

Suffering, Monstrosity, Exceptionality

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Abstract: In what sense — which is to say, in what forms, under what conditions, and via what mechanisms — can nonhuman beings and forces take the form or play the part of political agency? While much recent work in the fields of posthumanism, animal studies and environmental humanities has helped to highlight, against the prevailing anthropocentric prejudice, the agential power of various nonhuman beings and conditions, the specifically political dimension to that agency is often obscure and frequently assumed. This chapter sets out to explore this problematic through an analysis of diverse sites and scenes of environmental politics. In the first instance, the analysis turns on the extent to which those cases articulating the most immediately available languages and frameworks for imagining environmental politics remain delimited by the anthropocentric nature of politics-as-usual insofar as they render nonhuman entities as the passive target of anthropic violence, governmental processes and representational politics. Drawing on a broadly continental tradition of philosophical inquiry, the discussion goes on to supplement this critical reading with a speculation on the potential for more-than-human forms of agency to appear otherwise within the space of politics today.

What we have to create a response to is *the intrusion of Gaia*.

— Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times*, p.42.

Registering the consequences of ongoing environmental destruction and the impending disaster of global climate change, an increasing proportion of humanities and social sciences scholarship over the last few decades has sought to diagnose and decry the anthropocentric logics and values that ostensibly underpin modern industrial societies. In their most immediate form, such efforts revolve around producing a critique both of the presumption that the nonhuman world exists purely as a resource serving human ends and of the corresponding prioritization of human over nonhuman interests in efficacious sites of decision making and action. Looking beyond such analysis of anthropocentrism *qua* value system and exercise of power, other efforts offer an interrogation of the (onto)logical commitments characteristic of a mode of thinking and acting dubbed human-exceptionalism, which is grounded in the idea that there is a fundamental discontinuity between human and nonhuman lifeforms.

Against the view that the human animal is unique in possessing a range of qualities and capacities (reason, language, intention, freedom, prospection) that separate it from the nonhuman world, that is, much recent work in the fields of posthumanism, animal studies and environmental humanities has sought to highlight various ways in which nonhuman beings or systems exhibit characteristics that have otherwise been designated as exclusively human, in part by interrogating our assumptions about what defines these privileged qualities (see Kohn, for example). Such work has thus underscored the ways in which different species of animals, say, possess forms of agency that have typically been reserved

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for humans: an ability to demonstrate ingenuity in solving problems, to use tools for specific purposes, to cooperate or negotiate with other agents, to engage in acts of deception, to resist power, and generally to exert influence over events or respond to circumstances in ways that cannot be explained via the language of instinctual reaction and inborn drives.

Together, these critiques of anthropocentrism announce an imperative to develop an animal and environmental politics appropriate to contemporary existence, characterized as it is by the sense of turmoil conveyed by Isabelle Stengers' pithy "intrusion of Gaia" in the epigraph above. Yet the specifically political possibilities opened by this critique remain obscure or presupposed, in that they are frequently taken to imply merely an expansion of the range of interests to be accommodated by existing political processes rather than a more radical challenge to understandings of politics as such. Any one of several routine acts of animal activism may serve to illuminate the problematic. Over the last few years in the Western Australian city of Perth, for example, vegan activists have engaged in a series of political interventions, rallies, and public "stunts" aimed at highlighting the issue of animal rights by analogizing the production and consumption of animal products with human slavery, torture, and murder. The forms of protest taken by the activists have tended towards the spectacular, including pouring fake blood over the floor of popular fast food chicken outlets and donning farm animal costumes to lay memorial flowers before packaged meat products in supermarket refrigerators ("Vegan Activist"; "Notorious Vegan Activist"). Heeding the need to compete for media attention to reach a wider public (Morozov, 55), the activists filmed the events on phone cameras and uploaded the footage to social media with the aim (often realized) of having the video redistributed by local news channels. Thus, a segment of engaged citizenry serves to speak to political processes by introducing into public debate, via mass media, calls for animal liberation, proposals to enshrine and protect animal rights, and so on. This debate, in turn — ideally, at least — leads to improvements in animal welfare enforcement and to changes in state legislation (in the form, for example, of a ban on live animal exports), potentially driving the development of other government initiatives aimed at recognizing the rights and interests of nonhuman animals.

By prioritizing nonhuman interests in this way, such forms of animal and environmental activism ostensibly present a challenge to politics-as-usual, highlighting a need to incorporate the concerns and rights to wellbeing of all manner of living creatures within political decision-making. Environmental activists, together with various advocacy groups and formal political parties dedicated to addressing animal and environmental injustice, thereby come to function as representatives of an unenfranchised constituency, speaking on behalf of a marginalized or oppressed collective of interested parties and striving to have that constituency's claims to protection recognized by an established political process. In this regard, formulations such as Bruno Latour's "the parliament of things" (142–5) or David Wood's "the parliament of the living" (280–6) not only capture the logic of these endeavors but potentially imagine an even further-reaching transformation of this political framework. Via these and similar formulations, that is, the concerns and wellbeing of all manner of nonhuman entities, both living and nonliving, are situated from the outset as procedurally equivalent to the human interests, freedoms, and livelihoods that are taken as the remit of conventional politics. Such visions of government for the more-than-human thus appear to lay a foundation for an environmental politics that transcends the species chauvinism characteristic of secular humanism and (neo)liberal democracy.

By the same token, appeals to the model of representative politics make apparent the seemingly unavoidable anthropocentrism of these political efforts, if not also of politics as such. In the first instance, the language of rights and moral value routinely deployed in

calls to respect nonhuman lives relies, as has been argued many times already (Derrida, *Animal*, 64–5; Giraud, 7–8; Wolfe), on a thoroughly anthropocentric model of subjectivity: an expansion of human rights to encompass an indefinite, hence ever contestable, range of nonhuman animals, depending on whether they possess some attribute, such as intelligence, sentience, or agency, that evidences their moral proximity to humans and thus qualifies them for moral considerability. Beyond these complications regarding eligibility, moreover, struggles for public and political recognition of animal welfare and environmental protection issues ultimately highlight the lack of any direct political agency on the part of nonhuman “claimants,” who are instead situated in this process as a voiceless and powerless subaltern on whose behalf various advocates purport to speak.

Politics, in other words, continues to function as a sphere of exclusively human activity, reinscribing the centrality of human agency — *a fortiori* the institutions of the sovereign state — in the performance of political action and in processes of social transformation and geopolitics (Burke and Fishel; Saunders, this book). By the same token, nonhuman lifeforms seem capable of appearing on this scene only as the victims of (human) violence and the targets of political power. Thereby reproducing human-exceptionalist and anthropocentric logics — but potentially also a colonialist silencing of “nonmodern” voices more generally (Haraway, “Promises”; Giraud, 26–31) — political efforts conducted within this framework risk undermining their disanthropocentric ambitions through the very work of advocating for nonhuman life. The fact that attempts to articulate a politics sensitive to more-than-human interests so frequently have recourse to the language of parliamentary politics thus suggests that the humanist model of representational politics continues to constitute a significant impediment to displacing anthropocentric approaches to the nonhuman world.

