

## BETWEEN THE SPECIES

### Negotiating the Anthropological Limit: Derrida, Stiegler, and the Question of the “Animal”

#### ABSTRACT

Although much has been written about the so-called political, ethical and religious turns in the thinking of Jacques Derrida, few have noticed that his late writings were marked by what we could tentatively call a “zoological turn.” This is surprising given that in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* Derrida clearly stated that the question as to what distinguishes the human from the animal has for him always been the most important question of philosophy. This essay will attempt to offer a preliminary exploration of this still largely uncharted aspect of Derrida’s thought. Starting from a brief overview of Derrida’s most important writings on the question of the animal, it will be argued that his decision to write an entire book on this issue was largely motivated by his eagerness to settle a discussion with one of his pupils, the French theorist of technology Bernard Stiegler.

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In a collection of lectures published as *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Jacques Derrida elaborates a critique of “the gesture [that] seems to constitute philosophy as such” (2008, 40), namely the positing of a single and indivisible dividing line separating the animal from the human. For Derrida, the question of the animal is, therefore, not one more pressing question among many others, but probably “the most important and decisive question” (2008, 34), a question which he says to “have addressed a thousand times, either directly or obliquely, by means of readings of all the philosophers I have taken an interest in” (2008, 34). Hence, what for Derrida secretly unites Descartes, Kant, Levinas, Lacan and Heidegger is that these thinkers simply oppose the *Animal* to the *Human* by denying all animals certain qualities that are supposedly only proper to man (2008). To counter this tradition, Derrida will, however, not give back to the animal what man has always deprived it of—a gesture that risks introducing biological continuism and all the dangerous implications thereof—but argue that all living beings, including the human, suffer a radical powerlessness.

Although the publication of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* aroused an increasing interest in what could tentatively be called Derrida’s “zoological turn,” few have noticed that he did not write this work to open a new area of research, but rather aimed to elucidate an approach to this issue that he had already been defending at least since the early nineties. Starting from a brief overview of Derrida’s most important writings on the question of the animal, I will show that his critique of the anthropocentric bias in Western thought in this book does no longer simply concern the view that man is superior to the animal by having some transcendental quality, but, on the contrary, by having no qualities whatsoever. The reason for this change of discourse is that Derrida wanted to demarcate his

own approach more clearly from that of a former pupil of his. Indeed, Derrida's main argument in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* that the Western philosophical tradition considers man's superiority over the animal to be the result of an "originary fault," as well as the fact that he sees the basic structure of this argument most overtly formulated in the Greek myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus, are clearly references to the work of Bernard Stiegler who made precisely of Epimetheus's fault the emblem of his multiple-volume work *Technics and Time*. To conclude, I will suggest that Stiegler's project to think anthropogenesis as mutually constitutive with technogenesis should itself be understood as an attempt to correct what he thought to be Derrida's insufficient elaboration of the question regarding the singularity of the human animal.

Derrida's statement about the central importance of the question of the animal in his work arrives rather unexpectedly. Indeed, at first sight this claim seems to be in flagrant contradiction with the simple fact that Derrida apparently has not addressed this question as a specific subject of inquiry prior to the publication of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. To be sure, there has never been a lack of animal figures in Derrida's texts, but the strategic functions these animal figures fulfill are usually highly context-dependent and text-specific and certainly do not set the stage for a more profound investigation of the larger stakes of this issue. And yet, there nevertheless seems to be every reason to take this claim seriously. As if he wants to convince his readers that he is not merely using a hyperbole when making this claim, Derrida bluntly declares in this text that "logocentrism is first of all a thesis concerning the animal" (2008, 27). Derrida's versatility as a thinker renders it well-nigh impossible to detect an overarching theme in his writings. But it would certainly not be inaccurate to state that his critique

of logocentrism—Western philosophy’s assumption that there is a foundational principle of being and that this principle can be grasped through reason and discourse—motivates nearly all of his readings of texts of the Western philosophical tradition. Looking back at his early writings such as *Of Grammatology* (1974) and *Writing and Difference* (1978) from this perspective, one could indeed argue that the “quasi-transcendental” concepts he elaborated in these works, such as the trace, the *grammē* and arche-writing, can also be read as potentially holding a strong critique of the rigid human/animal distinction bequeathed by the tradition. But even if we grant him the benefit of the doubt and assume that he did not merely retrospectively project a more recent sensitivity onto his early work, this issue was surely not at the centre of Derrida’s attention at that time. It was therefore generally assumed, and even more so following the so-called ethical turn of deconstruction marked by the growing influence of the work Levinas on Derrida, that his critique of logocentrism was mainly intended to call attention to the many forms of human alterity that come to disturb the self-certain subject. However, if we follow Derrida’s lead we should try to understand that this critique was above all meant to be a critique of the age-old presupposition that the “animal other” is deprived of *logos*.

