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## ANIMAL AS AN ALIEN<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of the text is to reflect on defining animals as negative opposites of human beings, that contradict humanistic values and ideals. In a posthuman thought Rossi Braidotti proposes zoegalitarianism, aiming at providing animals and humans with equal rights. In cultural human tradition, one can find deeply rooted tendency to oppose humans and animals. Looking at this phenomenon from a humanistic point of view, we can notice that proposed by Lévinas category of *the Other*, has no application here. To contrary: animal is treated as an alien, and all negative qualities of the alien are automatically assigned to animal as well. What purpose this opposition serves? And what happens if this opposition disappears?

**KEYWORDS:** animal, human, alien, identity

### INTRODUCTION

The culturally embedded images of a man and an animal and their mutual relations reflect deeper psycho-social processes hidden underneath them. The way we “see” animals and what statuses we attribute to them as well as the culturally accepted status of humans can be treated as a projection diagnostic element. Therefore, in this text, I propose to see animals as being treated like aliens, which highlights the concerns expressed by humans. I do not address the issue of authentic imagery, visualization of an alien - an animal, but I focus on the mental construction of this image.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was published in Polish as “Zwierzę jako obcy” in *Filo-Sofija* 17(36): 609-621.

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### IDENTITY - THE OTHER - ALIEN

The processes of constructing human identity are nowadays understood in terms of fluidity and variability as well as in terms of following the change as a desired value (see Bauman 1997 and Giddens 1991). Such an approach to identity results from embedding it in a theoretical context, initially psychological, which indicates that the development of a man continues throughout his life, and the very concept of the development should be broadly defined as the process of adapting to the variability of situations and to the existing, surrounding conditions of the social environment. In this context, the development is not synonymous with the progress, on the contrary: in certain areas, the regress can be treated as a form of adaptation to the situational circumstances and can therefore be defined as a development. Thus, recognizing that changes in human identity take place throughout the entire life of a person because the social environment is constantly being modified, it is automatically presumed that a person develops throughout the entire life. Such an understanding of the identity (not as permanent and unchangeable state - which was characteristic of the positivistic paradigm of thinking) resulted in a complex reflection concerning the relation of human identity, and more broadly the subject, to others - to other people and to other subjects in general. While in this context, the reference of a man to another human being is a clear and accepted model of functioning within the scope of defining oneself, the reference to an animal may still be controversial. What is more, it arouses controversy, especially among those humanists who still associate their basis of thinking with positivism.

Treating identity as a process, has led to metaphorization of the concept and its application to other fields of humanities and social sciences - in the sense that it has become, in fact, a supra-disciplinary concept which, by crossing the boundaries of disciplines, combines them into a whole of multithreaded and multifaceted reflection on the phenomenon of building the identity. This enriched the reflection on identity and led to the emergence of attempts to create syncretic approaches that would combine reflections from different traditions. This is a very effective method of cognitive conduct, because it allows us to understand the regularity of phenomena important from the point of view of other fields of humanities. It should also be assumed that, within the current reflections on the concept of identity, there is a consensus that the identity of the human subject is constructed largely on the basis of opposition to something/someone else, and generally to the identity of other human subjects. The formation of these oppositions acquires more or less extreme figures: the most radical (confronting the most distant beings) is the opposition of the human subject versus the object. The least radical: the human subject versus the human subject.

The opposition of the human subject versus the inhuman subject/animal should be placed in the middle of this scale. In this way, not only is the animal itself a boundary category (for the time being let us use this term): neither man nor object; but also the opposition of the human subject versus the non-human subject/animal becomes the middle opposition, and thus in a sense also the border opposition.

