of thought. Marx argues that we must come to recognize the sensual reality of nature and the supersession of the abstract thought-entity. As elements of nature ourselves, we must move beyond the abstract forms through which we recognize ourselves and come to terms with the fact that we are natural, sensual beings, animals who may be captivated, who may also be processed, objectified, reified things as well as transcendent beings. In bare life, perhaps, we find the first moment of this supersession: Under modern capitalist sovereignty, we are all equally abandoned by the law we have created to free us from nature. We are all equally reduced to mere specimens of human biology, mute and uncomprehending of the world in which we are thrown. Species-being, or “humanity as a species,” may require this recognition to move beyond the pseudo-essence of the religion of humanism. Recognizing that what we call “the human” is an abstraction that fails to fully describe what we are, we may come to find a new way of understanding humanity that recuperates the natural without domination.

The bare life that results from expulsion from the law removes even the illusion of freedom. Regardless of one’s location in production, the threat of losing even the fiction of citizenship and freedom affects everyone. This may create new means of organizing resistance across the particular divisions of society. Furthermore, the concept of bare life allows us to gesture toward a more detailed, concrete idea of what species-being may look like. Agamben hints that in the recognition of this fact, that in our essence we are all animals, that we are all living dead, might reside the possibility of a kind of redemption. Rather than the mystical horizon of a future community, the passage to species-being may be experienced as a deprivation, a loss of identity. Species-being is not merely a positive result of the development of history; it is equally the absence of many of the features of “humanity” through which we have learned to make sense of our world. It is an absence of the kind of individuality and atomism that structure our world under capitalism and underlie liberal democracy, and which continue to inform the tenets of deep ecology. The development of species-being requires the

collapse of the distinction between human and animal in order to change the shape of our relationships with the natural world. A true species-being depends on a sort of reconciliation between our “human” and “animal” selves, a breakdown of the distinction between the two both within ourselves and in nature in general. Bare life would then represent not only expulsion from the law but the possibility of its overcoming. Positioned in the zone of indistinction, no longer a subject of the law but still subjected to it through absence, what we equivocally call “the human” in general becomes virtually indistinguishable from the animal or nature. But through this expulsion and absence, we may see not only the law but the system of capitalism that shapes it from a position no longer blinded or captivated by its spell. The structure of the law is revealed as always suspect in the false division between natural and political life, which are never truly separable. Though clearly the situation is not yet as dire as Agamben’s invocation of the Holocaust suggests, we are all, as citizens, under the threat of the state of exception. With the decline of the nation as a form of social organization, the whittling away of civil liberties and, with them, the state’s promise of “the good life” (or “the good death”) even in the most developed nations, with the weakening of labor as the bearer of resistance to exploitation, how are we to envision the future of politics and society?

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno suggest that Enlightenment has always been totalitarian in its drive to disenchant the natural world: “Humans believe themselves free of fear when there is no longer anything unknown. This has determined the path of demythologization, of enlightenment, which equates the living with the nonliving as myth had equated the nonliving with the living.”³⁷ Enlightenment assimilates the living world to nonliving concept, seeing everywhere the same “chaotic stuff of mere classification.”³⁸ Even the living existence of the individual is obliterated in its relegation to the realm of the concept. This process transforms subjects from ends in themselves to the means to an end: the control and disenchantment of the natural world. Instrumental reason incorporates humanity into its calculations as surely as it does nature. The antithesis of nature and history (as enlightenment) is most clearly revealed in the antithesis between animal and human being. No longer seen as gods, animals become part of nonliving nature, part of “the mass of things and creatures in the external world” from which the logos of the human has split off.³⁹ The human being becomes separated from nature, and from sympathy with the dominated earth. In the process, reason becomes self-preservation run wild; to save ourselves from domination by nature, we must dominate it in turn. From the perspective of enlightenment, to do otherwise is to be marked as anti-human and anti-progress — vide Ferry’s stigmatizing of deep

ecologists and animal rights advocates.⁴⁰ Domination by nature or domination by human nature: the choice is no choice as both depend on mere self-preservation. If we are no longer captivated by nature, we are captivated by our own domination of nature.