One of the first times Derrida explicitly addressed this issue was in an interview with Elisabeth Roudinesco. Here Derrida argues that the relations between humans and animals must change drastically and adds that this is not merely an “ontological necessity,” but also, and especially today, an “ethical duty” (2004, 64). In contrast to his brief and rather purely theoretical reflections on this issue in earlier texts, on this occasion and in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* he even goes as far as stating that “a war has been declared on so many animals” (2004, 67)

and that the violence inflicted upon them could even be compared “to the worst cases of genocide” (2008, 26). Many consider this comparison between the slaughtering of animals and the systematic liquidation of human beings totally unacceptable because it illegitimately equates the worst cases of human suffering and the treatment of animals in big industry. We would, however, completely misunderstand Derrida’s intention if we take it to mean that he is blind to the fundamental differences between these two kinds of suffering, or even worse, that he abuses the suffering of those who were murdered in genocides to call attention to the suffering of animals. His point is not that we put too much weight on human suffering in comparison to animal suffering, but that we do not pay enough attention to the *singularity* of animal suffering. As Matthew Callarco has argued,

The very difficult task for thought here is to bear the burden of thinking through both kinds of suffering in their respective singularity *and* to notice relevant similarities and parallel logics at work where they exist. To do so requires abandoning... the hierarchical humanist metaphysics that we have inherited from the ontotheological tradition (2008, 112).

The common opinion that human life is intrinsically more valuable than animal life is deeply embedded in Western tradition and culture and it will therefore take more than rational argumentation and political commitment to bring about a radical reorientation of our value system. So although Derrida declares to have much sympathy for initiatives such as those of the animal rights movement (2004, 74), he is far from convinced that the violence against animals could be stopped or lessened by simply granting them legally sanctioned rights. For not only is

it exactly the Cartesian model of subjectivity upon which the modern concept of rights is founded that he considers to be responsible for justifying anthropocentric violence in the first place, but he also clearly states that he has “never believed in some homogenous continuity between what calls *itself* man and what *he* calls the animal” (2008, 30). This latter statement is clearly directed at animal rights theorists such as Peter Singer who argue that one should grant “human” rights to those animals that are endowed with sufficiently developed cognitive capacities. Since Derrida takes this to imply that certain species of animals are to be considered superior to, for example, mentally-ill persons, he calls such strategies that deny any qualitative difference between humans and animals nothing less than “ridiculous and heinous” (2004, 67).

It should be clear, then, that Derrida takes issue with both dominant positions in the discussion of the human/animal relation. It is no surprise though that the largest part of his writings on this problem deal with the anthropocentric bias of the continental philosophical tradition. His main critique of this tradition is that it has always given man a privileged position among the living creatures by endowing him with qualities, essences or “propers” such as language, consciousness, reason or moral awareness, which animals apparently do not possess. At the same time, however, he seems to be equally critical of those who strive to undo the metaphysical separation of man and animal by giving back to the animal the qualities that man has always deprived it of. According to Derrida, such a view does not take sufficiently into account the singularity of all living beings. In other words, Derrida aims to undo the radical human/animal binary, but at the same time he also wants to avoid putting man on the same ontological level as the animal. The

question is, of course, whether it is actually possible to steer clear from both of these positions.