The element of the binary opposition of the I - not the I, is visible in the establish-

ment of individual human identities. Similarly, it also happens at the level of determining group statuses. It is in this context that I am interested in the concept of an ALIEN. The opposition: an akin- an alien allows to achieve a sense of security in the world filled with uncertainty: the security has its roots in the border phenomenon. It is the border that becomes what separates akin from the other, known from the unknown and safe from the dangerous. This is especially familiar to social psychologists and sociologists who, while analyzing the specificity of building and strengthening group identities, have already taken for granted that group identity is based on two oppositely oriented processes: the differentiation of group identity by emphasizing elements different from the social environment and, on the other hand, by emphasizing the similarities existing within the group<sup>2</sup>. Paradoxically, the stronger the two opposing tendencies, the more homogeneous and unambiguous the group identity and the more explainable and comprehensible is the world around us. The phenomenon of marking off and establishing demarcation lines, which determine the divisions between the two groups, remains a fascinating issue also for philosophers and anthropologists. For it is clear that, especially in the case of cultural phenomena, all boundaries are conventional: “The demarcation of boundaries, which always takes place when something is different from the other, eludes the gaze and slips out of hand; it can only be described as a trace left after demarcation. In this respect, border demarcation is similar to the signing of a contract that does not enter into the matter of the agreement itself, but it is not directly identifiable in the change of my obligations” (Waldenfels 2009: 22). All beings remaining on the border (border-line type) cause uncertainty: in fact, it is not clear whether one should be afraid of them, whether they should be tamed, whether they will be predictable or not. It is precisely this ambiguity, staying *in between* that is disturbing.

### **BORDER - BETWEEN HUMAN AND ANIMAL**

The border is a completely ambiguous concept, intersubjectively determined, modifiable and changeable while at the same time it has such a great significance in stabilizing perception and determining the categories of the division of the world. It is similar in defining the relationship between man and animal. The use of the term “animal” has the same character: as Derrida (2008) says, people behave as if they had the eternal right to call other entities by referring to them as non-human entities, as if these divisions were based on universal law, while they gave themselves the right to do so.

The use of the concept of the border in human-animal relations serves to strengthen the anthropocentric way of looking at the world (see Koza 2014: 164) and is based on the attempts to define it by the lack of <sup>3</sup>: what kind of qualities, functions and abilities an animal is deprived of, which would allow to classify it as a category other than man and to strengthen this division, on the basis of a border which does not exist

<sup>2</sup> This mechanism is sometimes reinforced, for example, by the use of costumes or rituals that are characteristic of a particular social group, clearly throwing out of parentheses those who look/ behave differently.

<sup>3</sup> B. Waldenfels also points this out: “All these describe a foreigner through some kind of absence” (2009: 113).

and which appears by placing obstacles founded on the distinction between one and the other. This approach has an aim to discover where animals are “inferior”, more “handicapped”, incomplete, and where there is still a dominant position for a man. As Michał Koza states following Derrida: “The list of interrogators includes, in particular: Aristotle, Descartes and Kant and, of course, Heidegger, Lévinas and Lacan (...), who ask whether the animal can think, reason, master the technology, and especially speak, express and imitate the logos by means of signs, a rational discourse that would also be reachable for the human being” (Koza 2014: 166). Especially noteworthy is the last condition of communicating in a manner which “would also be reachable for the human being”. In this way, animals are faced with an impossible to fulfill requirement: not only thinking or communicating, but also a condition that would be cognitively accessible to humans. It seems absurd to impose such a condition. This can be proved by reversing this reasoning and requiring a man to demonstrate for example the ability to communicate in a manner that would be comprehensible to animals<sup>4</sup> (it is worth noticing that we do not indicate here for WHICH animals). Indication of the lack, by revealing that the interlocutor DOES NOT OWN or HAVE something automatically condemns the subject to a lower position, in relationship to the evaluating dominant<sup>5</sup>. In this context, the evidence of absence means the indication of “inferiority”. If this cognitive procedure is applied to animals, it automatically enhances the anthropocentric well-being of the interviewer by prioritizing subjects. On the other hand, examining the ability of animals to function cognitively or emotionally, which is typical for humans, unambiguously brings to mind the ethnocentric practice of assessing cultures as better or worse, by responding or not to the standards imposed by the evaluator.

Waldenfels also follows this lead for some time when he writes about the differences between humans and animals: “An old saying: “Man is a living being with speech and reason” can be rephrased: “Man is a living being that gives answers. The difference between man and animal must be rethought, as well as the difference between a man and a machine (Waldenfels 2009: 59).

