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Zarathustra's Philosafari

A human being may well ask an animal: “Why do you not speak to me of your happiness but only stand and gaze at me?” And the animal would like to answer, and say: “The reason is I always forget what I was going to say” —but then he forgot this answer too, and stayed silent: so that the human being was left wondering.

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*

Since Aristotle infamously defined man as a “speaking animal” (*zoon logon echon*), language has often been employed by philosophers to trace the demarcation line distinguishing the animal from the human.¹ In an ironic gesture, Nietzsche suggests that language might not simply be the human’s privilege over animals that are presumed to be speechless, but rather the symptom of his compulsion to express himself, his having “forgotten how to be silent” (108),² or better, his having forgotten how to forget. It is not language *as such*, Nietzsche tells us, that distinguishes men from animals, but the use humans make of it. It is the human’s *ex*-pression – his propensity to speak in order to extract himself from life (which *The Genealogy of Morals* describes as a stream of forgetfulness) and, as a result, to negate his animal nature – that makes him a specific *kind* of animal: “the animal with red cheeks” (*Zarathustra* 112), “the animal with the right to make promises” (*The Genealogy of Morals* 57), “the animal not yet properly adapted to his environment” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 62). The human’s supposed superiority is thus not *inherent* in his exceptional or divine nature; rather, it is merely an *aftereffect* of a language that “overnames” (*überbenennt*), to borrow Walter Benjamin’s terminology, and thereby grants the human the illusion of “being above the animals.”

For Benjamin, too, the problem is not language “as such” (*überhaupt*) but human language (*die Sprache des Menschen*), which says and assumes too much. Benjamin’s reading of the scene where Adam names the animals in *Genesis* illuminates Nietzsche’s intuition about the animals’ muteness. In “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,” nature – as opposed to just the animals, as suggested in my epigraph – is deprived, not of “language as such,” but of the gift *to name in order to know*. Whereas “God made things knowable *in their names*” (my emphasis), man, “however, names [things] according to knowledge.” With this, Benjamin suggests that human language is

characterized by a tendency to overname. “Things have no proper names except in God,” Benjamin writes,

for in his creative word, God called them into being, calling them by their proper names. In the language of men, however, they have been overnamed. There is, in the relation of human languages to that of things, something that can be approximately described as “over naming” – the deepest linguistic reason for all melancholy and (from the point of view of the thing) for all deliberate muteness. [*Im Verhältnis der Menschensprachen zu der der Dinge liegt etwas, was man als »Überbenennung« annähernd bezeichnen kann: Überbenennung als tiefster sprachlicher Grund aller Traurigkeit und (vom Ding aus betrachtet) allen Verstummens.*] (Benjamin 2004:68-73).³

In contrast with Nietzsche, Benjamin claims that nature’s muteness does not originate in forgetfulness but in sadness: nature is not only sad because it is mute; it is mute because it is sad to have been named by man (if Benjamin were Nietzsche, he would perhaps call the human the happy animal). Both thinkers, however, deride the epistemic pretensions of human language. In *Human, All-Too Human*, Nietzsche writes:

Language as putative science. The significance of language for the evolution of culture lies in this, that mankind set up in language a separate world beside the other world, a place it took to be so firmly set that, standing upon it, it could lift the rest of the world off its hinges and make itself master of it. To the extent that man has for long ages believed in the concepts and names of things as in *aeternae veritates* he has appropriated to himself that pride by which he raised himself above the animals: he really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of the world (16).

Refusing the Christian postulate according to which “the soul” comes prior to and therefore is the condition of thought, modern philosophy, in the wake of Descartes, has affirmed that thinking is the condition of emergence for the human subject (“On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” aphorism 54). For Nietzsche, however, this gesture only replaces one given source of spiritual agency (“the soul”) with another one (“the mind”). In so doing, philosophy has perpetuated the Christian devaluation of the body that for Nietzsche is the unacknowledged source of all human knowledge: “You [the despisers of the body] say ‘I’ and you are proud of this word. But greater than this –

although you will not believe in it — is your body and its great intelligence, which does not say ‘I’ but performs ‘I’” (62). Nietzsche notes that it is an illusion to think that “I” am the master of my thoughts: “a thought comes when ‘it’ wishes” and “I” am left to interpret and synthesize it *a posteriori* (*Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 17). The subject “I” should be recognized for what “it” is, namely, a grammatical placeholder for an unascertainable subject. Asking his reader to purge himself of his metaphysical and all-too-humanist prejudices, Nietzsche endeavors to “naturalize humans” (*Gay Science* 109) by regarding them *as animals*. Such an endeavor does not call for a preconceived idea of animality but rather demands the *positing of a spectatorial relation to the animal seen from a distance*.⁴

What does it mean, I ask, to look at humans as animals? And to look at animals *as animals*? This formulation is not a mere tautology, for the animal “as animal” is not the “real” animal, nor is it the animal “as such,” which Heidegger, in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, distinguishes from the human precisely by depriving it of the ability to “hav[e] a relation toward beings as such” (Heidegger 1995, 337). Heidegger calls this (linguistic) ability to seize things in themselves and for themselves *logos apophantikos*. The “animal as animal” cannot be seized *in itself*, indeed it is never identical to itself but always perceived and conceived *as animal*. Evidently, this analogical detachment does not apply solely to the perception of animals, in the objective sense of the genitive, but can arguably be *extended to everything*. My contention is that the lesson that “everything is in a perspective” is taught by Zarathustra’s animals. *Zarathustra*, I argue, deploys a nonapophantic grammar that shuns the petrifying copula “is” for the dynamics of the conjunction “as.” These two small, seemingly innocuous words “share a common root” according to Heidegger (*ibid.* 338) but prove, in fact, *radically* different. Before attributing the privilege of seizing the world “as such” to the human, Heidegger ponders over the strange kinship that binds the “is” and the “as,” hypothesizing that the latter might be necessary for our *capturing* or *grasping* (*Erfassung*) of beings and of the world: “Perhaps that very relation in which the ‘as’ and the ‘as’-structure is rooted is the relation that also makes it possible to get a view of something like being [*so etwas wie Sein in den Blick zu nehmen*], so that the ‘as’-structure and being intrinsically hang together in some sense [*so dass „als“-Struktur und Sein in sich in irgendeinem Sinne zusammenhängen*]” (*ibid.* 338). While evidencing an *affinity* between two objects, the operator “as” also signals an irreducible distance, which Heidegger believes can be abolished in human language through the use of the copula. Contrary to the animal, which Heidegger describes as “poor-in-world” (*weltarm*), man is “world-forming” (*weltbildend*). In other words, an animal relation to