Recent work in animal rights theory only underlines the enormity of the challenge. Here, the imperative to consider what the acknowledgement of nonhuman interests means for thinking about politics has prompted the development of several theoretical or philosophical works, broadly analytic in style, seeking to derive a normative political framework from a founding affirmation of nonhuman interests. Developing in-principle arguments about the need to understand animals as worthy recipients of justice (Cochrane; Garner), enhanced models of political deliberation that can accommodate nonhuman interests (Parry), and even categories of animal citizenship derived from a new moral framework (Donaldson and Kymlicka), these works avow an obligation to engage responsibly and compassionately with animals and recast this responsibility in terms associated with a political discourse (justice, citizenship, participation).¹ In that sense, the “politics” offered by these accounts unfolds as something more like an applied ethics — driving “the political turn in animal ethics,” as the title of one collection of such work puts it (Garner and O’Sullivan), and imagining animal politics in terms primarily of what it “ought to be.”

Yet these ethico-political frameworks, developed and justified based on logical argumentation (as works in philosophical ethics routinely are), inevitably presuppose the authority of reason. If this observation appears so obvious as to be trivial, the accepted legitimacy of this necessary appeal to reason nevertheless presents a particular problem for attempts to develop a nonanthropocentric politics. For this appeal ineluctably serves to submit ideals of human-nonhuman existence to the power of the human animal, as that living being who possesses reason (*zoon logon echon*), for confirmation of their validity. Offered or received as blueprints, moreover, such theorizations rely upon the power of existing political organizations for their implementation, granting the human animal (as *zoon politikon*) final authority, once again, over the forms and limits of a more-than-human

politics (Briggs, *Animal-To-Come*, 140–1). Indeed, this model of rational thought and its capacity to enable social or political change for the better remains the founding assumption and central tenet of humanism, which is surely at best an equivocal ally in the effort to imagine a politics in view of the nonhuman world. The *cogency* of the reasoning that informs these and other ideals of nonanthropocentric politics, moreover, hardly guarantees the emergence of immediate, widespread, or even necessarily measurable change in moral behavior among the populace (Rose, 6–7). Constitutively anthropocentric on the one hand, therefore, and only tentatively effective on the other, the all-too-frequently assumed power of (human) reason to organize existence in harmony with the good and the true potentially plays a major part in obscuring the scope or possibilities of a properly nonanthropocentric politics. Yet how else to imagine and foster an animal, environmental, or more-than-human politics *after* humanism except using reasoned thought and its application in the form of responsive political action? Alternatively, what could a *posthumanist* politics, a politics that exceeds the bounds of (humanist) politics-as-usual and the authority of *zoon logon echon*, hope to be? How might it be recognized, which is to say, in what sense — in what forms, under what conditions, and via what mechanisms — might nonhuman beings and forces be thought or observed to play the part of political agency?

In the following discussion, I take up these questions by investigating the potential for nonhuman forms of agency to appear otherwise within the space of politics today. Rather than formulating reasoned prescriptions, or a rigorous ideal for the purpose of guiding political action and structural transformation, I approach this problem from the perspective of a more speculative, deconstructive outlook developed from engagement with a diverse set of ideas, arguments, and techniques coming out of a broadly continental tradition of philosophical inquiry. “Intensifying the sense of possibles” harboring within a situation, as Stengers might put it (“Insistence”, 17), the investigation aspires to “produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization” (Derrida, *Specters*, 89) by way of a deconstructive reinterpretation of three disparate forms or scenes of more-than-human politics. Loosely or indirectly, these three scenes correspond to and with what Donaldson and Kymlicka (3) identify as “three basic moral frameworks” that have been brought to bear on the question of an animal or environmental politics: the “welfarist,” “ecological,” and “basic rights” approaches, the last of which Donaldson and Kymlicka reconstrue in terms rather of “citizenship.” Reinterpreting these scenes under the signs of “suffering,” “monstrosity,” and “exceptionality,” the analysis here turns on a search for signs of political agency that challenge or complicate the seemingly unavoidable appeal to the figure of the human in attempts to define a posthumanist more-than-human polity.²

The first section discusses Kelly Oliver’s reflection on “vulnerability” as a phenomenon fostering a politics sensitive to both human and nonhuman suffering, before seeking to interpret this suffering beyond its conventional function as moral *ground* for political action in the form of animal welfare protection. The second section, with reference to Jacques Derrida’s thought of “nonpower” (*Animal*; Briggs, “Derrida’s Nonpower”), expands on this counter-intuitive reading of vulnerability to reimagine ecological sites as arenas of more-than-human conflict whose “management” by conservation agencies is ever threatened by monstrous forces and interests that are not entirely reducible to the conventional image of anthropocentric violence. Finally, the third section turns to urban and domestic scenes of multispecies interaction to pursue a reinterpretation of Hannah Arendt’s seemingly humanist account of politics as the distinguished performance of action in concert. Heeding Stengers’ injunction to “create a response” to Gaia’s “intrusion,” the analysis engages with the philosophical ethology of Dominique Lestel and Vinciane Despret

for the purpose of considering, before or beyond prospective arguments for the juridical institution of animal rights and animal citizenship, the forms and means by which nonhuman agents already assert their exceptional political status. As a minimal indication of the ways in which nonhuman beings and forces may take the form of political agents today, then, these analyses aim to show the extent to which environmental politics after humanism may turn not only on a revision of the priorities and processes of politics as we know it but moreover on a reimagining of where and how politics is unfolding today.

Suffering

Given the potential for articulations of a posthumanist or more-than-human politics to become trapped within the orbit of representative politics, the question of nonhuman political agency might, in the first instance, be developed by investigating the extent to which inherited political concepts and practices can accommodate or enable other perspectives on the workings of politics as such. Consequently, a first step towards identifying the conditions and mechanisms of nonhuman political agency may lie in speculating on alternative, disanthropocentric interpretations of acts or events that are otherwise identifiable in more conventionally political terms.

