

Heidegger on Animality and Anthropocentrism

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ABSTRACT

Throughout his writings, Heidegger's view of animals is ostensibly anthropocentric, defining them as deficient in relation to human beings. His most extensive analysis of animality, found in the 1929–1930 lecture course entitled *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, seems to be a clear example of this anthropocentrism, defining the animal as poor in world in opposition to the human being's world-forming character. Nevertheless, Heidegger is explicitly ambivalent regarding the anthropocentric implications of this conception of animality. This paper examines Heidegger's articulation of the notion of world-poverty as a distinct form of negativity, its implications for the question concerning Heidegger's anthropocentrism, as well as his ambivalence with regard to this question.

I.

One of the more striking features of Heidegger's references to animals is their apparently patent anthropocentrism. For, typically, he invokes animals in order to elucidate the human being's ontological structure, by comparing animals and humans. And in these comparisons, the animal is characterized as lacking some constitutive aspect of the human's way of being. Whether he draws the animal/human distinction with regard to the animal's lack of world, of language, of an understanding of being, of hands, or of the ability to die, Heidegger consistently defines the animal in terms of its suffering from a deficiency in comparison with the human being.¹ To be an animal, then, is to not be Dasein; more specifically, it is to *lack* Dasein. And, not surprisingly, Heidegger has been regularly criticized for maintaining this anthropocentric view of animals.

Heidegger's most extensive analysis of the nature of animals, found in the 1929–1930 lecture course entitled *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (FM 176–273), has been a particularly attractive target for criticism, as it seems to be a clear example of his

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¹For the animal as lacking world, see Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", 248; Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 47; Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art", 23; and Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (hereafter referred to as FM in the text), 176ff. For the animal as lacking language, see Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", 248; Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 16; Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, 16; and Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 36f. For the animal as lacking an understanding of being, see Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 168, and Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 152f. For the animal as lacking hands, see Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 16; and Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 80. For the animal as lacking the ability to die, see Heidegger, *Being and Time* (hereafter referred to as BT in the text), 237–238.

anthropocentrism. There, Heidegger approaches animality by way of a division between three types of entities: human beings, animals and present-at-hand objects. His analysis defines and distinguishes these types of entities with regard to their differing ways of being related to the world (FM 185). Specifically, the present-at-hand is “worldless” (*weltlos*), the animal is “poor in world” (*weltarm*), and the human being is “world-forming” (*weltbildend*) (FM 177). Heidegger’s three-part division appears anthropocentric insofar as the world-relations definitive of the present-at-hand object and of the animal are both characterized as kinds of deficiencies; that is, they are deficiencies in comparison with the human being’s definitive world-relation. For the human being, as world-forming, has a world; while the present-at-hand object and the animal, as worldless and poor in world, respectively, have no world, albeit in different ways (FM 196). The worldlessness of the present-at-hand and the world-poverty of the animal, then, are two distinct ways of not having a world, ways of lacking what the world-forming human being has – ways of lacking Dasein. So, for Heidegger, to be an animal is to be structured by a kind of negativity, i.e. by the specific mode of negation that he refers to as world-poverty, which is a lack of Dasein. Hence, the accusation of anthropocentrism – the animal’s way of being is determined by its suffering from a deficiency in comparison with the human’s way of being.

An influential version of this criticism is found in Jacques Derrida’s *Of Spirit*, where he maintains that Heidegger’s conception of animality “cannot avoid a certain anthropocentric or even humanist teleology”.² Derrida sees this tendency in Heidegger’s characterization of the animal as deficient, since, generally, “the words ‘poverty’ and ‘privation’ imply hierarchization and evaluation” (OS 56). And, in the case of Heidegger’s world-poor animal, the hierarchy implied thereby evaluates the animal as deficient with regard to, and thus hierarchically below, the human being.

