What does philosophy have to say about animals? It appears that the general attitude can be inscribed in a traditional pattern of ascending hierarchy. Already in Aristotle the idea can be found that animals are “better” than plants, that humans are “better” than animals, that men are “better” than women, free citizens “better” than slaves, et cetera. Not because whatever is inferior is “bad”, but because whoever is superior knows better what is “good”. Even those who clearly “side with” animality as opposed to “humanity”, and fight for animal rights and animal liberation in order to ultimately achieve equal representation of the animal species in this still all-too-human world, cannot do away with the idea of the domination of mankind over non-human nature, as if the latter needed help, respect, support, recognition.

The fact is that animals, in fact, do not really care that people care about them: we sacrifice them, we put them on transport to the slaughterhouse, we eat them, exploit them, train them, involve them in art processes, give them rights and documents – but they stay indifferent.

The moral attitude of humans towards animals can be easily brought back to its affective root, to the level of desire, which underlines any ethical concern or pragmatic preoccupation. Thus, I think, philosophers are sometimes really jealous of animals’ ability to take pleasure in things, which animals, so philosophers think, nevertheless cannot fully experience as they do not have “consciousness” of that.

The philosophy of animality turns to the question of how to think of animal existence – which, supposedly, does not think itself. Here, the question of epistemeology and measurement arises. There is a kind of consensus that we cannot deal with animality as such, but only with the human construction of animality.

Animals cannot but be represented, which means that they are either a representation or a representative. A representation gives us an "external" idea of what an animal is as an "object" (as in art or popular science or mass culture). An animal as representative comprises a figuration of its "interest" as a "subject" (in the animal rights movement, for instance, as well as in animal studies that critically relate to the human sciences).

However, in bygone cultural traditions animals played a much more "active" role, serving as representatives of something "human" or "divine", as in totemism or in antiquity. There's Incitatus, for example, Caligula's favourite horse, which not only became a citizen of Rome, but a member of the Roman Senate as well. This is a truly ridiculous manifestation of the embodiment of representative power. In classical narratives, animals traditionally represent human weaknesses. To take more recent examples, in psychoanalysis, animals might represent human agents associated with law and order, like the wolf that represents the father in Freud's famous "Wolf Man" case. However, the very inevitability of the representational frame provides viability to the utopia of the "real" animal, which rather than being represented or representing something already given instead "opens" – but always retrospectively – the immediate givenness of the "real" of human beings themselves. The ambiguity of the animal, which is representation par excellence, yet at the same time also unrepresentable, provokes a particular tension between ontology, politics, and psychoanalysis, and it is interesting to track how animality produces itself in a radical way in the unstable field of the "human". Philosophers have always made a distinction between human beings and animals, giving rational thought, language, or consciousness of death as criteria. In a way, one could say that the domain of the human is measured by the animal. The animal measures and mediates an incessant process of the self-alteration of men.

Thus, regarding human madness, Michel Foucault says that animality is the human's internal truth, which shows the limits of the "human". Animality is like an unthinking, unthinkable mirror-twin of subjectivity, which knows itself only insofar as this domain of unknowing exists at the same time. According to Jacques Lacan, looking into the mirror, the human being appropriates its own image as "human" from without. But it is the animal that exists outside the mirror, whereas the human being has to recognise itself and, at the same time, is unable to do so.

The play of inside and outside, of inclusion and exclusion, is a kind of device that Agamben calls an "anthropological machine"; it establishes a kind of boundary between the self and the "animal" other. One can compare, again, this optical devise with the mirror. Human being recognise themselves in the animal and they do in the mirror. This is, to borrow a Lacanian term, a kind of mirror stage, the moment when human beings start to acquire their humanity. Recognising
themselves in the animal, they begin to distinguish themselves from it. But in this mirror-machine, recognition goes along with misrecognition. For Agamben, this is not only in a metaphysical sense, but also a political operation, which leads either to humanising the animal, or animalising the human. This machine produces the boundary between human and animal, and at this border, there is a lot of racism, violence, and blood.