It seems as if the full import of this problem only started to dawn on him in the wake of his critical confrontation with Heidegger's thought. It is well-known that Heidegger was an ardent critic of the many forms of "ontotheological humanism" that populate the philosophical universe and it would therefore have seemed reasonable for Derrida to assume that Heidegger's writings contain a thinking that does not take for granted the radical human/animal divide. It is probably with this expectation in mind that in *Of Spirit* (1989) Derrida ventured a critical reading of Heidegger's only text that explicitly broaches the problem of the being of the animal, namely *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1995). The guiding threat of Heidegger's argument in this lecture course is constituted by three theses: the stone is wordless, the animal is poor in world and man is world-forming. Derrida calls particular attention to the obscurity of the second thesis: what does being poor in world mean? Heidegger is quick to argue that this thesis certainly does not imply that there is a difference in degree between the human and the animal in the sense that the animal has only limited access to the entities in the world to which the human would have full access. Given that Heidegger clearly states that "every animal and every species of animal as such is just as perfect and complete as any other" (Heidegger 1995, 194), it is certainly not the case that these characterizations should be taken as an evaluative ranking of some sort. Yet, the animal must certainly have some access to the world, otherwise it could not be distinguished from the stone of which he said that it has no access to the world at all. The animal, Heidegger will conclude, has access to entities, but it does not have access to entities *as such*. Derrida comments as follows:

This analysis, certainly, has the interest of breaking with difference of degree. It respects a difference of structure while avoiding anthropocentrism. But it remains bound to reintroduce the measure of man by the very route it claimed to be withdrawing that measure—this meaning of lack and privation (1989, 49).

A lizard lying on a rock, to use one of Heidegger's examples, certainly relates to that rock in some way, but it certainly does not relate to the rock as such. The animal, Heidegger argues, is completely captivated (*benommen*) or absorbed by the entities that constitute its environment and therefore cannot have a free relationship to them. It always has a relation of utility with the entities it encounters and therefore cannot let the rock be what it is. Since the animal is captivated by its environment, the possibility to apprehend something as something is structurally withheld from the animal (Heidegger 1995, 247). This phenomenological possibility to reveal an entity in its being is reserved for *Dasein* only. Derrida concludes:

I do not mean to criticize this humanist teleology. It is no doubt more urgent to recall that, in spite of all the denegations or all the avoidances one would wish, it has remained *up till now*... the price to be paid in the ethico-political denunciation of biologism, racism, naturalism, etc. (1989, 56).

The question is then whether Derrida himself found a way to avoid the twin pitfalls of metaphysical humanism and biological reductionism. At the time Derrida wrote *Of Spirit* he still seemed to be very skeptical about the prospects to actually achieve this goal. Heidegger's case is exemplary in this respect. Although he consistently rejected both the reduction of



*Dasein* to a biological entity and the metaphysical determination of man as a rational animal, Derrida points out that in his notorious rectoral speech, “The Self-Assertion of the German University” (1993), Heidegger capitalizes on both evils at the same time by spiritualizing the forces of “earth-and-blood.” He consequently ends up combining “the sanctioning of nazism and the gesture that is still metaphysical” (Derrida 1989, 40). Having become aware that it is simply impossible to twist oneself completely free from both humanism and biologism, the question for Derrida then becomes that of knowing which is the least grave form of complicity with these two “evils.” In *Of Spirit* he does not yet elaborate such a negotiation with the anthropological limit, but he does give an indication of how one would probably have to proceed:

[C]an one not say just as legitimately that the having-a-world also has for man the signification of some *unheimliche* privation of world, and that these two values are not opposed (1989, 50)?

This is indeed the strategy that Derrida will follow in *Aporias* (1993). In the second essay of this short book, “Awaiting (at) the Arrival,” Derrida reminds us that Heidegger opened his *Being and Time* by arguing that *Dasein* is the only entity in the world that has the ability to question its own being and that an analysis of its existentials provides a privileged starting point to reopen the question of being as such. In the second part of his *magnum opus*, Heidegger shows that *Dasein*’s exceptionality resides in the fact that it is the only entity that has an experience of death. Only human *Dasein* can die, animals simply perish. Death, in other words, is *Dasein*’s most proper possibility. But, Derrida objects, is death not exactly an experience that will never present itself to *Dasein* and thus actually its most im-

proper possibility? No one will be able to experience his own death, no one will be able to “live” this experience. From this perspective, the relationship between *Dasein* and the animal suddenly appears in a very different light:

But if the impossibility of the “as such” is indeed the impossibility of the “as such,” it is also what cannot appear as such. Indeed, this relation to the disappearing as such of the “as such”—the “as such” that Heidegger makes the distinctive mark and the specific ability of *Dasein*—is also the characteristic common *both* to the inauthentic *and* to the authentic forms of the existence of *Dasein*, common to all experiences of death and also, outside of *Dasein*, common to all living beings in general (Derrida 1993, 75).