Kelly Oliver's ongoing engagement with characterizations of social justice issues in terms of a politics of recognition proves useful in this regard. Originally proposed as a critique of liberal assumptions about autonomous personhood, the approach to recognition as a political framework is derived from several influential readings (Taylor; Honneth) of Hegel's account of the formation of collective subjectivity, hence of social and ethical relations, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. On this reading, the state and the civil society institutions that collectively underpin democratic values of freedom and justice are positioned as the outcome of historical struggles among members of communities to have their identity, autonomy, and rights recognized by others. The forms of oppression and neglect suffered by various cultural minorities and marginalized groups are understood to stem, therefore, from a lack of recognition granted to these groups by the state and the dominant institutions in society. Politics thus takes the form of a demand or struggle on the part of disenfranchised groups to have both the inequities defining their specific situation and their rights to full personhood and equal citizenship recognized by political power. As Oliver argues, however, the desired conferral of recognition only "reinforce[s] the power structure of dominance insofar as those in power control who is recognized and who is not" (477). In that sense, the conferral of recognition "is part and parcel of a pathology" that, as evidenced by a long history of colonization and domination of non-European peoples, Indigenous cultures, and natural worlds, "makes oppressed peoples beholden to their oppressors" (477). As with the representational model of advocacy, then, the social theory of recognition cedes power to the very groups and institutions that produce injustice through their withholding of recognition.

As a normative theory aspiring to validate the claims of the marginalized and oppressed, the social theory of recognition thereby fails to appreciate its complicity with the processes of marginalization that recognition would putatively overcome. Indeed, these shortcomings serve to highlight the inherently conservative forces with which everyday advocacy efforts must negotiate and compromise, as a pragmatic necessity, to achieve limited social justice gains. For Oliver, though, a more responsible, more hospitable basis for approaching the problem of political recognition can be derived from recent attempts

(Butler) to reorient this theory towards mutual recognition not of autonomy but of *vulnerability*. This reorientation is particularly productive, she argues, if vulnerability is acknowledged both as a condition that “humans share ... with all living creatures” (480) and as a form of experience that is “differentially distributed” among bodies and across social and political contexts (481).³ Crucially, Oliver advances this argument by stressing the centrality of *pathos* to the appreciation of vulnerability: the “recognition of vulnerability,” she argues, “cannot be merely a form of knowing,” as “we need *pathos* or empathy to act on what we recognize” (481). This “*pathos* beyond recognition” transforms recognition, in other words, into an experience of compassion, underscoring our own vulnerability to *feeling for* vulnerable, suffering others. *Pathos*, in that sense, takes hold of those who are capable of feeling and responding with compassion; it takes possession of those who would otherwise be said to possess it. Seizing these beings who are ordinarily imagined to be autonomous agents, capable of acting and exercising (political) power over others, this empathic force subjects them, therefore, to the workings of an affective power that exceeds their control.⁴

Such an account of political response to vulnerability promises to drive a significant transformation in thinking about the possibilities of animal politics. To be sure, in emphasizing the importance of vulnerability or suffering in making ethical and political decisions, Oliver’s affirmation of *pathos* no doubt repeats a move that is central to many an argument in animal ethics, and which often has as its source or locus Jeremy Bentham’s marginal note on the art of government. There, Bentham identifies not “the faculty of reason” or “the faculty of discourse” as the attribute central to political concern but rather the capacity to suffer.⁵ Acceptance of the moral significance of suffering lies, moreover, at the heart of the “welfare” approach to animal issues, the political weight of which is evidenced by animal welfare laws enacted by any number of legislatures around the globe. But where these classical forms of utilitarianism displace the faculty of reason as the primary *criterion* of moral considerability, the insistence on *pathos* as a faculty of feeling rather than “merely a form of knowing” further complicates or compromises the *authority* of rational knowledge in the determination and distribution of political rights and responsibilities (see Saunders, this book). Oliver’s formulation of *pathos*, that is, registers a potential to shift the focus in political discourse from knowing to feeling, from autonomy to heteronomy, from action to passion, at the same time as it expands the sphere of politics from a concern with human interests to encompass the interests of life more generally. And in this way the language of *pathos* — of vulnerability, empathy, and compassion, more generally — presents an alternative to the (humanist) language of rights and rightness, but also of fairness, insofar as these conventional discourses imply a rational and dispassionate, hence unaffected, calculation of (equitable) entitlements and (reciprocal) obligations.

In view of the problem of practical politics, moreover, this “*pathos* beyond rationality or recognition” (490) foregrounds, for Oliver, a concept and strategy of “witnessing” as “a powerful alternative to recognition in reconceiving subjectivity and thereby ethical relations” (483). By “witnessing,” Oliver means to capture not simply seeing with one’s own eyes but, further, the “connotation of testifying to that which cannot be seen,” hence of *bearing witness* to horrors beyond recognition. While she cites testimonies from Holocaust survivors to elucidate the concept, a specific strategy adopted by the Animal Save Movement perhaps better illustrates the more-than-human “applications” of her theory. For this activist movement, begun in 2010, has aimed to promote an equitable eco-friendly world by holding vigils outside abattoirs for the purpose of bearing witness to the industrial slaughter of livestock. Compared to more confrontational, potentially even violent forms of protest, such “action” appears to take an almost entirely passive form, involving no direct

efforts to disrupt abattoir operations beyond offering water to dehydrated animals. Yet through the simple, nonviolent act of “not looking away from animal suffering but coming close,” as co-founder Anita Krajnc has put it, the movement seeks to harness and grow the compassionate power of communities in the hope of encouraging the dismantling of animal exploitation industries (“About”). The strategy thereby manifests less as a protest conveying to a political process the demands for recognition of a disenfranchised population, than as a moment of mute compassion, a sufferance in sympathy. And what the campaign ultimately communicates, if it communicates as such, is not an ideal or principle depicted in words and action, but an affective power, a *pathos* passed on from one body to the next.

To the extent that Oliver characterizes *pathos* as a fundamental trait of (human) subjectivity, hence as some seemingly essential, if often deeply buried, sensitivity characteristic of (human) life as such, her argument appears awash with a philosophical normativity that courts the humanist faith that proper recognition of this putative universal will generate a more just and hospitable politics. In that respect, the considerable indifference shown to the multiple manifestations of suffering on the part of countless lives — both human and nonhuman — across the globe must surely give one pause. But understood as an historical achievement, one no more evenly distributed across the human population than the forms of suffering such empathy would spur “us” to address, Oliver’s *pathos* helps to articulate an engagement of politics beyond the parameters of state recognition and representative government. Indeed, the prevalence of animal vigils held by a global, ever-growing Animal Save Movement evidences the scope, at least, for the language of *pathos* to account for the extent to which (some) nonhuman suffering can — contingently, culturally, perhaps even arbitrarily — come to be felt in a politically effective manner. Privileging the communication of affect rather than the authority of reason, the thought of *pathos* thus highlights a key strategy in a posthumanist politics, which is to say in a politics that is not only sensitive to the nonhuman world but also irreducible to the ideals of reasoned debate and state recognition of rights that are implicit to the model of representative politics.