the world is governed by the regime of the “as,” whereas human relations are characterized by the possibility of the “is,” which enables man to access Being “as such.”

For Nietzsche, the human is not granted such a privilege. In the very last page of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Derrida writes:

Is there a relation of apprehension to the being “as such”—the “ontological difference,” therefore — to the being [*être*] of the being [*étant*], such that it lets the being of the being be, such as it is, in the absence of every kind of design, living? It is evident that the difference between Nietzsche and Heidegger is that Nietzsche would have said no: *everything is in a perspective*; the relation to a being, even the “truest,” the most “objective,” that which respects most the essence of what is such as it is, is caught in a movement that we’ll call here that of the living, of life, and from this point of view, whatever the difference between animals, it remains an “animal” relation. Hence the strategy in question would consist in pluralizing and varying the “as such,” and, instead of simply giving speech back to the animal, or giving to the animal what the human deprives it of, as it were, in marking that the human is, in a way, similarly “deprived,” by means of a privation that is not a privation, and that there is no pure and simple “as such.” (Derrida 160; emphasis added)

Following Derrida, I read *Zarathustra* as a sort of zoological excursion, mapping a series of human-animal encounters in which the human is but one species among others. Zarathustra is our tour guide during this philosafari, as he may be an incarnation of “the acknowledging one⁵ [who] walks among men *as* among animals”* and not “*as if* among animals” (my emphasis). The “as if” appears already to presume too much; it is the modality of a modern philosophy that is constantly seeking out new horizons, new conceptual conditional clauses, new “what ifs.” Seeing the human *as* an animal is crucial for Nietzsche, who refuses to grant the former any exceptional status. Let us consider three significant stations along Zarathustra’s journey (*safar* in Swahili) to examine the tension between the two regimes of perception guided by the “as” and the “as if” and to probe the potential of *Zarathustra*’s external gaze on the human as animal.

Spectatorial Distance. Nietzsche’s bestiary is so unique within Western philosophy that it cannot be reduced to a simple metaphoric system. Querying the place it occupies in

the economy of Nietzsche's oeuvre, Elizabeth de Fontenay laments the philosopher's tendency to allegorize the animal. Allegory is understood by Fontenay as a rigid, one-to-one framework of equivalences in which the signifying figures are, in principle, entirely subsumed by the idea they present. According to Fontenay, *Zarathustra's* allegorical inclination does violence to the animal by capturing it in a dragnet of tropes and instrumentalizing it for strategic ends, thus paradoxically resuming the very gesture of the metaphysical tradition that Nietzsche's hammer sought to knock down (Fontenay 609). One cannot entirely disagree with Fontenay's argument: Zarathustra's tutelary companions — the eagle and the serpent, "the proudest animal under the sun and the wisest animal under the sun" (53) — are endowed with undeniable allegorical prestige; doubtless, the "amen"-able donkey and the glazed cows have not been chosen for legendary brightness; and, to be sure, the lion licking Zarathustra's tears should be read as announcing the impending accomplishment of the prophet's last prediction. *Zarathustra's* animals are burdened with a lot of figurative baggage. They are not observed by the honed gaze of the naturalist but are seen from an allegorical distance. As in a safari, the reader walks among the animals and yet is isolated from them.⁶ Like the *flâneur* who sees "the city as hunting ground," the reader "feels himself viewed by all" yet simultaneously "utterly undiscoverable" (Benjamin 1999:420).

This double regime of visibility is characteristic of the dialectic of the *flâneur*, with whom Benjamin associates "the gaze of the allegorist" or "the gaze of the alienated man" (*ibid.* 10). Contrary to Fontenay, I do not interpret the remoteness of Zarathustra's gaze as the symptom of a metaphysical aloofness. Rather, I see this allegorical distance as necessary in order to unsettle both a strictly figurative viewpoint *and* a naturalist perspective on animal life.⁷ When Benjamin invokes the remedial potential of allegory, it is not because of the *symbolical* reconciliation it appears to promise — whereas Fontenay aspires to a metaphor-free idiom overcoming the "Great Divide"⁸ between man and animal — but, on the contrary, because allegory is, in Deleuze's words, a "power of figuration" that "uncovers nature and history according to the order of time."⁹ In his book on the German baroque *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin suggests that allegory exhibits the irremissible breach (*Sprung*) between figure and figuration and, in so doing, does not entirely erase all traces of the signifier (in this case, the animal as token or signifying "detail") in the act of signification. Though the elements constituting the baroque allegory appear as arbitrary surrogates for the transcendent truth that they purportedly represent, they are not entirely expunged of their idiosyncratic properties. As "*signifying property*, the 'detail' [in allegory] is devalorized with respect to a criterion of value modeled on an ideal of identity as essentially self-contained or self-present"

(Weber 241; emphasis in original). Yet it is also valorized, Samuel Weber adds, for its very detailedness, which is the condition of the indexical “potency” with which it is endowed. In other words, the detail is not entirely subsumed in the higher meaning it manifests but needs to be perceived *as detail*. Without being able to further elaborate the conception of allegory delineated in the *Trauerspiel* book, I believe that the scopic distance at stake in *Zarathustra* is radically different depending on whether one adopts Fontenay’s or Benjamin’s perspective. I contend that the spectatorial politics of *Zarathustra*’s philosophafari is crucial to understanding his relationship to animality. In order to nuance Fontenay’s charge, yet without reading the animal metaphor with tautegorical binoculars,¹⁰ it is necessary to take a closer look at *Zarathustra*’s grammar.