Heidegger’s metaphysical humanism is here defeated on its own terrain. To be sure, not by granting animals access to death “as such,” but, on the contrary, by showing that *Dasein* does not have that access either.

Human finitude, Derrida recapitulates in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, does not reside in man’s ability to run ahead towards death, but in the fact that man is not able to experience death as such, in a lack of power, in a not-having of the “as such.” This brings the human in close proximity to the animal. The most important question, Derrida argues, is therefore not whether animals do or do not have access to *logos*, speech, spirit, *tekhnē*, death, and the like, but to know whether animals can suffer. Being able to suffer is precisely this possibility without power, this radical finitude that man shares with the animal.

At the time of the writing of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, however, Derrida seems to have become aware of the fact

that this line of thinking could also clear the way for a more subtle version of anthropocentric thought. This strand of anthropocentrism would not oppose the lack of the animal to the plenitude of the human, but claims that man's superiority over the animal derives precisely from his deficient nature or his originary default:

[We will] see appear in every discourse concerning the animal, and notably in Western philosophical discourse, the same dominant, the same recurrence of a schema that is in truth invariable...: what is proper to man, his subjugating superiority over the animal... would derive from his originary fault, indeed from this default in propriety (Derrida 2008, 45).

The qualities that make man superior to the animal, such as *logos*, mind, language, etc., are not simply gratuitous gifts from God or from Nature, but emerge from his peculiar position as a deprived being. This would be the fundamental logic underpinning all metaphysical discourses concerning the human/animal divide. Unlike the animal, man does not have a fixed nature and that would paradoxically explain why he is able to gain access to these various defining traits. Leonard Lawlor has argued that this schema can be found in nearly all traditions of Western thought, but that it is most clearly present in those traditions that assume the fallen nature of man such as Platonism and Christianity:

Because of a fault, man conceives animals as being absolutely innocent, prior to good and evil, "without fault or defect." The animals therefore do not seem to suffer a fall... in contrast, man is not perfect; he has fallen and has a fault, which allows him to question. The abil-

ity to question brings us to the axiom: it is precisely “a fault or defect” in man, in us, that allows us to be masters over the animals (2007, 67).

Man would have suffered a fatal fall as a result of which he paradoxically attains a privileged position among the living beings, “[t]his would be the law of an imperturbable logic, both Promethean and Adamic, both Greek and Abrahamic (Judaic, Christian, Islamic)” (Derrida 2008, 20). Whence this sudden change of discourse? It almost seems as if Derrida’s argument that man also suffers from a deficient constitution, that man is also “poor in world,” had somehow started to boomerang back on him so that he thought it was now necessary to ward off the suspicion that his own writings would be open to such an interpretation.

In fact, there were certainly good reasons for Derrida to hold such a suspicion. In 1994, the French philosopher Bernard Stiegler published a book called *The Fault of Epimetheus* (1998) in which he argues that the origin of the human is neither to be found in some transcendental quality, nor in a particular genetic makeup, but in the structural coupling of a living being with its technical instruments. Significantly, Stiegler finds support for his argument in the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus (1998, 185-203). Since this story contains in broad outlines the central features of Stiegler’s philosophy, it seems worthwhile to summarize it here. In Protagoras’ version of this story as narrated by Plato, Epimetheus convinces his brother Prometheus to entrust him with the task of distributing qualities or powers among the living creatures that was commended by Zeus. The Titan performs his task by allotting each creature one specific quality making sure that there is an equilibrium between the species. But when it was time for the humans to

receive their due, Epimetheus suddenly realizes that he had already handed out all available qualities. When Prometheus arrives at the scene to inspect his brother's work, he notices that the humans are still naked and without means of defense. Because he is worried that their premature constitution could lead to the total destruction of mankind, Prometheus decides to make up for Epimetheus' fault and goes out to steal the technical skills and fire from the gods to compensate humans for their lack of qualities. What Stiegler wants to stress in his reading of this myth is the fundamental undefinability of the human or what he calls man's "default of origin." Hence, technics is not proper to the human either, but merely an external prosthesis that is only adopted afterwards, by default, to compensate for an originary lack of property.