It seems we are at an impasse; there appears no way to escape from the logic of domination. Yet in *Negative Dialectics* Adorno suggests the possibility of a new categorical imperative based neither in reason nor in nature but somewhere in between. The (non)concept of the addendum he introduces seems to stem from the very suspension between human and animal that Agamben calls bare life. The addendum is beyond conceptual, identitarian thinking: it occupies the space of the nonidentity of conceptual thought. The addendum is both a somatic impulse and a reflective moment that acts as “a flash of light between the poles of something long past, something grown all but unrecognizable, and that which some day might come to be” and which offers “the phantasm of reconciling nature and the mind.”⁴¹ Neither instinct nor concept, the addendum bridges the gap between mind and nature, refusing to be laid open to the probings of reason alone. This nonconceptual concept appears as a flash of an almost forgotten alternative to the dominating drive of instrumental reason, based not in logic but in the bodily experience of compassion. The addendum is a moral impulse stemming from the recognition of the double horror of the experience of the concentration camps: “the new imperative gives us a bodily sensation of the moral addendum — bodily, because it is now the practical abhorrence of the unbearable physical agony to which individuals are exposed even with individuality about to vanish as a form of mental reflection.”⁴² The horror of Auschwitz is not merely a conceptual horror. Reason, rationality, and language are insufficient to express the revulsion inspired by the camps. Something physical or somatic initiates a response that thought cannot exhaust. This impulse is more than instinct: *it occupies the space between the concepts of human and animal, stemming from the gap between them.* The addendum is more than the abstract categorical imperative of Kant, which derives morality from reason alone: it is an immediate response that connects the physical abhorrence of suffering to the horror of the liquidation of the individual from its material body even before death. This individual liquidation is not limited to the camps but is a core feature of social organization under capitalism. Adorno suggests that we might base morality upon this addendum rather than on a dominating reason that is merely a mask for the natural drive to self-preservation. Valuing this impulse rather than reason alone, we might find the basis for a new form of society, one that builds on the impulses of compassion rather than domination. The addendum seems to come from the same rupture between human and animal that reveals bare

life: it represents the positive impulse that speaks across this void, and the possibility that we may finally realize a humanity that is a community of the whole, recognizing the dignity of each member of our socialized human species (or species-being) without recourse to reason, to rights, or to sovereignty.

A liberal humanism still based in the efficient administration of the earth, such as Ferry proposes, wants to turn back the clock on the revolution of thought implied by bare life. But he misrecognizes radical ecology’s threat to democracy as a return to barbarism rather than an extension of the barbarism we have carried with us through history. We have not yet succeeded in eradicating the modes of thought that result in the domination of animals and nature, and that finds its most perfect expression in the reduction of life to the specimen in the lab, the factory farm, or the concentration camp. The inclusion of animals and nature as subjects within the law appears as monstrous to the existing order. The flaws of deep ecology, or animal rights, or right to life movements, or other radical inclusions of the inhuman within the human should not just be seen as movements that distract from the necessity of revolution in the means of production but also as moments that highlight the necessity for a revolution in thought as well. However poorly articulated or potentially reactionary such movements are, they share a common thread of compassion for other beings. This compassion seems to serve no purpose — of what practical use is consideration for animals or trees? Thus it might restructure the way we understand our place in the world. I do not want to celebrate the horror of the abandonment that reveals bare life, nor merely incorporate it into a positive idealism that would see progress in regression. But what appears as progress is itself all too often horrific: “No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb.”⁴³ The Holocaust itself is too often seen as an anomaly in the history of progress and Enlightenment, but as long as we see the Holocaust as the exception, then there is no call for change. The Holocaust did not fundamentally restructure morality or society as Adorno seemed to hope it could, in part because it seemed to fit too seamlessly into a narrative about anti-Semitism as a residual barbarism that could be expunged with the defeat of the Nazis. Believing it to be expunged, we carry its principle with us into the future.

Natural life can no longer exist outside politics. But this realization must be tempered by the recognition that what we may be losing was never of much value compared to what we might gain. A split and reified consciousness that sees the human only in contradistinction to the animal and a system of law that is always preparing us to be banned and excluded are not to be mourned. Overcoming this split opens the possibility that we might unify