Human as Animal. The first station I will read is the scene that takes place just after *Zarathustra* has “withdrawn from mankind” for the second time. Before returning from his solitude, *Zarathustra* declares that the thinker’s “speculations should be bounded by conceivability” (110*): one has to be able *to conceive* – in the most physical sense of the term, understood as becoming pregnant¹¹ – that which governs one’s life. Accordingly, Nietzsche advocates the substitution of the conceivable, earthly, and joyful *Übermensch* for the notion of an unconceivable, ethereal and misanthropic God. Such an enterprise requires the use of a grammar that is capable of translating the complex interrelationality of conceivableness instead of one that promotes a purely Platonic intelligibility.

Upon this meditation, the narrator reflects upon the notion of compassion and feels compelled to rectify a rumor concerning *Zarathustra*:

My friends, your friend has heard a satirical saying: ‘Just look at *Zarathustra*! Does he not go among us as if among animals?’

But it is better said like this: ‘The acknowledging one goes among men *as* among animals.’ (emphasis in text, 112*)

Zarathustra walks among men who observe him looking at them. The scopic interplay of this scene shows that the spectator is never just a spectator but is always exposed as an object of attention in return. The anonymous commentators denounce *Zarathustra*’s antisocial behavior and deride what they regard as his moralistic pretension: look at him, who walks among us as if he was not a part of “us,” as if he was better than “us.” Us *men*. But *Zarathustra*’s voice does not come from above, and his fables are not moralistic.¹² The reformulation offered by the narrator troubles the anthropocentric

prejudice of the first sentence, which clearly postulates that “us” cannot be assimilated to animals without the intervention of a derealizing “as if” (*wie*), echoing the “once upon a time” of tales and parables. The acknowledging one (*der Erkennende*) does not take for granted any specific knowledge about what he witnesses. While it retains a certain distance between the two objects compared, the “as” (*als*) disquiets the classical dichotomy between the human and the nonhuman.¹³ We could gloss the two sentences thus:

1. Zarathustra goes among men as he would if men were animals (but they are not, this is pure speculation).
2. The acknowledging one goes among men as he would if men were animals (and they may well be).

Zarathustra — if he is the acknowledging one in question¹⁴ — is not animalizing men in order to debase them; on the contrary, he calls into question the discursive grounds on which the ontological barrier that separates human from animal has been established. Language has long been thought to be the decisive criterion justifying this classic partition. Nietzsche seems to agree, but he operates a subtle, if radical twist by suggesting that the difference might not result so much from the animal’s speechlessness, but rather from the unacknowledged illusion produced by a moralizing and petrifying usage of “our” human language.¹⁵ In the preface to the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche asks his reader to reassess the logical connectors that articulate “our” systems of value: “do our ideas, our values, our yeas and nays, our ifs and buts grow out of us with the necessity with which a tree bears fruit—related and each with an affinity to each, and evidence of *one will, one health, one soil, one sun*” (16; emphasis in original).

Human language, with its immoderate use of “as ifs” (i.e. of speculations unbounded “by conceivability”) has lost touch with its animal self. This may be how Nietzsche’s famous aphorism describing “the internalization of man” should be understood:

...thus began the gravest and uncanniest illness, from which humanity has not yet recovered, man’s suffering *of man, of himself* — the result of a forcible sundering from his animal past, as it were a leap and plunge into new surroundings and conditions of existence, a declaration of war

against the old instincts upon which his strength, joy and terribleness had rested hitherto.

Let us add at once that, on the other hand, the existence on earth of an animal soul turned against itself, taking sides against itself, was something so new, profound, unheard of, enigmatic, contradictory, *and pregnant with a future*, that the aspect of the earth was essentially altered. Indeed, divine spectators were needed to do justice to the spectacle that thus began and the end of which is not yet in sight — a spectacle too subtle, too marvelous, too paradoxical to be played senselessly unobserved on some ludicrous planet! (*Genealogy* 85; emphasis in original)

The human seems to be in denial, refusing to recognize his kinship with non-human animals, inventing “new conditions of existence” that ironically appear to be unconditional. Nietzsche reveals the scopic nature of humanist egotism: requiring a witness whose grandeur is worthy of his narcissism, man invents transcendental omniscient spectators characterized by their inconceivableness and their irreducible remoteness. This invention of a purely objective viewpoint is what Michel de Certeau calls “the exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive” (92). It seems that it is precisely this God’s eye perspective – this unbridgeable epistemic distance authorized by the “as if” — that Zarathustra aspires to call into question. The thinker observes his object at a distance, but the detachment is only temporary because he is not operating with hypotheses and categorical imperatives but instead is reflexive (*erkennend*) and part of the very spectacle he beholds.