Unlike Agamben, I do not pretend to stop the anthropological machine, or the machine of metaphysics, which supposedly devours the living energy of the animal that is hidden inside. I just want to take a certain position from which it will be possible to investigate whether the very same machine can work differently. Whereas in Agamben, who analyses how this boundary between human and unhuman is produced, both animalised humans and humanised humans are objects of violence, manipulation, et cetera, I am rather interested in how this boundary is crossed in this or that direction. What is therefore at stake for me is rather a certain subjectivity, a subjective dimension of animality, which I attempt to interpret in terms of unconscious desire. An argument I’ve developed in my work is that animal subjectivity can express itself as an unconscious desire, which must be read politically.

To give you an example, let me now make a brief excursus into an animal side of political ontology. In his "Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood", which was his first immersion in the problem of material interests and economic questions, Marx famously writes:

The so-called customs of the privileged classes are understood to mean *customs contrary to the law*: Their origin dates to the period in which human history was part of *natural history*, and in which, according to Egyptian legend, all gods concealed themselves in the shape of animals. Mankind appeared to fall into definite species of animals which were connected not by equality, but by inequality, an inequality fixed by laws. The world condition of unfreedom required laws expressing this unfreedom, for whereas human law is the mode of existence of freedom, this animal law is the mode of existence of unfreedom. [...] The animal genus itself is seen only in the hostile behaviour of the different animal species, which assert their particular *distinctive* characteristics one against another. In the stomach of the beast of prey, nature has provided the battlefield of union, the crucible of closest fusion, the organ connecting the various animal species.

The natural animal kingdom serves here as both a metaphor and a model for the spiritual one. The natural order contrasts, but also reflects and sets off the
social one. I would like to focus your attention on the first brick in this metaphorical construction, namely, on the natural animal kingdom, in which an unfree society, or the spiritual animal kingdom, finds its reflection.

First of all, the stomach of the beast of prey is of interest. Let us think about this beast. Isn’t it a strange figure? The beast of prey with its enormous belly, which is “the battlefield of union, the crucible of closest fusion”, and within which the various animal species are connected. What is its story? On the one hand, it is a part of the natural animal kingdom, where hostility reigns; it is among others — other animals, of other species. On the other hand, in a way, it seems to be apart from other animals and other species. Or, better, it had to be apart from them, at a certain point, before pouncing on them, before devouring them. As if it stayed among others for a while, but all of a sudden stepped away, and, from there, attacked and devoured others. Now it is full, has an entire living universe in its belly, which becomes a measure of all bodies. At this state, almost pregnant, it encounters Marx on his way and tells him a sad story of the natural animal kingdom, which Marx then recognizes as a story of humanity.

Indeed, Marx was not the only philosopher who used a predator metaphor in a context closely related to the formation of human society. The animal kingdom is a common form of measurement in traditional political thought. It could not be otherwise, since everywhere an oppressive power invariably persists in masquerading as nature. Everywhere, its legal justifications pretend that they are natural law. The most greedy, and malicious human beings don the skin of noble beasts. In the political realm, human beings traditionally wear animal masks.

At the beginning of his seminar *The Beast & The Sovereign*, Jacques Derrida introduces a peculiar series of various cultural representations of wolves, and, within this frame, brings in a very important quotation from Rousseau’s *Social Contract* (chapter 2), in which Rousseau critically addresses Grotius and Hobbes, who, in their thinking about the origin of politics, compare human beings to beasts:

> It is doubtful, then, according to Grotius, whether the human race belongs to a hundred or so men, or if that hundred or so men belong to the human race: and throughout his book he seems to lean toward the former opinion: this is also Hobbes’s feeling. So, here we have the human race divided into herds of cattle, each one with its chief who keeps it in order to devour it.1

In this figure of the chief of herds of cattle, Derrida discerns “a kind of wolf”\(^2\), and extensively comments on it. He is interested in the becoming-beast of a sovereign, of the strongest, who defines justice by his own reason. The reason of the strongest is what matters here, as a principle of (in)justice, which tends to be a principle of the law, established by a sovereign, who himself stands outside of this law. What is then the rationale of the wolf-chief? It is just that simple – his incredible appetite. Derrida puts a strong emphasis on the “in order to devour it”, on the intentional character of the chief keeping the cattle.