There is little doubt that Derrida was mainly targeting Stiegler when he criticized those who hold that what is proper to man derives from his originary fault. Since Stiegler wrote his first volume of *Technics and Time* when he was a doctoral student of Derrida, the two must in any case have certainly been very familiar with each other's work. Moreover, in "Quand faire c'est dire" ("When to do is to say") (1994), an article that appeared shortly before *The Fault of Epimetheus*, Stiegler already explained that his theory should be understood as an attempt to resolve the question of the difference between man and animal which he thought Derrida has left in the air. In this article, Stiegler revisits Derrida's reading of Heidegger in *Of Spirit* that we discussed earlier. If man is also "poor in world" and his relation to the world is equally "guided by a narrow sphere of drives, of desires" (Derrida 2008, 159) and the like, Stiegler argues, then there still remains to be determined what is the human mode of being poor in world. In other words, if man is also a programmed being, if he does not have unmedi-

ated access to the world either, then the specificity of the human program still remains to be thought. Indeed, Derrida's argument only seems to beg the question. For if man and animal share a radical powerlessness, does he not end up endorsing some kind of continuism after all? Derrida seems to have anticipated such objections and counters them as follows:

I am not advocating the blurring of differences. On the contrary, I am trying to explain how drawing an oppositional limit itself blurs the differences, the *différance* and the differences, not only between man and animal, but among animal societies—there are an infinite number of animal societies, and, within the animal societies and within human society itself, so many differences (1987, 183).

But even if it is indeed the case that the philosophical tradition has always treated “the animal” as one homogenous category and consequently neglected the singularity of animal life, then we still bear the burden to determine what constitutes the singularity of the human animal. In order to steer clear from traditional metaphysical prejudices, Stiegler will answer this question by showing that the transition from the animal to the human is not the transition from a fully programmed living being to a being guided by no program whatsoever, but the transition from a genetic program to a techno-logical or what he calls *epiphylogenetic* program.

In the beginning of the third chapter of *The Fault of Epimetheus*, Stiegler writes that what is at stake in this book is “to think the birth of the human... and to attempt this independently of all anthropologism” (1998, 135). Stiegler finds a suitable point of departure for this project in the work of the

French paleontologist André Leroi-Gourhan. What is particularly interesting for Stiegler is that Leroi-Gourhan describes anthropogenesis as a process of “exteriorization” in the course of which the brain and the tool develop at equal pace. As this non-anthropocentric concept defies the classical image of the human as an animal to which miraculously the capacity for reflection is added, it seriously calls into question the radical opposition between the human and the animal. A crucial event for the development of Leroi-Gourhan’s theory was the discovery of the remains of the *Australopithecus* together with its flint tools in 1959. According to Leroi-Gourhan, this was the first bipedal humanoid to have benefited from exteriorization. What is so important about this paleontological finding is that the small size of the *Australopithecus*’ brain pan urges the conclusion that what was decisive in anthropogenesis was not cerebral development, but the erect posture and the new functional organization of the body that ensued from this novelty in the history of life:

The “freeing” of the hand during locomotion is also that of the face from its grasping functions. The hand will necessarily call for tools, movable organs; the tools of the hand will necessarily call for the language of the face. The brain obviously plays a role, but it is no longer directive: it is but a partial element of a total apparatus, even if the evolution of the apparatus tends towards the deployment of the cerebral cortex (Stiegler 1998, 145).

The erect posture brought about a gradual suspension of genetic constraints and, consequently, an increasing indetermination of the body functions. The immediate result was the appearance of tools and language to fill in for this lack of genetic program-

mability. Moreover, Stiegler writes, between the Australopithecus and the Neanderthalian tools evolved so slowly “that one hardly can imagine the human as its operator, rather, one much more readily imagines the human as what is invented” (1998, 134). This will be Stiegler’s thesis: the birth of the human *is* the appearance of technics in the sense that the human and technics “invent each other respectively, as if there were a technological maieutic of what is called ‘humanity’” (1998, 142), the cortex being informed by the tool as much as the tool by the cortex.