This does not mean that all differences are abolished. If the acknowledging one is (presumably) a human being, this does not prevent him from *momentarily* estranging himself from a humanity conceived in opposition to animality (Agamben 37). Let us remember that the passage under study here belongs to the chapter entitled “Of the Compassionate,” in which the narrator rejects the Christian notion of compassion but not compassion in itself: “and if I am compassionate then it is preferably from a distance” (112). Nietzsche’s idea is not to enforce “some homogeneous continuity between what calls *itself* man and what *he* calls the animal” (Derrida 30); Derrida warns us against such *bêtises*. No, the distinction between men and animals is maintained throughout *Zarathustra*, only this distinction is neither unconditional nor transhistorical. And it is certainly *not natural*.¹⁶

Animal as Animal. Asking his interlocutors to re-evaluate often-undisputed human exceptionalism, Zarathustra finds himself estranged from the community of men and returns to his cave. In the final section of the book, he is goaded by his animals in a humorous reversal into trying one final time to teach his fellow humans the meaning of the *Übermensch*. Zarathustra turns himself into a “fisherman” “cast[ing] [his] golden fishing-rod” into “the human sea” (252). The Christ-like prophet who announces the overcoming of the human gathers disciples around him as he climbs the mountain. After his conversation with the ugliest man (275), Zarathustra feels “chilled and alone” (279). Suddenly, he inexplicably grows “warmer and more cheerful”: “‘What has happened to me?’ he asked himself. ‘Something warm and living refreshes me. . . . Already I am less alone; unknown companions and brothers circle about me, their warm breath touches my soul’” (280). When Zarathustra looks around, he is surprised to find out that the unidentified warmth emanates from a nearby gathering of cows. The cows ignore Zarathustra as they are fascinated by a peaceable sermonizer, “the voluntary beggar,” who tries to “persuad[e] the animals to have no fear of him” (280).

Disgusted by the society of humans, the beggar wants the cows to instruct him in the art of rumination: “If we do not alter and become *as cows* [*wie die Kühe*], we shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. For there is one thing we should learn from them: rumination [*das Wiederkäuen*]” (my emphasis, 280). While the preacher “chews the cud” over the necessity to enbovine himself, reducing the cows to exemplary specimens as he meditates on the benefits of vegetarianism and of slow intellectual ingestion, another instantiation of the speculative “as if,” the cows observe him with amazement: “The cows, however, looked on and were amazed” (281). The animals — in this excerpt behaving *like* “real” cows, not emblematic figures — become spectators of this surreal scene. We could say that Nietzsche portrays “signifying cows,” to play on Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s influential concept, figures that operate as signifiers yet refuse to be reduced to the conceptual signification that the anxious philosopher seeks to impose on them. The comical quality of the passage is underlined a few pages later, after the agitated beggar explains why he fled the community of men and “came to these cows”: “Thus spoke the man of peace and himself snorted and perspired as he spoke: so that the cows were again amazed” (281). These apparently trivial details draw the reader’s attention to the uncanniness of the quasi-encounter between thinkers who use cows as models of wisdom and “real” cows standing before them, amazed, rendered speechless, so to speak, by what they see.

Such dissymmetry shows that the animalization of the human does not culminate in an ideal interspecific synthesis. Desiring to learn the secret of rumination from the cow's mouth, the voluntary beggar is mocked by the silent surprise he inspires in the object of his contemplation. This scene, of course, will recall any number of colonial contexts in which the "outsider tourist" seeks enlightenment from a bemused "fetishized other." The beggar dreams of an unmediated relationship with the animals ("I have already been talking to [the cows] half a morning and they were just about to reply to me" [280]), but all they repay him with is a confused stare. The animals do not fail to respond to the cow whisperer; rather, it is he who is unable to *see* what their response is, as the cows silently "stand and look at [him]." Paraphrasing the French poet Francis Ponge, one could say that *humans speak as animals remain silent*. The "as" should be understood as a temporal and causal connector, but also as comparative conjunction: humans speak *while, because, and in the same way that* animals remain silent. The satirical tenor of the narration does not suggest that the human cannot be taught the art of rumination, or that such an endeavor is laughable; such a conclusion would miss the radical criticism of the carno-, logico- and anthropocentric frame of reference conducted in *Zarathustra*. On the other hand, the subtle irony of the scene shows that the decentering of the human — heralding the coming of the *Übermensch* — does not amount to a sheer elimination of differences between animal species. In spite of the uncanny intimacy Zarathustra experiences with the cows, they remain unapproachable. Once again, Nietzsche moderates the "difficult relations" between the humans and their "animal relatives" thanks to spectatorial distance. Only this time, instead of the Cuvierian taxonomic drive of the zoologist,¹⁸ the reader catches a glimpse at animals looking back at men.

Übermensch As Postman. The dialectic of distance and proximity at work in *Zarathustra* requires that closer attention be paid to the intermediary nature of the human subject — recurringly defined as "a rope, fastened between animal and *Übermensch*" (43*) — by examining a scene where the animal speaks directly to Zarathustra. Such apparent lack of mediation is surprising, as it seems to abolish the distance carefully preserved by the "as" throughout the book. When one looks closely at the passage, the transgressive communication between human and animal has nothing to do with a holy communion. Thanks to Nietzsche's cautious rhetoric, what Heidegger calls *Zarathustra's* "poetic force," the scene does not impinge on the general logic of the narrative. In "Afterthoughts on Animal World," Akira Mizuta Lippit writes: "Surprisingly, Heidegger [who adamantly denies the possibility of an animal open¹⁹] grants to Zarathustra and his animals a world to frame their interaction" (801). Heidegger finds *Zarathustra's* proximity with animality justified by its poetics, i.e. by the significant

rhetorical (as opposed to logical) and sensual (as opposed to sensible) quality of Nietzsche's language:

Zarathustra's animals are all the more implacable inasmuch as we hear them—not expressing certain propositions or rules or admonitions—but saying from out of their essential natures what is essential, and saying it with growing lucidity through the palpable presence of sensuous imagery. Sense-images speak only to those who possess the constructive energy to give them shape, so that they make sense. As soon as the poetic force—that is, the higher, constructive energy — wanes, the emblems turn mute. They petrify, become sheer 'façade' and 'ornament' (qtd. by Lippit 801).