But what might this wolf, who keeps the herd of cattle in order to devour it, look like? In the spiritual (i.e. human) animal kingdom, the wolf has to look like others, it has to look like one of the cattle, to be, or to pretend to be, among them, one of us. That’s what happens in human societies. The chief of the herd represents himself as a part of the same herd, with the only difference that he occupies a sovereign position. He occupies the same paradoxical position as the Marxian beast of prey – being a part, but also being apart, and, finally, containing all the rest within him. When political philosophies say that the sovereign embodies the society, the state, the nation, or so on, one can read it literally – as an act of devouring.

However, in the actual natural animal kingdom, to put it bluntly, the one who wants to devour the others always looks different; his appearance gives him away. The cattle will immediately recognise the predator as soon as he tries to approach from outside. In order to keep the herd of, say, sheep, with a view to devouring them, a wolf must look like a sheep; he must wear sheep’s clothing. At a certain point he will rise up, throw off his sheep’s dress, and the flock will see him naked, they will see, but just briefly – and this will be the last scene they see – their naked king – naked, and with a wide-open mouth. Rising up, in animals, must equal showing one’s nakedness: that’s how humans appeared – by rising up, by exposing their sex, which they immediately covered with animal dress.

In order to devour, the sovereign dons an animal skin. Look, he says, this is a natural law; I am the strongest here, and this is my cattle. But we must raise here one more question: Is he really a wolf? Is he, who is lurking among the cattle, really a beast of prey? There is something dubious about this representation. Isn’t it that the strongest wears not only a sheep’s clothing (pretending to be a part of this given flock), but also a wolf’s mask (pretending to be a part of the hostile, natural animal kingdom as a whole in general)? He is very well covered, but does he really hunt?


Let us take another step forward, now following Michel Serres, who, in his book *The Parasite*, performs an unexpected turn in the very same traditional direction of representing the social as natural, and reconsiders all relationships in both natural and social economy in slightly different terms. Our relation towards nature and towards each other, according to Serres, is not a predatory, but a parasitic one. What is a parasite? It is the one who lives and benefits at the expense of the other. In parasitology this other is called the host. A parasite attaches to a body of the host, or digs inside it, and eats it. For Serres, the animal clothing is not just a metaphor:

We adore eating veal, lamb, beef, antelope, pheasant, or grouse, but we don't throw away their "leftovers". We dress in leather and adorn ourselves with feathers. Like the Chinese, we devour duck without wasting a bit; we eat the whole pig, from head to tail; but we get under these animals' skins as well, in their plumage or in their hide. Men in clothes live within the animals they devoured. And the same thing for plants. We eat rice, wheat, apples, the divine eggplant, the tender dandelion; but we also weave silk, linen, cotton; we live within the flora as we live within the fauna. We are parasites; thus we clothe ourselves. Thus we live within tents of skins like the gods within their tabernacles.3

From Derrida's predator, who keeps the cattle in order to devour them, we thus moved to Serres' parasite, who lives within the cattle and actually slightly eats it. But, in contrast to a number of small natural parasites, like vermin, insects and so on, he retains his position as chief of the cattle. He not only eats his cattle, but also stays with and within it, he keeps it, as is said, he takes care of it: he is a shepherd. A shepherd is another name for a chief of the cattle, who literally keeps them in order to devour them (and that's why he takes care of them). As a parasite, one might say, he is hosted by the cattle.

No one could better express it, in a fundamentally ontological manner, than Heidegger, who famously said: "The human being is the shepherd of Being."4 This sentence tends to be understood as a poetic metaphor for being as a flock, a congregation, led by man by way of language. But no one ever re-

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3 Ibid.
ally took seriously either the literal aspect of man’s shepherdship, namely its parasitic intention, or the bestial part of its ontological impact: if the man is a shepherd of being, then being is a herd. The herd of being is man’s host, that’s where he lives.

In this connection, let’s look at another famous quotation from Heidegger: “Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells.”5 Here, Heidegger’s preoccupation with the theme of home, or, to put it in Deleuzian terms, with territorialisation, is very remarkable. A man seeks a proper home, or host.