Derrida does acknowledge that, with his notion of world-poverty, Heidegger intends to avoid an anthropocentric subordination of the animal; an intention that he finds in Heidegger’s distinction between lack in the mode of poverty and lack in the mode of quantitative lack. According to Derrida, this distinction makes it possible for Heidegger to distinguish human beings from animals in a way that “respects a difference of structure while avoiding anthropocentrism” (OS 49). Specifically, it allows animality to be interpreted as different from Dasein, without being less than Dasein. In this way, animality could be determined in comparison with Dasein, while avoiding the subordination of the animal to the human being, and thus, in this sense, non-anthropocentrically. On the other hand, if the animal’s world-poverty were identified with a quantitative lack in comparison with the human being’s world-formation, then the animal’s world-relation would be continuous with, and thus a deficient version of, the human being’s world-relation; and since Heidegger takes these world-relations as definitive of the beings so related, the animal would be nothing more than a merely deficient version of the human being. So, by maintaining a distinction between poverty and quantitative lack, Heidegger resists this clearly anthropocentric interpretation of the animal’s deficient world-relation. As Derrida puts it, at least to this extent, “(i)t is not that the animal has a lesser relationship, a more limited access to entities, it has an *other* relationship” (OS 49).

²Derrida, *Of Spirit* (hereafter referred to as OS in the text), 55. See also *Of Spirit*, 12, where Derrida holds that Heidegger “leaves intact, sheltered in obscurity, the axioms of the profoundest metaphysical humanism”, and that this is “particularly manifest in the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*”.

Nevertheless, Derrida maintains that Heidegger's attempt to avoid anthropocentrism ultimately fails. For, although the comparative aspect of his conception of animality does not itself subordinate the animal to the human being, the negative aspect of that conception establishes such an anthropocentric hierarchy. That is, because the animal's definitive characteristic, determined in comparison with the human being, is a lack, quantitative or not, the animal can only be a deficient version of the human being. By interpreting animality as a lack, then, Heidegger endorses the anthropocentrism that he had contested through the distinction between poverty and quantitative lack. The negative characterization of the animal maintains the paradigmatic status of the human being "by the very route it claimed to be withdrawing from that measure – this meaning of lack or privation" (OS 49). Heidegger's defining the animal's way of being as a lack, then, lies at the root of his tendency toward "a certain anthropocentric or even humanist teleology", because lack implies "hierarchization and evaluation".

Matthew Calarco also views Heidegger as attempting to avoid, but ultimately endorsing, an anthropocentric interpretation of animals. On the one hand, as Calarco sees it, Heidegger's discussion of animality in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* "does make a genuine effort to understand the animal's relation to world on the animal's own terms",³ rather than in comparison with the human being's relation thereto. In this way, he intends "to think through animal Being in nonanthropocentric terms".⁴ For Calarco, then, Heidegger's resistance to anthropocentrism is found in his attempt to conceive animality non-comparatively, i.e. without comparing animality to Dasein, and so, *a fortiori*, to conceive animality otherwise than as deficient in relation to Dasein. To do so would allow Heidegger to avoid subordinating the animal to the human being. Yet, Calarco maintains, Heidegger's discussion of animality is "shot through with anthropocentric comparative analyses, where the human functions as the measure of animal life".⁵ These comparative analyses are, specifically, anthropocentric insofar as the human being appears as the standard by which the animal is measured, and to which it is subordinated. This comparative negation of the animal is inevitable, despite Heidegger's non-anthropocentric intentions, because he presupposes "that the animal's being can be explained in negative and oppositional terms in comparison with the human".⁶ It is this anthropocentric presupposition that underlies the definition of animality guiding Heidegger's analyses: the animal as poor in world. For Calarco, then, as for Derrida, Heidegger succumbs to anthropocentrism, because he defines the animal's way of being as deficient in relation to Dasein.

As is typical of commentators who charge Heidegger with anthropocentrism, both Derrida and Calarco fault him for defining animality both negatively and comparatively.⁷ Their assessments as to where Heidegger's attempt to avoid such a subordination of the animal goes astray, and thus their suggestions as to how this avoidance could be successfully carried out, however, are somewhat different, insofar as their criticisms emphasize differing aspects of Heidegger's allegedly faulty approach to the animal's way of being.

³Calarco, "Heidegger's Zoontology", 21.

⁴Calarco, *Zoographies*, 20.

⁵Calarco, "Heidegger's Zoontology", 28.

⁶*Ibid.*, 29; see also 18.

⁷See, for example, Wood, "*Comment ne pas manger*", 15–35; Krell, *Daimon Life*; and Glendinning, "Heidegger and the Question of Animality", 67–86.