Zarathustra's animals are not simply reified — Fontenay would say allegorized. Heidegger's word-choice is of interest here. In the English translation, the animal is "petrified," literally, "turned into stone." This is evocative, given that in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* Heidegger describes stones as being worldless (*weltlos*) while he grants the animal a world, albeit with limited access to it (*weltarm*). In this quote, it seems that the animals are slipping into the muteness (*verstummen*) and worldlessness of stones after rising briefly into the world-formation of humans. The German, however, merely says that the animals *fall into* or are *reduced to* mere façade and window dressing (*sie fallen herab zur "Fassade" und "Staffage"*). Heidegger's terms indicate that Zarathustra's animals return to their natural flatness and lowliness after having been bequeathed a certain human depth and stature by dint of the "higher constructive energy" of the poem. More importantly, however, Heidegger writes that one hears the animals "saying *from out of* their essential natures what is essential [*aus ihrem Wesen das Wesentliche sagen*]." The intrinsic ambivalence of his phrasing recapitulates exactly the way in which animals encounter their human counterparts in *Zarathustra*: they speak *in the name* but also *from outside of* their essential natures. Zarathustra's animalization is problematic for Heidegger insofar as it exposes him "to the contagion of their world poverty" (Lippit 802). In sum, for Heidegger, when he speaks with his animals, Zarathustra loses the world-making potential of language; for Nietzsche, on the other hand, it is language — a certain speculative and not specular use of language — that made humans lose the world and their relationship to their animality.

Characteristically, the longest conversation Zarathustra has with his animals occurs when they teach him the lesson of the eternal return. Supposedly trapped in their own silence, condemned to a repetition that situates them outside of history, the animals represent the Heraclitean creatures *par excellence*. Heidegger notes that the animals speak about what they symbolize — i.e., “the eternal recurrence of things.” What he does not seem to notice is that the animals do not so much speak *to* Zarathustra — and, contrary to what Adrian del Caro writes, they are not just “using his words” (413); nothing indicates that Zarathustra is the owner and origin of the words he utters, let alone that the animals are “essentially no different than the negative Zarathustra imitators (dwarf, foaming fool) – at best innocent by virtue of being animals” (*ibid.*) – but rather they speak *for* him. Teaching him that he is “the teacher of the eternal recurrence [*Wiederkunft*]” (237), the animals literally put words in Zarathustra’s mouth (which is not to say that they themselves are the owners and origins of the discourse):

‘And if you should die now, O Zarathustra: behold, we know too what you would then say to yourself – but your animals ask you not to die yet!

‘You would say. . . .

“Now I die and decay,” you would say, “and in an instant I shall be nothingness. Souls are as mortal as bodies.

“But the complex of causes in which I am entangled will recur – it will create me again! I myself am part of these causes of eternal recurrence. . . .

“I shall eternally return to this identical and self-same life, in the greatest things and in the smallest, to teach once more the eternal recurrence of all things,

“to speak once more the teaching of the great noontide of earth and man, to tell man of the *Übermensch* once more” (237-238*).

The discourse is framed by a double layer of quotation marks. Not only do Nietzsche’s animals speak, but they speak on behalf of the human who will then be sent in the world to preach the good news. The passage suggests that Zarathustra is not driven by his mind but, as Heidegger saw it, by his animals, which might be understood here as standing metonymically for his animal nature. Nietzsche derides the Christian and Cartesian conceptions of disembodied subjects, affirming that if there is a “philosophy of the future,” it must be physical and not metaphysical, or, as del Caro puts it, it needs to be “grounded on the earth.” Moreover, the animals’ ventriloquism also hints at the permanent circulation of forces between the humans and the world in and by which they live.

This scene echoes Nietzsche's own "experience of inspiration" as described in *Ecce Homo* apropos his writing of *Zarathustra*. Nowhere near the demiurgic poet promoted by a certain romantic ideal, the philosopher portrays himself as a simple mediator:

...one is merely an incarnation, merely mouthpiece, merely medium of overwhelming forces. The concept of revelation—in the sense that suddenly, with indescribable certainty and subtlety, something becomes *visible*, audible, something that shakes one to the last depths and throws one down—that merely describes the facts. One hears, one does not seek; one accepts, one does not ask who gives; like lightning, a thought flashes up, with necessity, without hesitation regarding its form — I never had any choice (*Ecce Homo* 300; emphasis in original).

The affirmation of life taught by Zarathustra is the affirmation of a force that exceeds the limitations of the human self and of the human will (its operation is distinctly involuntary). The lesson of the eternal recurrence of things is not a matter of cognition (or volition) but of *recognition of one's human condition*, that is, of the fact that *one is not an unconditional (nor an unconceivable) being*. There is no need to look for a justification in ulterior world — like the afterworldsmen do (58-61) — beyond this one world.

In this light, the *Übermensch* — a concept I have chosen not to translate as either "Superman" or "Overman" — is to be understood as the reconnection of humans with the world they dreamed themselves detached from. The *Übermensch* is the one who has renounced the harmonious unity of the *anthropos*, the one who acknowledges and embraces his relational constitution, his entanglement with the "complex causes" that create him over and over again. Barbara Herrnstein Smith has suggested that the *Übermensch* might be translated as "the postman."²⁰ This translation strikes me as extremely promising given that, on the one hand, the prefix *post* renders the idea of being "over" man conveyed by the German *über*, and, on the other hand, the quotidian figure²¹ of the postman suggests that the *Übermensch* is not the transcendental *telos* of the human — let us remember that he will not come at the apocalyptic end of the day but in the "great noontide," when there is no shadow to speak of, and thereby little possibility to draw from one's shadow a Platonic idea of oneself — but his translator, his mediator, his messenger. This is why the animals tell Zarathustra that he shall teach the world — not just his fellow humans — that "the middle is everywhere" (234).