But how is it possible that these two sentences can be brought together, since, in Heidegger, nothing is more human than language, and since a Heideggerian human being who speaks language is really very far from the animal that just produces a meaningful noise? Here, to move away from Heidegger, I’ll make a brief note on the bestiality of language, on its origin in a non-articulated animal voice. Thus, first, according to Agamben, “The articulation of the animal voice gives life to human language and becomes the voice of consciousness”6, and this articulation passes through the death of the animal. This follows from Agamben’s reading of Hegel, and, particularly, from his interpretation of Hegel’s assertions that, “every animal finds a voice in its violent death”7, and that, “the death of the animal is the becoming of consciousness”.8

Second, bestiality of language finds its perfect expression in the idea of the unconscious. This might sound a bit weird, especially for those who see the problem of the unconscious through a Lacanian lens, since Lacan (almost like Heidegger) posits language precisely at the border between humans, who have language, and animals, which do not. Lacanian unconscious is essentially a language, but this language is not appropriated by any “I”; it is the language of the Other. “It” speaks, Lacan says. But is the gap between the Freudian unconscious, which originates, first of all, in the repression of the organic, in rejection of our own animality, and the Lacanian one, which speaks, really that big? After all, who or what is this “it” that speaks behind our back?

From this perspective, it seems that Heidegger’s call of (a deeply forgotten) being comes from this animal multiplicity, from a non-articulated animal voice, which, in psychoanalysis, one would say, always returns as repressed. Meaning and consciousness will come to be articulated when this voice is cut into pieces, as if by someone’s teeth, by chewing: “This pure sound is interrupted by mute

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5 Ibid., 239.
7 From Hegel’s *Jena Lectures*, cit. in Agamben’s *Language and Death*, 45.
8 Ibid.
[consonants], the true and proper arrestation of mere resonation."

It's not a man, a sovereign — it is cattle that speak this way. A sovereign just opens his mouth, no doubt, in order to devour: articulation as mastication.

Thus, a parasite lives within animals it eats. But there is something else going on here, since, as Serres emphasises, there is a parasitic chain, which knows only one direction. In this chain, one parasite is a host for another one. In a way, sheep, too, are hosted by the shepherd-wolf; as far as he keeps the cattle, but also as far as he devours them (and then keeps them in his stomach). They are hosted in order to be devoured. Cattle are, so to say, basic animals, which are invited to be eaten, but there can be other animals, other parasites, against which the shepherd protects his pasture. As Serres says:

In the end, there are two kinds of animals: those that are invited and those that are hunted. Guests and quarry. Tame and wild. The wolf and the dog whose neck is irritated by the collar. ... There are animals whom we parasite and those who might supplant us and whom we chase away, hunt, and eventually eliminate.

That's how Serres understands repression — as, basically, chasing other potential parasites. The one chases the others in order to purify his habitat, to have all of the cattle for himself:

This repression is also religious excommunication, political imprisonment, the isolation of the sick, garbage collection, public health, the pasteurisation of milk, and so forth, as much as it is repression in the psychoanalytical sense. But it also has to do with history, the history of science in particular: whoever belongs to the system perceives noises less and represses them more, the more he is a functioning part of the system. He never stops being in the good, the just, the true, the natural, the normal.

It might seem that we have now moved too far away from Marx, but that's not quite true. Do not the goodness, the justice, the truth, as well as naturalness and normality of the one who chases the others bring us back, through the Derridean sovereign, the strongest with his ultimate reason, to Marxian nobles, who tend to raise their customs and privileges to the power of universal law?

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9 Hegel, cit. in Agamben's Language and Death, 44.
10 Michel Serres, The Parasite, 77-78.
11 Ibid, 68.
Thus, the motive for bigger parasites chasing smaller ones can be read between the lines of the very same article on the theft of wood. Here, Marx discusses some legislative amendments proposed by the Rhine Province Assembly. To put it briefly, these amendments aim to consider pilfering of fallen wood, gathering of dry wood, and the like, as a crime, which should be punished “as severely as the stealing of live growing timber”.¹²

Dry branches fall down from the trees; peasants come and gathering them to fire their furnaces; their children pick up berries for their modest tables... Deadwood, brushwood, berries and other small things, unimportant for the rich, unnoticed by them, still have, according to Marx, an indeterminate property status. These commons¹³, as they are called in a current debate, or alms of nature, as Marx himself calls them – are kind of trophies for poor people, like leftovers gleaned from rich men’s feasts.