For the same reasons, moreover, the forms of vegan activism which earlier served to illustrate the anthropocentric limits of the advocacy approach might now be judged as not so limited in practice. On the contrary, their spectacular, passionate nature serves both to express and to propagate that *pathos* beyond (human) rationality and recognition which allows for the entry of nonhuman others into the sphere of politics. In view of a posthumanist politics, though, what perhaps matters in these forms of activism is less their potential to bring about progressive legislation (or not solely that potential, at any rate) than their role in initiating or intensifying diffuse cultural change. Through the distribution of a sensitivity to specific modes of nonhuman suffering, if not through the cultivation more generally of a compassionate, nonanthropocentric ethics, such forms of activism may yet induce political transformation beyond the official arenas of state politics and rational deliberation.

More radically still, such examples of activism, understood as a consequence of *pathos*, as a response to suffering, also provide insight into the scope for nonhuman beings to exercise a strange kind of political agency of their own. For *pathos*, as the process by which (some) human bodies come to be *moved* by other (nonhuman) bodies — called into action by the latter’s suffering — thereby serves not only as the means but also as the *target* of a kind of distributed political mobilization. Through this affective power, that is, compassionate citizens find themselves seized, their autonomy overcome by heteronomy, driven by non- or more-than-human forces to act. Defying the efforts of “sovereign” human

subjects to act in accordance with rational authority and established political duty, suffering nonhuman agents take hold of various human actors and exploit their vulnerability to vulnerability. Inflicting empathic pain and generating compassion, they act on and through (human) others, enlisting response to their own suffering to support their efforts to continue their existence, irrespective of whether such action would or could be legitimated by established authority or good reason. Even before a welfarist program or argument can be proposed or instituted by the rational, political animal called human, in other words, nonhuman creatures of various kinds are already acting, working in advance to organize their advocacy, by way of eliciting a (human, political) response to their patent signs of suffering.

Monstrosity

To the extent that suffering may sometimes drive political agents to act, “vulnerability” registers something other than the utter powerlessness or defencelessness that it is regularly thought to denote. Just as “*pathos*” names that (human) vulnerability that would stir citizens into action, that is, that vulnerability which appears in the form of (nonhuman) suffering functions, at the same time, as a “capacity” to invite or initiate sympathy and (political) movement. Vulnerability, in that sense, constitutes a form of what Jacques Derrida, in a sustained philosophical engagement with the question of the animal, has characterized as a “passivity” or “nonpower at the heart of power” (*Animal*, 28).

While this “nonpower” has frequently been read for its ethical import and its affirmation of the experience of “compassion” (McCance), the concept also has implications for the analysis and the deployment of power more generally. For a nonpower at the *heart* of power also speaks, for Derrida, to a certain contradiction or equivocality in the very ideas of action, transitivity, capacity. Rather than naming the absence of power or the annulment of one power by a greater power, that is, nonpower captures a fundamental ambivalence and differential conflictuality that is the condition of power’s operation (Briggs, “Derrida’s Nonpower”). It thus points to a differential *play* of forces — to the distribution, inversion, conflict and frustration of power in an ongoing redistribution or exchange of strength and weakness, agency and patiency. In this sense, the passivity that Derrida speaks of characterizes a site of subjugation, to be sure, but also of facilitation, the grounding of activity in passivity. Indeed, understood as a condition of power *as such*, nonpower speaks to the degree to which any form of activity, capacity, agency is owed to an anterior play or dispersion of forces — institutional, physiological, social, geological, evolutionary, technological, and so on — which manifests in the moment of seemingly voluntaristic action. Thus, if one can be said to be capable of writing, for example, this power derives from a dispersed set of technological affordances, training regimens, semiotic capacities, physiological aptitudes, social protocols, imaginative potentials (and more) that are themselves products of complex histories of cultural, political, and evolutionary convergence, conflict, and transformation.

To that extent, Derrida’s “nonpower”, like Oliver’s *pathos*, offers a posthumanist complication of theories and practices of political representation to the extent that it characterizes acts and behaviors less as the simple product of an autonomous (human) agent than as the location or effect of a strange kind of patience or passivity — as the conflictual outcome, therefore, of a relayed redistribution of the power of an affection or, indeed, of multiple affections. By the same token, that condition of vulnerability which tends

to be conceived as the exposure of (nonhuman) lives to gratuitous violence, death, and oppressive control becomes recognisable on this basis as encompassing susceptibility or receptivity to more productive or developmental forms of force as well. As a site or moment of ambivalence and conflictuality, that is, that vulnerability called nonpower manifests as a capacity to respond to — precisely by being differentially affected by — all manner of impulses and strategies: processes of discipline and deterrence but also of encouragement and cooperation, hence preservation, support, and even empowerment. In that sense, moreover, nonpower underscores the problem of (political) representation in a second way, in that it also names a certain condition or capacity to be represented, to be subject to processes of representation and indeed to be constituted within such processes. To be sure, it is this susceptibility of nonhuman creatures and systems (along with so many other “voiceless” others) to being represented that sees their physical suffering become the business of advocacy. But with this susceptibility also comes the potential or capacity to be engaged and represented otherwise — engaged and represented with regard, that is, not only to a condition of suffering but also to a diversity of activities, dispositions, behaviors, and accomplishments.

In this way, arenas of environmental and ecological management become public political spaces, not least of all in the sense that Latour suggests when, as part of his parliament of things, he instates as representatives of “natures,” or nonhuman beings and systems, the “scientists who speak in their name” (144). Such forms of environmental management already testify to a more-than-human politics, of course, to the extent that they operate primarily through state-sponsored agencies and legislation with a view to managing, by limiting and reducing, the damage caused to the nonhuman world by that harmful, self-interested animal called “human.” Here the moral framework that Donaldson and Kymlicka characterize as the “ecological” approach plays a significant role the operations of this politics. Environmental scientists and other experts, that is, provide scientific evidence of the specific human-induced injuries and intrusions suffered by wildlife and ecosystems, whose intrinsic value becomes only more precious as the threat of loss and decay magnifies. Governmental agencies, authorized by this testimony, implement strategies and forms of action that aim to protect designated species and sites from harm and disruption while enabling adaptation and restoration of populations and habitats. Acknowledging the vulnerability of wildlife and ecosystems to a monstrous human violence, efforts at environmental management thus aim to support nonhuman flourishing predominantly through frameworks of protection and, increasingly, of building ecological resilience.