Leroi-Gourhan, however, will maintain that from the Australopithecus up to the Neanderthalian, “tools were still, *to a large extent*, a direct emanation of *species* behavior” (1993, 97), which means that he thinks that in this archaic period of thousands of years technical evolution was still mainly determined by the rhythm of cortical development, itself propelled by genetic selection, and thus essentially of zoological origin. According to the paleontologist it is only with the emergence of the Neanderthalian that technical evolution frees itself completely from genetic constraints. So although Leroi-Gourhan argues that the fact that the Australopithecus could already handle tools implies that this humanoid must have had a “technical consciousness,” he thinks he was still not yet endowed with a full-fledged “symbolic consciousness,” something that will only emerge with the Neanderthalian when an extraordinary increase in anticipatory capacities was accompanied with the stabilization of the evolution of man’s neuro-equipment. What is at issue here is the latitude that became available with exteriorization and the origins thereof. Stiegler argues that Leroi-Gourhan was wrong to say that the Australopithecus did not yet possess a symbolic consciousness. This thesis contradicts the simple fact that the Australopithecus must already have had the capacity for anticipation because the possibility to perform a



technical gesture requires, as Leroi-Gourhan himself explains, “a good deal of foresight on the part of the individual performing the sequence of technical operations” (1993, 97). So although Leroi-Gourhan came close to recognizing that the birth of the human coincides with the birth of technics, in the end he gives a determining role to cortical development, implying that the *Australopithecus* was still an animal and that the genuine origin of the human is the acquisition of a faculty for symbolization. This is a conclusion that Stiegler cannot accept:

There is no such [second] origin because technical differentiation presupposes full-fledged anticipation, at once operative and dynamic, from the *Australanthropian* onwards, and such anticipation can only be a relation to death, which means that symbolic intellectuality must equally be already there. Reflective intellectuality is not added to technical intelligence. It was already its ground (1998, 163).

The difficulty Leroi-Gourhan found himself confronted with, Stiegler argues, is the ambiguity of the term “exteriorization.” It gives the impression that what is exteriorized should be preceded by some kind of (mental) interiority, something that would function as the origin of this movement. But given the fact that Leroi-Gourhan himself had asserted that the brain was only a beneficiary of the rupture of exteriorization, there cannot be anything of that kind, whether it be in the guise of a neurological impetus or a premature consciousness. What has therefore remained unthought is the possibility that the “interior and exterior are... constituted in a movement that invents both one and the other” (Stiegler 1998, 142), so that “neither one precedes the other, neither is the origin of the other, the origin being the coming into adequacy [*con-venance*] or the

simultaneous arrival of the two” (1998, 152). The challenge is to think what Stiegler calls a “mirror proto-stage” or an “instrumental maieutics,” the structural coupling of the human and technics that makes the constitution of the one impossible and unthinkable without the other.

It is at this stage of his argumentation that Stiegler calls upon Derridean *différance* which Stiegler in this context understands as the history of life in which are articulated different stages of the *grammē*. Significantly, Derrida also based his concept of the *grammē* on what Leroi-Gourhan calls the liberation or exteriorization of programs. More specifically, Derrida finds in Leroi-Gourhan’s notion of “program” a “non-anthropocentric concept that does not take for granted the usual divides between animality and humanity” (Stiegler 1998, 137):

Leroi-Gourhan no longer describes the unity of man and the human adventure thus by the simple possibility of the graphie in general; rather as a stage or an articulation in the history of life—of what I called *différance*—as the history of the *grammē*... this movement goes far beyond the possibilities of the ‘intentional consciousness.’ It is an emergence that makes the *grammē* appear as such... if the expression ventured by Leroi-Gourhan is accepted, one could speak of a ‘liberation of memory,’ of an exteriorization always already begun but always larger than the trace which, beginning from the elementary programs of so-called ‘instinctive’ behavior up to the constitution of electronic card-indexes and reading machines enlarges *différance* and the possibility of putting in reserve (Derrida 1974, 84).