Not only does Nietzsche aim to overturn the metaphysical and eschatological project that the human constitutes by imagining the postman as an intermediary being, but he also warns us against the temptation of a teleological interpretation of Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, a title that may lead us to believe that evolutionism delineates a form of necessity staging the emergence of humanity as the ultimate chapter in the history of the world (see *Gay Science* 109, and Cox 101-105).²² The postman is *not* coming *after* the human, who is *not* coming *after* the animal. Such a chronological sequence is not what Nietzsche's animals are teaching Zarathustra. The *post* in postman has to be understood like that of postmodernism, less as a temporal marker than as critical appendix. The postman is the one who, embracing his animal nature, "does not overlook sensual pleasures" and is endowed with "wild Wisdom" (109). According to Vanessa Lemm, "Nietzsche welcomes the return of the animal because he sees, in animality, a force that disrupts the human being's identity. It is a return that destabilizes what is in view of what shall be.... [B]ecoming overhuman points to a movement of excess and an extension of the human that leads it beyond its all-too-human form" (23). Focusing on the idea that man is "the animal with the right to make promises," Lemm recalls that promises are not just constative; they are also performative speech acts that contribute to the elaboration of the sovereign subject Lemm understands to be the *Übermensch*, a subject that refuses to remain identical to itself and constantly alters itself.²³

This refusal of stabilization — the adoption of the regime of the "as" over that of the "is," the "as such," or the "as if" — is performed in the text through different rhetorical and grammatical tactics that prevent the formation of any absolute certitude: the human is at odds with the world in which he lives, but this sense of inadequacy does not result from an ontological discordance. I have tried to argue that this sense of inadequacy is often conveyed in *Zarathustra* by a spectatorial disjointedness that supposes an irreducible remoteness. This remoteness is less the pseudo-neutral detachment of scientific or metaphysical observers than the humorous or ironic – or allegorical, in Benjamin's sense – distance necessary to disrupt the classical homogeneity of the human. The human is seen *as* an animal that (who?) sees the human in return, and even puts words in his mouth. The uncanny proximity with the animal undermines the dream of a perfect epistemic comprehension of nature. In a sense, Nietzsche offers a revaluation of the eye, understood as the quintessential organ of humanism. Significantly, it is such a revaluation that Derrida retains from the often-cited scene of Nietzsche's demise:

We all know about the episode in Turin ... where [Nietzsche's] compassion for a horse led him to take its head into his hands, sobbing....

Now if tears come to the eyes, if they well up in them, and they can also veil sight, perhaps they reveal, in the very course of this experience, an essence of the eye.... The eye would be destined not to see but to weep. For at the very moment they veil sight, tears would unveil what is proper to the eye (in *Memoirs of the Blind* qtd. in Wolfe 142).

Nietzsche's madness cannot be dissociated from this moment of empathy, from this encounter with the non-human, this "animal relation" with another animal. At the very end of the book, when his animals have brought him the sign he has been waiting for, Zarathustra grows silent:

His heart, however, was loosened, and tears [*Thränen*] fell from his eyes down upon his hands. And he no longer paid attention to anything, and sat there motionless and no longer warding off the animals. Then the doves flew back and forth and sat upon his shoulders and fondled his white hair and did not weary of tenderness and rejoicing. The mighty lion, however, continually licked the tears that fell down Zarathustra's hands, roaring and growling shyly as he did so. *Thus did these animals* [*Also trieben es diese Thiere.*] (334-325; emphasis added)

This scene can be regarded as an example of compassion at a distance: once again, the teaching, if teaching it is, comes from the animals. It is the animals who show what compassion looks like. Thus spoke Zarathustra. Thus did his animals.

Notes

1. Philosophy often has "man" as its subject instead of the less exclusionary "human." When he mentions what has been translated as "the overcoming of man," Nietzsche uses the more generic "Mensch." For a discussion of gender and the translation of *Übermensch* as "superman" or "overman," see Avital Ronell (80).
2. References to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* will be indicated directly in parentheses. I will use R. J. Hollingdale's translation. Any modification of the translation will be indicated by an asterisk (*).

3. Translating *Verstummens* as “deliberate muteness” seems problematic. Benjamin is not as categorical, as is shown by his use of the adverb *annähernd*; “falling silent” or “being reduced to silence” might be more accurate to describe the effect of overnaming “from the point of view of the thing.”

4. I use *spectatorial* in the classical sense of the term, as positing an autonomous subject supposedly detached from the object he is watching. I see Nietzsche as complicating this definition by *emancipating* the spectator, to use Rancière’s vocabulary, from his supposed passivity and revealing his interlockedness with the world observed. The term *philosafari* echoes Wittgenstein’s concept of “seeing-as.” In his discussion of Jastrow’s “duck-rabbit,” Wittgenstein suggests that the difference between “seeing” and “knowing” is far less evident than we usually think (“Wann würde ich’s denn ein bloßes Wissen, kein Sehen, nennen?”).

5. The German “*der Erkennende*” does not necessarily imply human agency, while Hollingdale’s translation does (“the Enlightened man”). Thomas Common’s “the discerning one” is not entirely satisfactory either because it does not render the reflexivity suggested by *Er-kennende*, literally the “re-cognizing” or “acknowledging one,” in contrast to *Wissender*, the “knowing one.” By privileging acknowledgment over knowledge, *Zarathustra* underlines the irreducible belatedness, or better untimeliness, inherent in the process of cognition.