It is in view of such a construction of environmental politics that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), for example, represents the interests and livelihood of nonhuman communities and environments by “leading a global effort to preserve and protect one of the planet’s most significant natural wonders” (“About Us”). Situated on the north-east coast of Australia, the Great Barrier Reef is recognized by the UNESCO World Heritage Convention as one of the most complex ecological systems on earth, globally significant for its unparalleled size, natural beauty and unique biodiversity (“Great Barrier Reef”). Operating under the Australian Government’s *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act* of 1975, the GBRMPA thus aims to protect this natural heritage site by mitigating multiple threats to its health and integrity. The various stresses induced by anthropogenic climate change — rising sea temperatures, increasing ocean acidity, more frequent storms and cyclones — constitute the most significant threat to the reef’s health, but beyond highlighting the impact of global warming and endorsing climate change action, the

GBRMPA also attempts to maintain ecological stability by tackling threats deriving from human (mis)use of the wider area and its “resources”: coastal development, reef water pollution, illegal and over-fishing.

As with animal advocacy, such forms of environmental management arguably manifest as nodes of a distributed agency, whereby (nonhuman) vulnerability enlists political agents in the service of protecting an ecosystem and facilitating its flourishing. Understanding ecological interactions in this way invites consideration of scenes of human-nonhuman interaction and coexistence in terms of the effort to pursue a multispecies justice (see Celermajer et al.; Khandaker, this book). Indeed, public authorities such as the GBRMPA might, on this basis, be accorded formal political power as arms of an “independent, statutory Environmental Defenders Office” to ensure adequate representation of nonhuman interests within governmental, legislative, and judicial processes (Eckersley, 253). Yet, in view of the complexities raised by the nonpower at the heart of power, the actions of *Acanthaster planci*, the crown-of-thorns starfish (COTS), invites a reinterpretation of this politics of protection and flourishing. For these coral-eating seastars are a key factor in the decimation of live coral cover across the reef infrastructure and for this reason mark one of the most visible and tangible threats posed to the reef ecosystem. In particular, “outbreak events” — occasions in which COTS populations suddenly and significantly increase in size — have been identified as a major problem over the last 40 years, not only causing coral decline through predation but also inhibiting the establishment of coral communities more resilient to climate change. COTS population density control, by way of strategic surveillance and manual culling programs — injecting individual starfish with lethal doses of bile salts or vinegar — thus constitutes a key strategy in protecting the reef’s hard coral cover.

In the context of environmental management efforts, control of COTS population density no doubt amounts to the use of best available science to protect vulnerable coral species and encourage reef ecosystem stability. Viewed in terms of a differential play of more-than-human forces which identifies action as the conflictual outcome of multiple affections, however, the scenario appears more akin to an arena of ecological warfare. Environmental management comes to function as a mode of what Gelves-Gomez (this book) describes as “command-and-control management” — a form of securitization, that is, with COTS control programs employing strategically applied lethal force to defend a territory against an aggressive invader. For their part, *A. planci* individuals may be said to be simply harnessing opportunities for flourishing provided by an unexpected abundance of nutrients, with research suggesting that COTS outbreaks are facilitated by nitrogen from industrial fertilizers being introduced into reef waters via flows of agricultural run-off into river catchments (Engelhardt, 7–8). If this exploitation of industrial pollution consequently places COTS outbreak events under the sign of perverse, unnatural mutation — a threat to natural stability — other studies have shown that the reproductive biology and population recruitment strategies make the asteroids prone to episodic outbreaks in any case (Engelhardt, 7). That their aggressive colonization of reef habitat could alternatively be rendered as little more than a by-product of mundane practices of subsistence and reproduction perhaps testifies, then, to the extent to which both their status as monstrosity and their corresponding death sentence are already assured by the Great Barrier Reef’s designation by various institutions as natural beauty, tourist attraction, marine science treasure trove, and more — in short, a wonder of the world, to be protected and preserved.

The image of environmental politics constructed by institutions already invested in an endangered species or site is, in this way, one frequently organized around the protection of a prior perfection: the preservation of a symbiotic “good life,” a peaceful and just

multispecies coexistence threatened only by unnatural forces that disturb this peace from without.⁶ Against this background, the conditions which define *A. planici* flourishing become the very conditions which make them vulnerable to lethal control, their “resilience” constituting a threat not only to their reef cohabitants but also to their own lives. By the same token, human agencies, such as the GBRMPA, come to function ambivalently as peacekeepers, adjudicating conflicts between warring parties. But the peace thus secured is one defined all too regularly with reference to a stability and resilience that “incorporates multiplicities of difference into a single and apparently incontrovertible consensus” (Vardy and Smith, 175).

In this sense, strategies of ecological management themselves *enforce* an order that inevitably serves the interests of some (human and nonhuman) constituencies more than others. Such a characterization no doubt contrasts with the sense of good conscience that otherwise accompanies efforts to secure the future of vulnerable organisms and ecosystems. Indeed, it recalls the seemingly irresolvable tension between the moral frameworks of animal welfarism and ecological holism (Callicott; Donaldson and Kymlicka), with the former taking individual lives to be sacrosanct and the latter prioritizing the integrity and survival of the ecological system as a whole over its individual components, such that it is sometimes necessary to “kill for conservation” (van Dooren). From the perspective of “nonpower,” however, it is the ambivalence of this nevertheless unavoidable recourse to power for the purpose of deciding and administering multispecies justice that situates such frameworks as part of the problem to be accommodated — in Haraway’s sense of “staying with the trouble.” For such ambivalence speaks to those frameworks’ ultimate lack of authority and reliability, to their incapacity to manage, once and for all, the force of competing demands and counterclaims from so many other — nonhuman, potentially monstrous — others. This nonpower, in other words, testifies to the violence at the heart of ideals of more-than-human responsibility, even as it operates as that vulnerability or *pathos* which ideals of more-than-human responsibility would target for the purpose of mobilizing action on the (nonhuman) other’s behalf.

Yet rather than presenting merely a “critique” of environmental management strategies, or a relativization of all human and all nonhuman interests, what a reinterpretation of conservationist efforts along these lines further highlights is the *stakes* of a posthumanist politics, properly speaking. Read as a sign of the nonpower at the heart of power, that is, the ambivalent vulnerability of the coral-eating starfish speaks to a more-than-human politics precisely insofar as those “monstrous” animals *refuse* to abide by the parameters of an ecological “health” diagnosed in view of human (if not also neoliberal) interests. Asserting their will to occupy a territory and exploiting opportunities for flourishing, these nonhuman agents *have their say* in the attempt to determine the terms of coexistence. Through such forms of action — potentially monstrous in view of accepted or settled images of normal or healthy ecological behavior — these and other nonhuman agents stake their claim, in turn, to the terms of political conflict and resolution, thereby placing the very definition and limits of “politics” beyond the power of human agencies — political, economic, scientific — to determine and police.