Following Derrida, M. Koza also points out in his text that the use of such a border is aimed at immunization (2014: 167) - making man immune to the suffering of animals, building a barrier that does not allow to notice the similarity of feelings experienced by man and animal, allows to exploit animals with impunity.

In discussions focused around the manner of defining the human subject (in the context of post humanistic analyses), it was only when the question of the possibility

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<sup>4</sup> Such a cognitive procedure brings to mind the use of tools in the form of intelligence tests to evaluate the intellectual potential, which are not culturally adapted to the conditions of the examined person. Through such a procedure, the researched person is inevitably condemned to failure: how is the person supposed to respond correctly, since the content comes from a completely different cultural context? Probably the person could know the answer to a similar question but related to the native context (the tool would then have to be based on questions like: “Who was the first president of YOUR country? and not for example the USA or Russia).

<sup>5</sup> A well-known procedure, appearing in the psychoanalytical concept of Sigmund Freud, which draws a hierarchy between men and women based on the absence of a penis (Oedipus complex and Elektra complex in particular).

of suffering was raised that the division between humans and animals was disturbed.<sup>6</sup> But it must be remembered that over the centuries this attribute, too, has not been considered to be proper: many who followed the Cartesian way of looking at animals did not see them as capable of suffering. “By posing the problem of the border, the philosopher proposes that the criterion of its certainty, which shapes the line on which it runs, should be instead of the Cartesian clarity and obviousness, the ‘irrefragability’”. As Derrida says, this means the impossibility of denying the suffering, fear or panic, terror or fear that can affect certain animals and that we humans can testify to” (Koza 2014: 167).

Derrida concentrates on the very concept of a border, the confrontation between a man and an animal and the fact that such a relationship is not simple, unambiguous and convenient. At first sight it has many hidden aspects - such as, for example, putting man and animal against each other, while an animal can be everything from a horse to an ant. It is not Derrida’s idea to abolish this border, but to show its complexity and this goal was undoubtedly achieved by the French philosopher.

However, whether from the point of view of ethnocentrism, anthropocentrism, or any other kind of “centrism”, and regardless of the axiological markings given to such practices, the division by demarcation of borders has an important function: precisely the function of defining safe, controlled areas, superior to dangerous, uncontrolled and worse ones. From the point of view of the process of constructing and then maintaining the human identity, the creation of a border that defines the alien is therefore important. It is all the more important because in everyday functioning (linguistic, cognitive and emotional) “alien” means bad; “alien” hides in itself the association with negativity. Bernhard Waldenfels writes: “To say it in the native language of Western philosophy: different (...) and alien (...) are distinct things. The alienation of a guest (...), the alienation of another language of another culture, the alienation of a different sex or ‘different state’ is not reduced to the fact that something or someone turns out to be different. Building materials like wood and concrete, or wines like Beaujolais and Rioja, are completely different from each other, but usually nobody will maintain that they are unfamiliar to each other. The alienation creates its own domain and its own being of what is Self (ipse, self), and this Self must not be confused with the same one (idem, same) which is distinguished from something else” (2009: 17).

The creation of a human identity is therefore based on the process of categorization through the delineation of boundaries and then through the juxtaposition of the two sides, which, as I have pointed out above, has three fundamental forms:

**The human subject versus the human subject.** This opposition is most deeply analyzed in the reflection current embedded in the philosophy of dialogue. In particular, Emmanuel Lévinas (1998), Paul Ricoeur (1992) and Martin Buber (1962), draw attention to the inseparability of the opposite processes, which are indispensable for the constitution of human identity as a process of creating

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<sup>6</sup> It was attempted to separate man from animals on the basis of: ability to think, creativity, ability to sense feelings, religiousness, morality, technical skills, and numerous “attributes of others” (erect attitude, nudity, deviations, play, cooking and dressing, etc.). (see Lejman 2008: 49).