humanity through common compassion rather than reveal human unity as specimens, the kind of unity that leads to Auschwitz: the pure identity of death, and the unity of interchangeability that makes any life commensurable with another rather than particular and unique. Questions of labor cannot be separated from questions of environmental justice, nor can animal welfare or rights be separated from worker health and safety. The rise of environmentalism and the need for politics to address environmental questions merely in order to sustain human existence proves that there is no easy way back to a pure politics. But such pure politics also never existed — it was always haunted by that which was excluded. Neither is there a return to nature because the state of human being is always already alienation from nature. Capitalism, in alienating us from our fellows, takes from us not only our identities as human beings but also our potential to realize a global humanity that would include animals, rocks, and trees not in a primordial animism but as necessary parts of an anthropomorphic, humanized, and reenchanting nature. Problematic as the rhetoric employed by ecology and animal rights may be, the questions posed are thus *not* peripheral but central to coming to a new understanding of the relationship between humanity and nature, and thus coming to understand humanity itself. In seeking to save what appears outside human society, both ecology and animal rights enter into that zone of indistinction that may, once fully revealed, provide a means to fundamentally alter socioeconomic relations. Rather than seeing ecological and animal rights movements as misanthropic distractions from the real need for human liberation, we might begin to see them as fruitful places to begin to shape a resistance to a capitalist order that denies us our ability to be what we have never yet been: human.

Notes

¹ A prolonged discussion of the incompatible differences among environmentalism, deep ecology, and animal rights would be misplaced here. Environmentalism usually functions as a blanket term encompassing a wide variety of positions from conservation to eco-feminism but is generally conceived as a lighter shade of green because proponents accept a human-centered approach to environmental problems. Because deep ecology presents the most radical challenge to humanism, it receives the most attention and critique (in this essay as well as in general discourse). The animal rights position is non-anthropocentric, but in seeking to “widen the circle” of human rights to include non-human animals, it accepts the rhetoric of human rights. Because this means affirming the value of individual animals rather than just species,

animal rights frequently conflicts with both environmentalism and deep ecology. If all animal lives are of value, what our duties to wild animals might look like is difficult to say. Tom Regan goes so far as to call radical ecology “environmental fascism” because it impinges on the rights of individual animals. (Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, 2nd ed. [Berkeley: U of California P, 2004] 362.) The conflict between the needs of species as groups of animals in the wild and our duties toward them as individuals remains an undertheorized area of animal rights.

² Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order*, trans. Carol Volk (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) xxvii.

³ Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1983) 219. Williams suggests three headings under which most uses of “nature” fall: “(i) the essential quality and character of something; (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both; (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings” (219). The flexibility of the word is such that all three usages are commonly employed, and sometimes contradict one another.

⁴ Timothy W. Luke, *Ecocritique* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997) 11.

⁵ See Matt Cartmill’s *A View to a Death in the Morning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993) for a discussion of the roots of this idea in postwar thought. The events of World War II led many to believe that humanity was doomed to destroy itself through the use of the atom bomb. Deep ecology echoes this despair with its distaste for technology, though the actual means of destruction shifts — the population “bomb” being as dangerous as any weapon.

⁶ Luke, *Ecocritique* 42.

⁷ Ferry, *The New Ecological Order* xxviii.

⁸ Ferry, *The New Ecological Order* 5.

⁹ The distinction between a *determination* and a *situation* is largely unworkable, though Ferry tries to make it work. He is hard-pressed to account for the humanness of primitive peoples, or “people without history,” since according to his argument, they would be little more than animals and deserving of the same treatment. He finesses the point by arguing that cultural differences are inessential. Quoting Robert Musil he notes that a “cannibal taken from the cradle to a European setting will no doubt become a good European and that the delicate Rainer Maria Rilke would have become a good cannibal had destiny, to our great loss, cast him at a tender age among the sailors of the South Seas” (14). It is hard to see how this resolves the situation/determination bind, however, as it would equally apply to other animals. Most domestic animals, for instance, behave quite differently in given situations than they would if their essence were truly as fixed as Ferry would like to pretend. That animals can be trained to go against their own natures indicates their openness to cultural transmission. What Ferry seems to be addressing is the remarkable adaptability of human beings, something we share particularly with other omnivores but to some extent with many other animals as well. In speaking of animals’ strict adherence to natural codes, he overstates the case.

¹⁰ Ferry, *The New Ecological Order* 145–46.

¹¹ The inverse is also true: if not enough people care about nature or animals, then nothing will be done. Ferry is right to suggest that ethical models drawn from nature or science are always suspect, but why the market should be better is unclear.

¹² Ferry, *The New Ecological Order* 128.

¹³ Ferry, *The New Ecological Order* 146.

¹⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 1998) 1.