It is in view of the fact of this more-than-human conflict, no doubt, that the language of war and security bears pertinence in the description of environmental management efforts. But this contestation — which, *qua* more-than-human, necessarily *exceeds* already recognizable measures of multispecies justice — may yet serve in turn as the impetus to develop and pursue other strategies of political interaction, negotiation, and response. To that extent, experimental research into the aversion response exhibited by *A. planici*

individuals when placed in water conditioned or occupied by their principal predators perhaps holds out hope for the development of more “diplomatic” (Stengers, *Cosmopolitics II*) means for discouraging COTS expansion (see Motti et al.). Regardless, what the very possibility of such developments may indicate, with respect to the problem of imagining a posthumanist politics at least, is the nonpower of prevailing concepts and formations of politics. Frustrating their ability to secure the space of politics in advance, this nonpower simultaneously generates the very power of such constructions to accommodate the entry or insistence of unanticipated, even unrecognisable — hence monstrous — displays of political will and agency on the part of any number of nonhuman forces.

Exceptionality

To acknowledge the nonpower that inevitably thwarts efforts on the part of human institutions and concepts to define the terms of politics is to begin to intensify the specifically political possibilities harboring within what Isabelle Stengers has called “the intrusion of Gaia” (*Catastrophic Times*). Through this formulation, that is, Stengers attempts to produce a response to the looming catastrophe of climate change that would refuse to endorse conventional conceptions of it as a problem that is to be mastered and thereby solved. For Stengers, to speak of the *intrusion* of “Gaia” is to identify a “being” that is irreducible to images of the environment as passive background to human activity — irreducible, that is, to the concrete earth and its various physical, chemical and biological processes, which would then be conceived in the form of an object that “we” can separate ourselves from and, as it were, hold in our hands or submit to our will. But this thought of intrusion also serves to dispel those comforting images of a nurturing “mother earth” that would promote “a sense of belonging where separation has been predominant” (43).

Gaia’s intrusion marks, in other words, not only a mutation in a history of coexistence and co-evolution which constitutes life on earth but also a profound challenge to the assumed relationship between human life (history, society, knowledge, innovation) and the material world which accommodates that life. Rather than naming a mode of belonging, then, “Gaia” expresses “an assemblage of forces that are indifferent to our reasons and our projects”, designating therefore a “type of transcendence” whose intrusion “makes a major unknown, *which is here to stay*, exist at the heart of our lives” (45). In this sense, Gaia appears today not simply in the form of climatological and ecological incursion, a potentially catastrophic transformation to the material conditions of existence, but moreover as a disturbance within those forms and practices of knowledge that have previously contrived for “us the liberty of ignoring her” (47). Response to the reality of climate change would therefore require something more or other than the development of practical and technological alternatives to the carbon-based energy industries that have profoundly changed the earth’s atmosphere. Beyond such technical “solutions,” that is, Gaia’s intrusion foregrounds the need to introduce into the concepts and knowledge with which we comprehend and presume to organize human existence the irreducible fact of our nevertheless variable relation to the material, organic world and to a longer duration of co-evolution than is ordinarily captured by notions of history and theories of politics.

For thinking through a posthumanist or more-than-human politics, a politics after humanism, then, Stenger’s “Gaia” broaches the question of how to allow for the entry of nonhuman agency within concepts that organize our understandings and practices of politics as such. Accordingly, where conventional accounts of contemporary politics largely unfold

against the background of some theory of the social contract, of political authority as a matter of agreement reached between all interested parties on the back of discussion and debate, the intrusion of Gaia would prompt the question of what the “social contract” could mean if it is to hold, as Dominique Lestel puts it, “between beings where some speak and others barely communicate, but where they all share interests and meaning” (68). Surprisingly perhaps, Hannah Arendt’s recollection of the “original Greek understanding of politics” (23) in *The Human Condition* has much to offer to this question, notwithstanding that book’s titular focus (Briggs, *Animal-To-Come*, 92–120). For this work of recovery sees Arendt elaborating the terms of a form of political life that precedes both modern political philosophy’s theories of the social contract as well as the advent of the modern state and its structures of representation.

Most significant in this respect is Arendt’s argument that while the work of legislating and executive government by vote were notable features of Hellenic public life, the early Greeks did not count such tasks “among the political activities” (194–5). Rather than consisting in the work of ruling or governing, *bios politikos* referred, on Arendt’s account, to a life dedicated to what she calls *action*: the performance and sharing of words and deeds in public, by way of which one acted to distinguish oneself before others. Such action is central to the “founding and preserving [of] political bodies” (9), Arendt argues, for the way it expresses the “human condition” of natality, “to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative. To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin ... to set something into motion” (177). While the political realm arises out of the sharing of words and deeds, what gives such dealings the “dignity” of action (13), therefore, is the part they play in setting underway something new, a process or development “which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before” (178). Necessarily carried out in view of and in concert with others, moreover, such action is defined by its public and collaborative character, its “reality” coming entirely “from being seen, being heard,” and generally being performed “before an audience of fellow men” (198). Such dependence “upon the constant presence of others” speaks, in turn, to action’s “frailty”: its essential vulnerability to frustration and failure, but also its potential for intensification and transformation. Indeed, this essential vulnerability of action and its dependence on publicity were, on Arendt’s account, the very impetus for the establishment of the *polis* itself, a foundation which created the conditions for the remembrance of great deeds and the sustained performance of action. For the foundation of the *polis* assured “that the most futile of activities, action, and speech, and the least tangible and most ephemeral of man-made ‘products,’ the deeds and stories which are their outcome, would become imperishable” (197–8).

Far from being a right or responsibility that could be delegated to rulers, representatives, or advocates, therefore, politics in this sense of action in concert speaks to the “founding and preserving” of conventions and relationships that far exceed the spaces of politics as defined in the modern era. To be sure, Arendt, writing in the 1950s, felt little cause to question the classical view that humans alone stand out from the eternal “circular movement” of “nature’s ever-recurring life” (18–19). Yet some warrant for reinterpreting her account in view of the intrusion of Gaia is provided when she claims that “whatever enters the human world of its own accord or is drawn into it by human effort becomes part of the human condition” (9). In this sense, Lestel’s attempt to reconstrue the concept of “social contract” in a multispecies context provides the basis for developing the possibilities of a more-than-human politics along such Arendtian lines. For central to his argument is a proposal to understand the sites and relationships characterizing daily existence as

constituting the activity and interactivity not of communities of citizens, as conventional political theory would have it, but rather of “hybrid communities” of humans, animals, plants, and artifacts. In this way, Lestel makes visible more diverse forms of relationship, “based on arrangements of practices and shared cooperations that are negotiable but not debatable” (68–9), than can be accommodated by modern political philosophy’s humanist preoccupation with “a society of equals” that supposedly underpins a consensual contract of “mutual obligation.” Such work no doubt lends itself to efforts, such as Donaldson and Kymlicka’s, to develop a more diverse and accommodating set of categories of citizenship, which would grant various types of animal others differential rights by virtue of their variable relationships to human society. But, giving expression not to a political or normative ideal but to a practical or existential reality, Lestel’s concept of hybrid communities arguably highlights more a loose site or framework of multispecies interaction than a privileged way of being or a defined project articulating the terms by which nonhuman agencies would be regulated or, indeed, enfranchised. Against the apparent imperative of political philosophy to determine the principle according to which the world — human and nonhuman — would ideally be built and governed, that is, Lestel’s approach simply invites attention to a more-than-human political realm that, to borrow Arendt’s words, “rises directly out of acting together” (198).