quality based on a sense of continuity, cohesion and identity at the same time (Ricoeur 1992). This approach to the identity of the human subject is constantly changing based on its confrontation with other people, which would be described by symbolic interactionists as a communication with others based on symbols: this is how the concepts of the “significant other” (H. Sullivan) appear, but above all “the looking glass self” in Charles Cooley’s view. Also, George Herbert Mead (2015) points to a constant reference of the I, to other “I”, which allows us to define “the selfhood” and the limits separating it from “otherness”. In this and in the key approaches proposed by symbolic interactionists, identity is always built on the basis of numerous sources of information and the important is what we are not, i.e. the information about the possibility of denial by defining oneself. In human identity, this element of distinctiveness, detachment or even contradiction allows for a precise definition of what I am: I am what I am NOT. Using some generalization, it can be assumed that in the above-mentioned concepts - the Other is defined in positive terms, its positive image is emphasized as well as its positive impact on the formation of the individual self. Even if Emmanuel Lévinas speaks of the Other as a “widow and orphan”, pointing out that the relationship with the Other is not always simple and straightforward, he insists on the need for a positive attitude towards the Other (see 1998, 1999). The Other written with the capital “O” unquestionably has the status of a subject: and even if someone does not want to recognize it, it is POSTULATED. So strongly that, in principle, it constitutes the definition of the Other. The Other is therefore someone who, although radically different from me, MUST be treated with due respect and must be recognized (in the categories proposed by Paul Ricoeur, see 1992). The Other is seen here as valuable, by the influence he even unintentionally exerts on someone else, and not by the type of his actions or the specificity of his behavior.

**The human subject versus the object.** The most radical, previously indicated oppositional identity, which provides support for the identity of the human subject, places it in front of the object. Here it is clearly defined what the human subject is and what the object is. While the human subject has the rights and causative power of intentional action, the object does not have any rights, intentions or possibilities of conscious action. Sociology, while reflecting on how people relate to objects, points to their “causative power” to the fact that by triggering emotions and provoking actions, objects become contributors to building relationships and references to the self in relation to the outside world. However, they do not initiate them on their own. In this area, unambiguous so far, we have also observed breaches in the form of emerging and increasing concerns as to how to define the subject and how to separate it from the object: an example here are activities combining in their nature interventions through advanced technologies in the human body (bio-art, creation of hybrids connecting the body of the human subject with objects, nano-biotechnologies or intelligent technological solutions supporting the functions of the human body - techno-

logically advanced robotics).

**Human subject versus non-human subject/animal** is an ambiguous opposition and, moreover, has the characteristics of negative references. The history of contrasting man and animal treated as an object is most visible in Descartes' thought, who sees the animal as a machine. Descartes' definition of animals as objects contributed to the establishment of such an approach in Western European culture, which at the level of causative actions triggered indescribable damage in the form of psycho-physical dualism (with which, unfortunately, the contemporary psychology and medicine still have to cope to this day). Above all, however, it has built a belief that an animal, as a kind of object (machine), is devoid of feelings and emotions and therefore can be treated as an object.

In the middle of the line of radical comparisons, the relationship between a man and an animal can be divided into two categories: man, and animal as the other and man and animal as the alien. In this text I focus on the latter type of relationship when an animal is perceived as an alien. I am interested in the necessity of obtaining a cognitive conviction that evil is an alien and an alien is bad which accompanies such opposition. Therefore, a stranger becomes, in the case of defining humanity, what is bestial, inhuman and monstrous, evil and instinctive. Pushing beyond I the negative descriptions that oppose the I, assumes an unclear form of an alien. An animal. In this context, it is necessary to recall all those definitions which connect an animal and an evil: bestiality, beast and animalism which lose their meaning only when confronted with monstrous human behaviors, when the people who reflect on them say "animals do not behave like this", animals are better and have their own morals. As Derrida says, we never refer to animal bestiality, because bestiality is reserved exclusively for man as ultimately his characteristic and right (see Derrida 2008). The beast is not a human therefore, neither an animal. Derrida shows in his essay *The Animal That Therefore I Am* that the creation of the opposition: man – animal, is not aimed at discussing animals. It aims to talk about "non-humans". It is proven (as I mentioned above) by pointing out that an animal in this contraposition is a completely heterogeneous category and contains many species that cannot be compared to each other at all (Derrida 2008). One of the attempts to abolish the border between a man and an animal was Edward Wilson's proposal (2000), which took the form of sociobiology. It provoked numerous protests from opponents, based on more or less rational arguments. These attempts to undermine Wilson's reasoning revealed his opponents' attachment to anthropocentric reasoning and categorizing the world in the same manner. All the submitted arguments - about the destruction of culture and its values, Wilson's rejection of religion and his fascination with eugenics - were, in fact, desperate attempts to keep in force the existing order in which man was granted dominance, animals were subordinated to him and constituted an antithesis of human attributes<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> A similar reflection can be found in Desmond Morris's popular science work *The Human Animal*: "There are one hundred and ninety-three living species of monkeys and apes. One hundred and ninety-two of them are