Since the *grammē* does not only concern genetic inscription, but also “electronic card indexes” and “reading machines,” in other words, means of technical inscription, it seems that the program is operative on both sides of the human/animal divide. But, Stiegler argues, it is nonetheless true that this transition from a genetic to a non-genetic program coincides with the appearance of the human and an account of the specificity of this passage is exactly what is still missing in Derrida’s writings.

The emergence of the human, Stiegler will conclude, coincides with the appearance of a third type of memory or program in the evolution of the living. First, there is *genetic* memory, which is common to all living beings and which remains strictly internal to the organism. Second, there is *epigenetic* memory, individually acquired experiences that are stored in the central nervous system of the living organism. The central axiom of molecular biology states that these two memories do not communicate with each other in the sense that the flow of information in organisms runs from the DNA to the proteins, from the genotype to the phenotype, but not the other way around. This means that individual acquired experiences are lost with the death of the organism. With the birth of the human, however, there emerged a third kind of memory that Stiegler calls epiphylogenetic memory—memory embodied in technical objects. Since the human is capable of exteriorizing its epigenetic memory in material supports—from stone tools to digital storing devices—it can preserve and transmit this memory across generations. It is this suspension of the law of life that according to Stiegler constitutes the specificity or singularity of the human animal.

Critics such as Ben Roberts (2005) and Geoffrey Bennington (1996) have argued, however, that it is not so much Derrida’s

interpretation of Leroi-Gourhan that is lacking in clarity, but Stiegler's appropriation of it. While Derrida's quasi-concepts such as the *grammē* and the trace precisely challenge the opposition between the human and the animal, Stiegler's distinction between epigenesis and epiphylogenesis would simply reproduce this opposition in terms of technicity. By insisting on the fact that the human is the only living being that is able to conserve its memory in technical objects, Stiegler would merely have invented a more subtle form of anthropocentrism. As we have seen, this also seems to be Derrida's own critique of Stiegler's theory of anthropogenesis.

I think, however, that we would do injustice to Stiegler's philosophy if we read it as simply implying that technics is the defining property of man since his argument is precisely that there is nothing proper to the human. If the danger of anthropocentrism is most critical when it straightforwardly opposes the animal to the human, then no worse could be done than to install an insurmountable gap between them on the basis of some transcendental property. In this respect Stiegler's refutation of what he calls the "miracle thesis" (1998, 161), that is, the positing of some form of "spirituality" without a rational understanding of its provenance, is rather an attempt to diminish anthropocentric violence than its continuation by other means. Moreover, the suppression of both overt and latent anthropocentrism could just as well lead to its opposite, namely the effacing of all differences between the animal and the human. As Stiegler puts it, "the contestation of oppositions must not eliminate the genesis of differences" (1998, 163).

When asked in an interview what he thinks about the fact that certain primates also use tools and transmit this knowledge to the next generation, Stiegler responds as follows:

If you would object to me that certain large apes also have cultures, then I would say that I am willing to accept them as members of the world which starts with the human—in other words, as embryonic fabricators of this third type of memory. I would most certainly allow them to enter human history. As a matter of fact, that is the reason why they are so close to us (2004, 49, my trans.).

Arthur Bradley has argued that this way of responding to this objection can only confirm the impression that Stiegler violently “absorbs every apparent exception into the narrative of hominisation” (2006, 98). I think, however, that such an interpretation arises because it is almost impossible to use the name of “man” without inheriting the metaphysical assumptions pertaining to this term. That is the reason why Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* to designate human being and why Stiegler prefers to call this entity simply the “who.” In other words, Stiegler is not primarily interested in the entity we unreflectively call “man,” but in the structure of experience that opens up when a living being enters into a mutual constitutive relation with technical objects:

I’m not interested in what we call “man” but in *temporality*, temporality that, as a form of life, has to decide what it is to become (and it so happens that this form of life is still called man today). Even when man is finished, when he belongs to the past, this form of life may well continue on, becoming ever more complex – and perhaps man is *already* finished (2003, 158).

Thinking anthropogenesis as mutually constitutive with technogenesis implies that the human is not a spiritual miracle that

is added to an animal body, but that hominization is “the pursuit of the evolution of the living by other means than life” (1998, 135). Hominization is not a break *with* life, but a break *in* life. Whether this negotiation with the anthropological limit will stop generating new controversies about the most important and decisive question of philosophy remains, however, to be seen.

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