In this focus on hybrid communities, we might therefore see the basis of a more-than-human politics that not only transcends the scenes and the limits of conventional representative government but is also in many respects already well underway. For Lestel’s approach draws attention to the founding and preserving of *multispecies* political bodies, emphasizing the role that the “extraordinary multiplicity of relations” between humans and animals (62), the “reciprocal attachment between humans and animals” (70), has played in shaping human (and nonhuman) existence. Here, the domestication of various forms of animal life (and plant life, too) no doubt “constitutes a major foundation of hybrid communities” (64), and thus presents as a key question for a more-than-human politics. But where a certain understanding of animal rights might prefer to imagine this process as one in which the human animal conscripts nonhuman animals into its service, submitting the latter to misery, violence, and premature death, Lestel argues that the flow of power cannot be understood in “purely unilateral terms,” if only because domestication is an operation from which “humans themselves do not escape untouched” and from which different animal and plant species benefit, by design or otherwise (64).⁷ As a process of *mutual* transformation, moreover, domestication potentially establishes forms of relationship that see individual animals developing surprising characteristics or “talents” by way of which they distinguish themselves before others. Clever Hans, the horse who could give answers to arithmetic problems (Despret, “Body”); Kanzi, the bonobo who uses a language system to communicate with his human handlers (Stern); and Sugriva, the chimpanzee who likes to use a smartphone to browse images posted to social media platforms (Milman) — these and other individuals have earned distinction from their startlingly unexpected displays of talents acquired from their domestic situation. Moreover, all three, in their respective ways, could lay claim to having set into motion a new process to the extent that the unexpectedness of their acts and accomplishments have helped to transform ways of engaging with their species and with nonhuman life more generally.⁸

To be sure, ethologists, primatologists and psychologists are typically careful to emphasize the “artificial” circumstances that have contrived the development and performance of these cognitive talents, and in doing so they cast doubt on the validity of these performances as evidence of the “inherent” cognitive or communicative competences

of the species generally. More worryingly, reports of these and similar achievements by other nonhuman animals — elephants painting “self”-portraits; dogs and orangutans displaying acts of friendship — are frequently shadowed by expressions of concern about animal welfare abuse and by exposés of the cruel, destructive, and illegal operations which target such animals for capture and sale to an exploitative animal entertainment industry. But where these justified critiques of abusive forms of domestication tend to take as their ideal the existence of a pure animal, untainted by human contact and living in a pristine natural environment, the intrusion of Gaia calls into question the presumed separability of human and nonhuman existence.

From the perspective of a posthumanist politics, that is, that “acculturation” which reveals or produces in various individual animals unexpected potentialities points not — or not simply — to a necessarily violent deformation or corruption of a natural existence (Donaldson and Kymlicka, 8–10). Rather — or in addition — it points to the continuing, irrepressible potential for mutual adaptation and collaborative development that has characterized in varying ways multispecies coexistence and co-evolution across a longer history.⁹ For a posthumanist *politics*, moreover, what is at stake in this process is precisely the scope to initiate through such collective action new forms of human-animal-environment relations, new ways of living together, that are *not* so fundamentally exploitative as those that have defined the “animal-industrial complex” (Noske; see also Wadiwel). As a condition or process of mutual (if frequently unequal) transformation, in other words, domestication raises the explicitly political question not only of the kinds of “interests” that “humans and animals share within these hybrid communities” — material, protective, reproductive, as well as “what we might call ‘intellectual’ interests, for lack of a better word” (Lestel, 67) — but also of the kinds of relationships that might accordingly be founded and preserved, disclaimed or preferred. Politics from this perspective becomes the collaborative effort to develop new ways of living together — forms of relationship that, ideally, are less violent and less instrumental than many today, but which are not necessarily founded on the isolation of animals from humans and on the protection of the former from all forms of contact, cohabitation, and interaction with the latter. Never entirely free, no doubt, from the exercise of (human) power over nonhuman agents, politics in the wake of the intrusion of Gaia nevertheless remains irreducible to a contest over the *legitimacy* of such uses of power and becomes, more broadly, an ongoing multispecies *experiment* in how to live and act together.¹⁰

The broader political potential of acts of nonhuman exceptionality is arguably evidenced, moreover, by the way that startlingly unexpected accomplishments on the part of animal denizens, companions and collaborators routinely win recognition and fame — and thereby gain their “reality” — from an attentive public. Today, for instance, “discoveries” of surprising capabilities on the part of different animal individuals and species are frequently reported and circulated via global news coverage. Bees learning to solve basic maths problems; dogs being taught to drive cars; octopuses demonstrating their ability to escape from sealed jars — operating under the protocols of experimental ethology, such feats no doubt emerge from contrived scenarios, begging further interrogation of the specific play or dispersion of forces that could occasion these feats. But the results of the research are invariably announced via the popular press, in addition to peer-reviewed science journals.¹¹ In the age of citizen journalism and user-generated content, moreover, such media attention extends to marvellous feats accomplished outside the context of controlled experiment, as urbanized “wildlife” devise sometimes astonishing tactics for navigating human-built environments.¹² Indeed, online media sharing platforms abound

with videos of animals doing surprising things: parrots playing basketball, mice surfing waves, cats flushing toilets! And if such acts of nonhuman exceptionalism, when assessed alongside more conventionally “political” forms of action, seem marginal or inconsequential (Morozov, 55), their online circulation, as Vinciane Despret argues, both arouses and provides proof of an enduring interest in what humans and animals produce together (*What Would Animals Say?*, 199). Indeed, “because many of the experiences that are shared on the Web are due to the common work between a human and an animal, from the mutual learning that has developed, from a productive complicity, from a game that has been patiently introduced... we learn what *we* are capable of with them” (200). In this way, Despret suggests, such videos attest “to the creation of a new interspecific ethos, of new relational modalities” (196), thereby evidencing the potential of such displays “to transform the beings involved” — both nonhuman actors and human witnesses — “and the knowledge that unites them” (197). Such documents speak, in other words, to a certain potential to found and propagate new ways of relating to nonhuman agencies, new multispecies political bodies.