¹⁵ Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 126.

¹⁶ Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 129.

¹⁷ Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 139.

¹⁸ Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 113.

¹⁹ For an in-depth discussion of Nazi animal protection legislation, see Boria Sax, *Animals in the Third Reich: Pets, Scapegoats, and the Holocaust* (New York: Continuum, 2000) and Arnold Arluke and Clinton Sanders, *Regarding Animals* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1996).

²⁰ Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 175.

²¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 174.

²² Animal rights is often forced to confront the question of euthanasia precisely because its focus on the limit cases of humanity (the severely retarded, the very old, the very young, etc.) cuts both ways. If some people display capacities significantly less than those of the more intelligent animals then attempts to widen the circle may look very like closing it. Peter Singer, credited with launching the modern animal rights movement, has openly stated his support for euthanasia and even suggested that there isn't much wrong with killing very young infants. He has been prevented from speaking at conferences in Germany because of these disturbing echoes of Nazism in his work. Emphasizing the distance between animal rights and deep ecology, Singer claims we have no duties toward nature, but as our own preferences are advanced by its maintenance, we have an interest in keeping it in good order.

²³ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2004) 16.

²⁴ Agamben, *The Open* 34.

²⁵ Walter Benjamin to Florens Christian Rang, qtd. in Agamben, *The Open* 83. Benjamin's quote refers to the technological ideal rather than to how technology is actually employed. Full quote:

The mastery of nature (so the imperialists teach) is the sense of all technology. But who would trust a cane wielder who proclaimed the mastery of children by adults to be the sense of education? Is not education, above all, the indispensable ordering of the relationship between generations and therefore mastery (if we are to use this term) of that relationship and not of children? And likewise technology is the mastery not of nature but mastery of the relation between

nature and humanity. It is true that men as a species completed their evolution thousands of years ago; but humanity as species is just beginning its.

This suggests that the Cartesian model (of the master and possessor of nature) is not the only possible way in which our alienation from nature may be understood. Rather than a relationship of domination, there is a mutuality of mastering. Both nature and human beings are mastered by one another and held suspended in a between space that is not a dialectical overcoming.

²⁶ Von Uexküll's work influenced Heidegger's analysis of the animal's poverty in the world.

²⁷ Agamben, *The Open* 52.

²⁸ Agamben, *The Open* 76–77.

²⁹ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1988) 76.

³⁰ This does not discount the possibility that other animals may, at some point, become species-beings themselves. Should other animals develop the capacities Marx describes, one would assume they would have to be considered species-beings as well.

³¹ This separation from nature is not absolute. Elsewhere Marx describes nature as "man's inorganic body," highlighting the necessary relation to nature that further separates his position from that of the anti-natural man. Human beings are explicitly natural beings in Marx: "the first object of man — man — is nature, sensuousness; and the particular human sensuous essential powers can only find their self-knowledge in the science of the natural world in general, since they can find their objective realization in natural objects only" (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* 111).

³² Of course, harmony with nature is not something that can be experienced. To be in harmony with nature is to be unaware. The loss of harmony with nature can only be imagined.

³³ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* 109.

³⁴ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* 117.

³⁵ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* 158.

³⁶ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* 159.

³⁷ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2002) 11.

³⁸ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 6.

³⁹ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 5.

⁴⁰ In an extended section from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s "Notes and Sketches," Horkheimer and Adorno describe the very connection Ferry seeks to make between Nazism and animal rights.

116 Laura Hudson

In this world liberated from appearance — in which human beings, having forfeited reflection, have become once more the cleverest animals, which subjugate the rest of the universe when they happen not to be tearing themselves apart — to show concern for animals is considered no longer merely sentimental but a betrayal of progress. In the best reactionary tradition Göring linked animal protection to racial hatred, the Lutheran-Germanic joys of the happy murderer with the genteel fair play of the aristocratic hunter. The fronts are clearly drawn; anyone who opposes Hearst and Göring is on the side of Pavlov and vivisection; anyone who hesitates between the two is fair game for both. (211)

To care about animals is to be linked to the totalitarian forces of Nature, something the Nazis tapped into as the source of their power. To reject the Nazis, however, is to accept that vivisection and torture of animals is part of progress, and that to align oneself with the totalitarian drive of enlightenment as a second nature. There is no escape, and one must choose a side.

⁴¹ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton. (New York: Continuum, 2003) 229.

⁴² Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 365.

⁴³ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 320.