6. Fontenay compares Nietzsche’s menagerie to a zoological garden: “Son bestiaire philosophique, à la différence des tropes du scepticisme, loin de réussir par surcroît quelque relève de l’abstrait dans la singularité, la diversité et le concret, quelque sauvetage des phénomènes, a manqué la bigarrure muette de la vie animale, tout comme le jardin zoologique anéantit l’être de ceux qu’il prétend exhiber” (610). While I agree that *Zarathustra*’s reader is turned into a voyeur, I don’t think the animals are simply held captive of their metaphorical function. One need only recall, for instance, the lifelike description of bovine amazement (281) or of the docile tarantula (123) to see that Nietzsche is a careful observer of the animal world. Vanessa Lemm sees Nietzsche’s animal-metaphors as “overflow[ing] with life while universal concepts and abstract thinking exercise restriction and control over the artistic expression of animal life” (119). In opposition to a metaphysical linguistic tradition ordering knowledge and positing things-in-themselves, Nietzsche valorizes relational, poetic language, understood here as a language that has not erased its metaphorical nature. Of course, these two languages are not essentially different, but Lemm describes the former as secondary, coming *from* the human (thereby more anthropocentric) and the latter as

coming *to* the human and therefore “free from anthropomorphism” (120). While I would qualify this statement, I find the distinction to be both pertinent and useful.

7. See Christoph Cox’s excellent *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation*. Ensuing the death of God, Cox writes, Nietzsche attempts “to translate man back into nature” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 230) by pursuing a new naturalism that does away with metaphysical dualisms without falling into senseless relativism. He avoids such a pitfall by recognizing the irreducibility of “interpretation” — which Cox prefers to the misleading “perspective,” thereby unhitching interpretation from the simplistic analogy between seeing and knowing (113-114) —, that is, of an *aesthetic* relationship to the world the human is a part of. Though in this essay I focus on the spectatorial, thus mainly scopic, relationship humans entertain with animals, I want to insist that the safari is a synesthetic experience insofar as it places the spectator in sight but also on site, that is, *among* the animals.

8. In *We Have Never Been Human*, Latour claims that modernity faces an unprecedented crisis: the proliferation of hybrids confuses the theoretically incommensurable horizons of scientific facts and sordid politics, which is progressively forcing us — us pseudo-moderns — to reconsider the Great Divide between knowledge and power, science and politics, nonhumans and humans. We can no longer deal simply with “things-in-themselves” or with “humans-among-themselves,” Latour claims, and we must now replace “societies” with “collectives,” understood as “associations of humans and nonhumans” (4). This crisis, Latour adds, is the “crisis of the critical stance.” It may be useful here to recall that “crisis” and “critical” share a common etymology. Such a linguistic stuttering, typical of Latour’s irony, shows that modernity is both profoundly *critical* — in the sense that it is constituted by a number of foundational crises and determined by a set of radical discontinuities (epistemological, social, discursive) — and yet deeply *acritical* — protected as it is by its refusal to call into question the ontological distinction between humans and nonhumans, subjects and objects, politics and science (11). The emergence of modernity is coterminous with the birth of the human as we know it and, simultaneously, though this reality is obfuscated, with the birth of the nonhuman (13). Having established this monstrous kinship, Latour makes a strange move. In order to escape the confines of our modernity (a modernity whose constructedness is now recognized), he suggests that we reconcile the two meanings of the word “representation” (29) and that we extend democracy to things (12). In the chapter entitled “Revolution,” Latour claims that “what Sartre has said of humans — that their existence precedes their essence — has to be said of all the actants: of air’s

spring as well as society, of matter as well of consciousness" (86). What he professes is the disappearance of the subject/object dichotomy to the benefit of variable agency. In other words, Latour is telling us that we have never been human, if the human is understood to be radically different from the nonhuman. Yet, Latour does not suggest that we get rid of the figure of the human, but only of this "reduced form of humanity" that is the modern man (138). Latour prophesies that humanity can maintain itself only by sharing itself with the mute forces or quasi-objects it used to consider radically foreign and by acknowledging its being part of a network that it imagined itself disconnected from.

9. "Walter Benjamin made a decisive step forward in our understanding of the Baroque" writes Gilles Deleuze, "when he showed that allegory was not a failed symbol, or an abstract personification, but a power of figuration entirely different from that of the symbol: the latter combines the eternal and the momentary, nearly at the center of the world, but allegory uncovers nature and history according to the order of time" (*The Fold* 143).

10. Fontenay criticizes Michel Haar for arguing that Zarathustra's animals exist independently from — or at least are irreducible to — the concepts they stand for (Fontenay 600).

11. The translation of "denken" by "conceive" seems particularly adequate insofar as, on the next page, Zarathustra affirms that "the creator himself to be the child new-born must be willing to be the mother and endure the mother's pain" (111).

12. "When Zarathustra once told [the story of the adder's bite] to his disciples, they asked: 'And what, O Zarathustra, is the moral of your story?' Zarathustra answered the question thus: 'The good and just call me the destroyer of morals: my story is immoral'" (93). See also this passage in *Ecce Homo*, about Nietzsche author of Zarathustra: "I have not been asked, as I should have been asked, what the name of Zarathustra means in my mouth, the mouth of the first immoralist: for what constitutes the tremendous historical uniqueness of this Persia is just the opposite of this. Zarathustra was the first to consider the fight of good and evil the very wheel in the machinery of things: the transposition of morality into the metaphysical realm, as a force, cause, and end in itself, is *his* work. But the question itself is at bottom its own answer. Zarathustra created the most calamitous error, morality; consequently, he must be the first to recognize it" (*Ecce Homo*, 327-328).

13. This is supported by the fact that *der Erkennende wandelt unter Menschen als unter Thieren* is almost anacoluthic while *Wandelt Zarathustra nicht unter uns wie unter Thieren?* is perfectly grammatical.

14. My thanks go to Zachary Sng, who drew my attention to the fact the *antonomasia* can be read as a specimen of “being-as” or “being seen as.”

15. Significantly, language seems to have replaced action in Zarathustra’s journey. Every station of his pilgrimage is punctuated by a speech. The recurrence of the incantatory “thus spoke Zarathustra” places the emphasis on the singularity of each of the utterances: the “thus,” here, does not index a logical necessity but rather underlines the baroque mannerism of Zarathustra’s harangues, which are meant less to edify than to stir their interlocutors. They are events more than sermons. While Zarathustra’s teaching may at first appear doctrinal — in the same way that Nietzsche’s aphorisms seem to proclaim general truths whereas they aim to shatter the certitudes of commonsense — it never *establishes* knowledge but rather seeks to *provoke* a reaction.