The role of the alien in an animal is to exaggerate those features that carry a negative mark - not to show the animal in a bad light, but to show the human being in a good one. Similar measures were applied in the colonial era, where the conquered nations were described as wild, barbaric and uncivilized, with the intention of showing in a positive manner their opposite: a civilized and cultural man. But the alien carries with it the sense of negativity in general: "Escaping the Self means that the moments of the alien in Self, the moments of the strangeness in all orders are toxic" (Waldenfels 2009: 25). This ethnocentric type of application of an alien category shows that this concept is a broad classification, in principle common to all humanities, freely crossing the lines of artificial divisions. It is present wherever cognitive functioning of a man exists. It seems impossible to define a category of "an alien": "The problem of an alien starts when it is named. Nothing more ordinary than the word 'foreign' and its many variations and derivatives like 'foreigner', 'foreign', 'strange', 'foreign language', 'alienation' or alienating" (Waldenfels 2009: 109). Further, the author points out that attempts to render the meaning of the term "alien" reveal various shades of these meanings: 1) foreign means something occurring outside any given area, 2) foreign means someone else's or alienated, 3) foreign means another kind, different. Waldenfels stresses that an element of a location makes a given shade of alienation more distinct: in principle, when we talk about a stranger, we talk about someone who is not from here. The basic definition of an alien can be found within the same author, who describes it in the following way: "If we take the most common expressions of alienation, which are indispensable for ethnology as well, we constantly come across two expressions, namely the inaccessibility of a certain area of experience and meaning, and the lack of affiliation to a group. In the first case, something is alien to me or to us, in the second case, others are alien to me or to us" (Waldenfels 2009: 113).

"When we talk about otherness, however, we often mean nothing else but otherness, but often we drift away into conceptual twilight, which does not allow a radical question about the alien to emerge at all. (...). The fact that something gains its identity only in such a way that it is different from other things is a discovery of Platonic dialectics, which until the times of Hegel resulted in a substantial speculative capital. The contrast between the same and the other, which underlies every order of things, stems from the separation that distinguishes one from the other" (Waldenfels 2009: 110-111).

All these reflections ultimately lead us to the conclusion that the foreign is intimately intertwined with itself and that these are two qualities that cannot exist without each other. An animal as an alien becomes an antithesis of a man as himself, but at the same time it is bonded with him. As Waldenfels correctly states "If a man is astonished by an alien and terrified of it, then a man is not in control of himself.

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covered with hair. The exception is a naked ape self-named *Homo sapiens*. This unusual and highly successful species spends a great deal of time examining his higher motives and an equal amount of time studiously ignoring his fundamental ones. He is proud that he has the biggest brain of all the primates but attempts to conceal the fact that he also has the biggest penis.... He is an intensely vocal, acutely exploratory, over-crowded ape, and it is high time we examined his basic behaviour". "That's how I started the introduction to my book, which I wrote in the 1960s and which caused a great wave of criticism" (1994).