But the strongest extend their property. The owners of the forest with their incredible appetites are not satisfied with only the individual living trees that are at their actual disposal. They feel that the poor are the parasites of their forest – and they try to chase them out, as they chase a hare which nibbles a cabbage in their garden. “They steal”, that’s what is usually said also about those little birds, sparrows and pigeons, that pick up crumbs of bread on the street. A bigger parasite chases a smaller one, staying always on the side of the good and the natural, using its reason of being the strongest, which he calls the law. In a sense, for Serres, all people are like those hares from the point of view of some bigger and stronger parasite, who doesn’t like the fact that someone can pick up fruit that has fallen from his tree: “Our forefathers were excluded from paradise. I left, too; we were all chased out... Never ceasing to chase beings from their paradise and always chased by others from our own.”¹⁴

Paradise is a home where fruits and meals are distributed for free, no one has to pay. An ideal host body. Being expelled means being exposed to an economy: nothing gratis. And the chain, as already emphasised, develops in one direction – one parasite parasites another one. Basically, the initial link in the one-way chain of the relations of production (a host body of nature) never benefits, whereas the final one – the sovereign – grabs everything in order to fill his belly. He, a parasite, wearing a prey’s cloak and a predator’s mask, is the guest in the flock, but, at the same time, he is also another universal host. On the one side of a parasitic chain there is, say, a cattle (an animal multiplicity), but on its other

¹² Karl Marx, “Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood”.
¹³ See, for example: Peter Linebaugh, in Karl Marx, the “Theft of Wood and Working Class Composition: A Contribution to the Current Debate”, in Crime and Social Justice, 1976, Vol. 6, 5–16; see also: Peter Linebaugh, The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), etc.
¹⁴ Michel Serres, The Parasite, 89.
but also a universal body — so paunchy — which wears this uniform. As far as linen takes a value form: Its existence as value is manifested in its equality
side there is a singular beast, which hosts what is being devoured. From one host to another, the chain closes:

We parasite each other and live amidst parasites. Which is more or less a way of saying that they constitute our environment. We live in that black box called the collective; we live by it, on it, and in it. It so happens that this collective was given the form of an animal: Leviathan. We are certainly within something bestial; in more distinguished terms, we are speaking of an organic model for the members of a society. Our host? I don’t know. But I do know that we are within. And that it is dark in there.¹⁵

Being within the beast is the other side of our social existence: from the Garden of Paradise we go directly into the belly of a parasite. Think of his stomach, where the natural animal kingdom found its battlefield of union. He still keeps this paradoxical position — being a part, being apart, and containing all the rest within. At the end of the day, all animals are equal in his stomach, as far as his hospitable body presents itself as a universal equivalent. From one Marxian metaphor — the stomach of a beast of prey — we move to another one, introduced in the first edition of the first volume of Capital. Here, an indefinite singular beast, running alongside other animals, suddenly incarnates them all:

It is as if, alongside and external to lions, tigers, rabbits, and all other actual animals, which form when grouped together the various kinds, species, subspecies, families, etc. of the animal kingdom, there existed in addition the animal, the individual incarnation of the entire animal kingdom. Such a particular which contains within itself all really present species of the same entity is a universal (like animal, god, etc.). Just as linen consequently became an individual Equivalent by the fact that one other commodity related itself to it as form of appearance of value, that is the way linen becomes — as the form of appearance of value common to all commodities — the universal Equivalent, universal value-body, universal materialisation of abstract human labour.¹⁶

Value: a universal form, or a uniform, made of linen or various animal skins, but also a universal body — so paunchy — which wears this uniform. As far as linen takes a value form: "Its existence as value is manifested in its equality

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¹⁵ Ibid, 10.

with the coat, just as the sheep-like nature of the Christian is shown in his resem­bance to the Lamb of God." The lamb, in its turn, moves from God's meadows to God's enormous plate. And yes, Marx truly sees a parasitic nature of capitalist exchange, based on the abstraction of a labour power. A labour power was not always abstract. It was concrete and living, before being incarnated, or devoured, by the animal. Marx gives a name to this beast — money. The general equivalent is the measure of a capitalist world, but the multiplicity of animals apart and inside does its epistemological work, whose aim, after all, must be to invent a tool that can cut open the belly of the beast, and let other animals go.