16. “Once the straightforward truth of our human distinctiveness is unsettled by the straightforward truth of our animal identity,” writes Barbara Herrnstein Smith, “there’s no point, or at least no more obviously *natural* point, beyond which the claims of our kinship with other creatures — or, indeed, beings of any kind — could not be extended; nor, by the same token, is there any grouping of creatures, at least no more obviously *rational* grouping, to which such claims might not be confined” (154).

17. One will remember how Nietzsche justified his aphoristic style in the preface to *The Genealogy of Morals*, published two years after *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, writing: “To be sure, one thing is necessary above all if one is to practice reading as an *art* in this way, something that has been unlearned most thoroughly nowadays — and therefore it will be some time before my writings are ‘readable’ — something for which one has almost to be a cow and in any case *not* a ‘modern man’: *ruminatio*” (emphasis in original, 23).

18. In an insightful parenthesis, Deleuze uses an animal metaphor to describe this classificatory inclination as limiting — and limited by — its reactive nature: “(Thus knowledge gives life laws that separate it from what it can do, that keep it from acting, that forbid it to act, maintaining it in the narrow framework of scientifically observable reaction: almost like an animal in a zoo. But this knowledge that measures, limits and

moulds life is itself entirely modeled on reactive life, within the limits of reactive life)" (*Nietzsche* 100).

19. As Agamben makes clear, Heidegger's reflection on the human/animal difference is for the most part based on a form of spectatoriality that greatly differs from Nietzsche's: "At work in both Nietzsche and Rilke is that oblivion of being 'which lies at the foundation of the biologism of the nineteenth century and of psychoanalysis' and whose ultimate consequence is 'a monstrous anthropomorphization of. . .the animal and a corresponding animalization of man. [For Heidegger, however,] only man, indeed only the essential gaze of authentic thought, can see the open which names the unconcealedness of beings" (Agamben 58). For Heidegger, the human gaze is characterized by a "proximity," an "essentially unmediated and immediate irruption of Being into beings" from which the animal is "excluded," while for Rilke – whose "basic poetic experience is not at all distinct from the basic position of Nietzsche's thinking" – "the animal sees more than man does, for the animal's gaze is not trammled by any objects but can go on infinitely, in some unknown way, into the objectless." In the eighth *Duino Elegy*, Rilke writes: "And we: spectators [*Zuschauer*] always and everywhere, / to whom all is turned and never out there!" For the poet, the human can only catch a *retrospective* glimpse of "the open" by looking at the animal, which he deems unmediately connected to the whole: "What *is* outside we know from the animal's / visage alone" (emphasis in original). Heidegger observes: "It is almost as if in [Rilke's] poetry there is operative an unlimited and groundless hominization of the animal, by which the animal, with respect to the original experience of beings as a whole, is even raised above man and becomes in a certain way a 'super-man'" (*Parmenides* 141-161).

20. I thank Barbara Herrnstein Smith for this brilliant, off-the-cuff remark. With the postman, I embrace all the valences that Derrida attributes to the prefix "post" in *The Post Card*, especially the sense of a necessary lag between the sending (*envoi*) and the reception. It is noteworthy that the "late Nietzsche" thought of himself as writing *posthumously* for an audience that had yet to be invented, hence perhaps *Zarathustra's* address to "everyone and no one." The "post" of "posthumously" indexes less a mere latency than the inherent untimeliness of great books. Only under certain conditions will the book encounter its readers, who need new ears and new eyes to perceive "the most distant things." The rest can neither see nor hear yet. "The rest are merely mankind" (*The Antichrist* 125).

21. In *Grounding the Nietzsche Rhetoric of Earth* Adrian del Caro makes a convincing case for a “quotidian Nietzsche” (212-221), suggesting that instead of “questions such as what is the human being, why are we here, what is our fate after death, how do we reconcile with God etc, ‘we must again become *good neighbors of the closest things* and no longer gaze contemptuously beyond them toward clouds and nocturnal monsters’ (HH II/2 16)” (219 ; emphasis in original). This revalorization of the quotidian — “nutrition, place, climate, recreation, the entire casuistry of selfishness,” but also one’s shadow (del Caro 399) — is less an egocentric withdrawal than a call to be more attentive to an environment to which the human has gradually grown indifferent. Nietzsche’s prayer is reminiscent of Thoreau’s treatment of animals as “brute neighbors” in *Walden* or his appeal to what a politics of “nextness,” which implies a form of proximity to as well as an irreducible distance from one’s object (see Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*).

22. Nietzsche repeatedly derides this anthropocentric pretension: “And when it is all over with the human intellect, nothing will have happened. For this intellect has no additional mission which would lead it beyond human life. Rather, it is human, and only its possessor and begetter takes it so solemnly — as though the world’s axis turned within it. But if we could communicate with a gnat, we would learn that he likewise flies through the air with the same solemnity, that he feels the flying center of the universe within himself. There is nothing so reprehensible and unimportant in nature that it would not immediately swell up like a balloon at the slightest puff of this power of knowing” (*On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*).

23. There is an ongoing debate underlying this question. Some understand the *Übermensch* as the ultimate sovereign subject able to promise indefinitely, while others see the “sovereign individual” described in *The Genealogy of Morals* as a problematic figure who complies with the “slave morality” and thus cannot be identified as the *Übermensch*. For a clarification of this debate, see Christa Acampora’s “On Sovereignty and Overhumanity” and Paul S. Loeb’s commentary of Acampora’s essay, “Finding the *Übermensch* in Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morality*” (78-79). Appealing to performativity might be a promising way to resolve Lemm’s seemingly contradictory definition of sovereignty as constant alteration.

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