For while Derrida sees Heidegger's subordination of the animal as rooted in the negative aspect of his definition of animality, Calarco sees it as rooted in the comparative aspect of Heidegger's definition. The remedy to Heidegger's failure to avoid anthropocentrism, for Derrida, then, would be to conceive the animal as different from the human being, but not as deficient in comparison with the human being; while, for Calarco, the remedy would lie in a non-comparative conception of animality. The remedy that Heidegger prescribes for himself can be seen in his discussions of his own anthropocentrism.

Although the view of animality that is articulated in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* appears to be clearly anthropocentric, Heidegger suggests that the issue is not as clear as it seems. Anticipating the charge that his critics will bring against him, Heidegger takes up the issue of his own anthropocentrism at the beginning of his analysis of animality (FM 192–195) and again at the end of that analysis (FM 270–273). In the former discussion, Heidegger denies the charge, when he maintains that his conception of the animal as poor in world, on whose articulation he is about to embark, “must not be taken as a hierarchical evaluation” (FM 194). However, Heidegger's second discussion of anthropocentrism, which takes place after his explication of world-poverty, begins by admitting that his attempt to avoid the anthropocentric hierarchy has failed, due to the comparative nature of the analysis. As comparatively determined, his characterization of the animal as poor in world is “not drawn from animality itself” (FM 270). Therefore, “(i)t is only from the human perspective that the animal is poor with respect to world” (FM 270). Nevertheless, Heidegger concludes this self-criticism, and with it the entire analysis of animality, on a less critical, and more aporetic, note. He maintains that until we arrive at a fuller understanding of the nature of world, we cannot pass judgement on the ultimate legitimacy of his conception of the animal as poor in world. Only then can it be determined whether there is “poverty in the animal's specific manner of being as such” (FM 272), or if such poverty obtains only in comparison to Dasein. With this in mind, Heidegger concludes the analysis by maintaining that “the thesis that ‘*the animal is poor in world*’ must remain as a problem” (FM 273). Heidegger never again addresses the issue, and so a problem it remains.

In view of the above, it seems that, for Heidegger, the question concerning his own anthropocentrism can only be resolved by way of a detour through his conception of world – a detour that would effectively lead us through the entirety of Heidegger's works. However, the self-criticism found in the 1929–1930 lecture course offers another path toward the solution of this problem. Specifically, if the type of deficiency that is definitive of animality is shown to be internal to the animal's way of being, i.e. an intrinsically determined deficiency, and not only a comparatively determined deficiency, not only a deficiency in comparison with Dasein, then the characterization of the animal as poor in world would be “drawn from animality itself”, rather than obtaining “only from the human perspective”. In this way, Heidegger's characterization of the animal as deficient could be defended against the charge of anthropocentrism, because, according to Heidegger, it is precisely the apparently comparative nature of the animal's definitive deficiency that renders his characterization open to such a charge.

Notice that Heidegger's self-criticism accords with Calarco's, rather than Derrida's, position regarding the problematic aspect of his characterization of animality as world-poverty. That is, Heidegger sees that characterization's tendency toward an anthropocentric subordination of the animal as rooted in its comparative, rather than its negative,

aspect. For Heidegger, then, lack does not, as Derrida's critique asserts, necessarily imply hierarchization and evaluation, because lack can be intrinsic. Insofar as he attempts to conceive the animal's world-poverty as a deficiency of this intrinsic type, Heidegger views a non-comparative conception of animality as the remedy to his view's anthropocentric tendency. So, to avoid anthropocentrism, Heidegger sets himself the task of conceiving world-poverty as an intrinsic deficiency. In order to determine if the Heideggerian animal is intrinsically deficient or merely comparatively deficient, and thus to determine if Heidegger has an answer to his critics, we must take a closer look at the mode of negativity that is characteristic of the animal, i.e. poverty.

II.

Heidegger's initial adumbration of the animal's world-poverty distinguishes negation in the mode of poverty from two other types of negation – quantitative lack and absolute lack (FM 192–200). Our interpretation of poverty will proceed by examining Heidegger's way of contrasting it with these other types of negation, beginning with his distinction between poverty and absolute lack.