Interpersonal or intercultural alienation cannot be separated from interpersonal or intra-cultural otherness. That is not all. It should be added that the otherness we encounter in others leaves the stronger traces in us, the more it relies on something familiar, denied, devoted to something of our own” (Waldenfels 2009: 118)<sup>8</sup>. In other words, we are afraid of ourselves when we are afraid of an unfamiliar animal. By separating ourselves from the animal, we are isolating from ourselves. The animal is in us, and its verbal alienation is necessary for us to define ourselves. Hence, those who do not recognize the animal as a subject, give it a lower status and reveal their own fears and uncertainties. It is hard to deny this in the context of the above considerations.

An animal is an alien, but an alien becomes an animal: the word “animal” becomes a negative epithet given to the Other, which allows for its humiliation and disdain. The epithet: classifying someone else in the category of animals diminishes his status. This lavish use of an animal negative epithet is evident in the whole objectifying metaphor of the holocaust - the torturers are not only supposed to be animals, who, by the way, call the victims animals; but animals also become real victims of the everyday holocaust in slaughterhouses. Apart from the last case, an animal is an epithet attributed to a human being who behaves not as a human being, but also not as an animal, because animals are not capable of such behavior (see Łagodzka 2015: 173). Naming someone an alien is a performative act: it changes not only the name but also the real status of the subject lowering its value.

Marginalization of the Other by means of a label given to an alien, in the case of interpersonal relations, is considered an expression of authoritarian and fearful personality traits (see Adorno 1968). In fact, there is no reason to interpret the rejection of the Other, the animal differently.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of people’s attitudes towards animals over the centuries (see Serpell 2012), shows signs of growing anxiety and takes the form of actions aimed at separating people from animals by means of various cognitive categories, in order to maintain one’s own definition of the self, based on the belief that man is something/someone unusual and significantly different from animals. Assigning characteristics of an alien to an animal indicates that, as a species, we are increasingly defensive towards animals. The higher the technological development, the more polarized this attitude is. As Wojs writes: “The human race has achieved its humanity at the cost of alienation from the natural environment. As a part of nature, man opposed nature as an observer, ruler and user, and this dialectic is becoming more acute in relation to the animal world” (1993: 5). It is hard to deny the accuracy of this observation, and even more it makes us reflect on the next one - that the more man develops in terms of technology, the more he moves away from the world of animals. And the more often animals are defined as aliens. However, we have in common characteristics with the animals and

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<sup>8</sup> A little earlier Waldenfels also writes: “If one’s self is intertwined with a foreign, it also means that the foreign begins in ourselves and not outside of us, or, to put it another way: it means that we are never fully self” (Waldenfels 2009: 116).

their presence makes it difficult to establish an unambiguous relation to the animals. As a species we demonstrate a kind of cognitive dissonance in relation to other animals. We have built certain cognitive, emotional and behavioral categories that have given us the tools to defend ourselves from connecting with the animal world. On the other hand, however, not all of us abide by this (artificial?) dichotomy. What's more, I would say that today we reach a turning point - a kind of "animal turn" in the perception of not only animals but also people and, above all, the relationship between animals and people. As if human cognitive manipulations in this area, exceeded some acceptable for our species limit of this separation from the animated world. The animal movements, but also the increasingly clear reflection on the relationship between man and other animals, are gaining strength and their voice is becoming clearer. However, this does not evoke acceptance everywhere, and in particular in numerous media reports one can find voices of criticism<sup>9</sup>. This is where our human fears reveal themselves: I refer to fears of a symbolic nature, which are based on anxiety about the essence of one's own identity, which is perceived as so fragile that it must be defended through the creation of radical divisions. Unambiguous and indisputable boundaries are needed in clearly defined cases of threat: physical when walls and impassable barriers are created; psychological when categories that order the world are introduced. Everything on the border is unclear, uncertain and frightening.

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<sup>9</sup> In this context, it is worth mentioning the criticism of animalistic movements, particularly intensified in the Polish media, visible in the years 2014-2015. Where, in particular, in the opinion of right-wing, unequivocal and categorically speaking politicians and activists, "Animal Studies", just like issues related to gender discourse, are the source of evil itself.

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