Notwithstanding the apparent endorsement here of particular modes of animal experimentation, what follows from the reinterpretation of Arendt in light of the intrusion of Gaia is not a political imperative to subject various animals to arduous training regimes for the purpose of cultivating the capacity to perform astonishing tricks. What the Arendtian framework brings to light, rather, is the sense in which *politics* — as the practical problem but also as the productive potential of *living together* — is far from confined to the operations and concerns of political agencies and political philosophy as conventionally conceived. Indeed, in view of Arendt’s account of the frailty of action, politics takes place in spaces and modes far beyond those conventionally associated with the institutions of the state, the work of legislation, strategies of social movement organizing, and even standard accounts of citizenship to the extent that the most “mundane” features of everyday life and the most “frivolous” of pastimes may yet become the basis for founding and preserving new relational modalities among diverse members, both human and nonhuman, of hybrid communities. *A fortiori*, politics thus exceeds attempts on the part of political philosophy (as applied ethics) to legislate, based on the authority of reason, those principles that ought to organize or govern ecopolitical interaction and existence.

Conclusion

In view of these deconstructive reinterpretations of sites of multispecies interaction, the key question for a posthumanist politics might be said to revolve around the ways in which and the extent to which images or events of nonhuman agency can exceed the representational, governmental, and legislative frameworks that always seem to take as given the centrality of human reason (*zoon logon echon*) and human agents (*zoon politikon*) to the performance of political action and to processes of social transformation. Beyond making room for nonhuman interests within conventional political processes, that is, the pursuit of a posthumanist or more-than-human politics, an environmental politics after humanism, might take the additional forms of initiating diffuse cultural change through the communication of affect; of acknowledging the potential of nonhuman agencies and interests to defy principles of good ecological management and to formulate new terms for coexistence; and of engaging in collaborative processes of discovery by which human and nonhuman participants tackle the problems and enrich the possibilities of living together.

Such modes of more-than-human politics do not await their formalization as strategies to be legitimated by ethical principle and deployed in an organized form but are in many ways already underway, and perhaps have been for some time, even in less obviously posthumanist forms and contexts. The reconception of political agency for a posthuman and postnatural world would thus be a matter of continuing to identify and intensify these processes already underway.

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¹ Such approaches, of course, are also able to be adopted in attempts to include ecological systems and the environment more generally among the voices that may “speak” in a deliberative democracy (see, for example, Dryzek, ch. 6).

² Here and throughout, I deploy “animal,” “environment,” “nonhuman,” “more-than-human,” and “posthumanist” as a set of nonsynonymous substitutions or loosely overlapping terms that point, by virtue of their “ordinary” significations, in different ways to forms of existence (living or nonliving, material or cultural) that exceed or otherwise remain irreducible to the figure of “the human.”

³ See Khandaker, this book, for an analysis of the multispecies conflict between stateless Rohingyas and migratory Asian elephants, which may serve to evidence Oliver’s point insofar as Khandaker expands “the umbrella of victimhood” to elephants and refugees alike, whilst analyzing the complex socio-political realities that have brought about their respective forms of suffering.

⁴ In this sense, Oliver’s “*pathos*” can be understood in terms of what John D. Caputo has previously called “the power of powerlessness,” the power that emanates from the forgotten, the downtrodden, the oppressed and the exploited, and which seizes the (vulnerable) agent, undoes the pretence to self-possession, and transforms autonomy into heteronomy.

⁵ “The question is not, Can they reason?, nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer? Why should the law refuse its protection to any sensitive being?” (Bentham, 236; see also Khandaker, this book). Oliver’s situation of vulnerability at the base of animal politics thus comes after Peter Singer’s more well-known argument for animal liberation, but also Derrida’s sustained interrogation of a human-animal distinction based on the human animal’s putatively exclusive possession of “faculties” of language and reason (*Animal*).

⁶ See Briggs, *Animal-To-Come*, 120–55, for an extended interrogation of this logic. The continued effectivity of this image even in innovative theoretical work may be glimpsed in Celermajer et al.’s characterization of multispecies *injustice* as “compris[ing] all the *human* interruptions of the *functioning* of [the] broad array of relations” which constitutes “ecological reality” (127; emphases added).

⁷ Lestel cites the historical example of dogs and ruminants taking advantage of the salt, scraps and waste products generated by early human communities (64). Closer to the present, we might acknowledge the evolutionary and environmental “success” of various urban-adaptable species that have come to thrive in the globalization of urban environments.

⁸ The feats of Clever Hans, for instance, lie at the basis of the formal recognition in behavioral psychology of “experimenter expectancy effect” and the development of methodological principles aimed at eliminating this effect for empirical studies. See Despret, “Body.”

⁹ Thus, studies in convergent evolution highlight the presence of abilities in domesticated (but not undomesticated) canine species to read human communicative and social behaviors. These studies suggest that “the unusual social skills of dogs arose as a result of domestication and represent a case of convergent evolution with humans (i.e., similar derived traits in distantly related species)” (Hare and Tomasello, 441).

¹⁰ It is regarding this determination of legitimacy that my argument perhaps diverges from – some might say, “falls short of” – the case for a group-differentiated theory of animal citizenship presented by Donaldson and Kymlicka. While the latter identify several interesting examples of

emergent human-animal institutions in the course of propounding their theory of animal rights, the thought animating my efforts here and elsewhere is that the attempt to foster a posthumanist or more-than-human politics “after humanism” might sometimes be advanced (i.e. strategically, hence politically) by an effort to *resist* or *inhibit* the temptation to seamlessly translate suffering, conflict, initiative (politics) into reasoned principle or prescription (applied ethics). Such a strategy, as I hope the section on “monstrosity” above already makes apparent, may yet play a key role in attempts to intensify the possible forms and spaces in which such politics, beyond all “authorized” politics, takes place.

¹¹ These and other examples are readily discoverable through simple online searches (“bees can count”; “dogs drive cars”). In the case of honeybee numeracy, for example, original research evidencing counting abilities in honeybees has been reported over the last decade in *The Telegraph* (UK), *The New York Post* and *The Guardian* as well as on *CNN*, and write-ups of these amazing abilities nowadays feature on any number of popular and kids’ science websites.

¹² In 2022, Australian media (ABC, *The Guardian*) reported on the spread among Sydney-based sulphur-crested cockatoos of an independently invented technique for flipping the lids on household rubbish bins to expose their contents. These accounts were followed in 2023 by reports on the ingenious efforts of these same cockatoos to subvert various attempts by bin-owners to prevent this access.

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