Absolute lack is the type of negativity that characterizes the present-at-hand object's worldlessness, its having no world; and according to Heidegger, a present-at-hand object, such as a stone, is worldless, insofar as the entities among which it is found are "essentially *inaccessible* to the stone itself" (FM 197). This inaccessibility is essential to the stone because the inability to access other entities "belongs to its being" (FM 197). That is, a stone's lack of access to the beings around it is not simply a contingent fact about that stone, but is due to its very way of being, its presence-at-hand. For "having no access is precisely what makes possible its specific kind of being" (FM 197). So, the present-at-hand object's worldlessness, its absolute lack of access to other entities, is determined by its ontological structure; its absolute lack is, in this sense, an ontological lack.

As to the connection between ontological lack and absolute lack, we can see why an ontological lack is necessarily absolute by examining Heidegger's claim that the present-at-hand object's worldlessness, its ontological lack of access to other entities, is different than the animal's world-poverty insofar as the latter is a "deprivation" (*Entbehrung*) of world, whereas worldlessness is not.⁸ Worldlessness is not a deprivation because the being that suffers from an ontologically determined lack is not, properly speaking, deprived of that which it lacks, as what it lacks does not even pertain to it in any way; the ontological structure of the being that has an ontological lack renders that being completely unrelated to what it lacks. Deprivation, on the other hand, is "a lacking or absence of something which could be present and generally ought to be present" (FM 195). Thus, a present-at-hand object is not deprived of access to objects any more than it is deprived of, say, the ability to read, because both having access to objects and being able to read are such that they neither could be nor ought to be possessed by the present-at-hand, as they conflict with its way of being. As determined by an entity's ontological structure, then, to lack something ontologically is to be completely unrelated to it, rendering that

⁸As Heidegger puts it, "(p)overty in world implies a deprivation of world. Worldlessness on the other hand is constitutive of the stone in the sense that the stone *cannot even be* deprived of something like world." (Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 196.)

lack, in principle, irremediable. It is in this sense that an ontological lack is absolute – remediation of an ontological lack is an absolute impossibility.

However, the same considerations that militate against an ontological lack being a deprivation also imply that such a lack is, properly speaking, not even a lack. Although Heidegger does not draw this conclusion in the 1929–1930 lecture course, he had suggested it in the opening sections of *Being and Time*'s first Division. There, Heidegger gives a preparatory sketch of Dasein's basic characteristics, by articulating the salient differences between Dasein and the present-at-hand (BT 41–62). This two-part division, between Dasein and the present-at-hand, foreshadows the three-part division, between human beings, animals and present-at-hand objects, found in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, insofar as both are drawn in terms of the world-relations proper to each of the distinguished terms. In *Being and Time*, while the present-at-hand object is "worldless" (*weltlos*) (BT 56), Dasein's way of being is being-in-the-world. Further, as in the later lecture course, *Being and Time* characterizes the world-relation of the present-at-hand object as a kind of deficiency. This deficiency is conceived as a lack in comparison with the human being's world-relation. Specifically, while in the lecture course the present-at-hand object's worldlessness is its lack of the human being's world-forming character, its lack of having a world, in *Being and Time*, this worldlessness is the present-at-hand's lack of Dasein's being *in* a world.

In the analysis from *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes the present-at-hand object's worldlessness as its inability to touch, in the sense of encounter, another object (BT 55–56). Dasein, on the other hand, can encounter objects because its way of being is such that it takes an interest in, or is concerned with, the world. Dasein's relation to the world, then, is one of concern, which distinguishes it, ontologically, from the worldless present-at-hand object. Heidegger further explicates the present-at-hand's worldlessness by contrasting its lack of concern with, or lack of "taking care of" (*Besorgen*) (BT 57), its world with the way in which Dasein can lack concern. That is, the present-at-hand's lack of concern is an ontological lack, while Dasein can lack concern only as a deficient mode of concern itself. With this notion of the deficient mode, the sense in which worldlessness is, ultimately, not a lack comes to the fore.

Heidegger introduces the deficient mode in order to account for the fact that although Dasein's way of being is such that it is concerned with the world, it is not the case that, as a matter of fact, Dasein is always found to have concerns. For it is certainly possible for a human being to be completely disinterested in what goes on in the world. Instead, Heidegger acknowledges this possibility, but maintains that even paradigmatically unconcerned types of behaviour, such as "(o)mitting, neglecting, renouncing, resting, are also ways of taking care of something, in which the possibilities of taking care are kept to a 'bare minimum'", i.e. they are "deficient modes" of being concerned (BT 57).

Heidegger makes the apparently heavy-handed claim that human disinterestedness is actually a mode of concern, a mode of taking an interest, because Dasein's having concerns is rooted in, and so is a manifestation of, the fact that its ontological structure is that of "care" (*Sorge*).⁹ Dasein has interests insofar as being interested, having something at

⁹As Heidegger makes the point, the expression "taking care" is used to describe Dasein's behaviour "not because Dasein is initially economical and 'practical' to a large extent, but because Dasein itself is to be made visible as *care*." (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 57.)

issue, is constitutive of its very ontology; having an interest is required of Dasein by virtue of its ontological structure. All of Dasein's activities, then, must be ways of having an interest, as a matter of ontologically determined necessity. Therefore, when a human being behaves disinterestedly, such behaviour must be a mode of interestedness, i.e. a deficient mode, a mode in which interestedness is reduced to "a bare minimum".¹⁰ The present-at-hand object, alternatively, cannot, properly speaking, be disinterested because its way of being is not care, and so it is ontologically barred from being interested, whether in positive or deficient modes. Its ontological structure is such that having interests does not even pertain to it in any way. That which is present-at-hand, then, can be neither interested nor disinterested.¹¹

Returning to the analysis from *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, we can now see that because the stone's inability to access objects is determined by its ontological structure, the stone is not, properly speaking, without such access. Rather, just as the stone's presence-at-hand renders it neither interested nor disinterested, this way of being also renders it *neither with nor without* access to objects; having such access does not pertain to the present-at-hand any more than having interests does. The present-at-hand's worldlessness, then, being an ontological lack, is not a lack at all. Although it does not have access to objects, and so has no world, the present-at-hand is not *without* such access, and so does not lack a world either.

Why, then, does Heidegger characterize worldlessness as a lack, "a kind of not-having of world" (FM 196)? Here, we must keep in mind that the analysis under consideration is comparative, insofar as the worldlessness of the present-at-hand and the world-poverty of the animal are explicated in comparison with the human being's world-forming character. From this point of view, worldlessness can be seen as a lack. Notice that Heidegger's characterization of the stone is blatantly anthropocentric, "not drawn from (presence-at-hand) itself", because "it is only from the human perspective" that the present-at-hand object lacks a world. Thus, the type of deficiency that is definitive of presence-at-hand, i.e. absolute lack, is not an intrinsically determined deficiency, but only a comparatively determined deficiency, a deficiency in comparison with Dasein.

The anthropocentrism of Heidegger's characterization of the present-at-hand, as found in the 1929–1930 lecture course, certainly supports the claim that his view of animals, there, is also anthropocentric. For, in both cases, the world-relations definitive of these non-human types of beings are determined to be deficient through the same comparison with Dasein's world-relation. Presumably, such a comparative analysis ineluctably leads to an anthropocentric position, as its results only obtain from the human perspective. In order to see if this criticism does, in fact, apply not only to Heidegger's explication of presence-at-hand, but also to his explication of animality, we look to the second type of negativity from which Heidegger distinguishes poverty: quantitative lack.

According to Heidegger, poverty "by no means represents what is 'less' or 'lesser' with respect to what is 'more' or 'greater'" (FM 195); and so, the animal's poverty in world does

¹⁰Heidegger makes a similar use of this idea of the deficient mode in order to explain how Dasein can be factually alone, although its ontological structure includes its being-with-others. In Heidegger's words, "(t)he other can be *lacking only in and for* a being-with. Being-alone is a deficient mode of being-with." (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 117.)

¹¹Heidegger makes this point explicitly with regard to the possibility of indifference, when he says that, in the case of a present-at-hand entity, "its being is a matter of 'indifference'; or more precisely, it 'is' such a way that its being can be neither indifferent nor non-indifferent to it." (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 42.)

not “express quantity, sum total, or degree with respect to the accessibility of beings” (FM 195). Heidegger explicates the distinction between poverty and quantitative lack by showing that the latter, like absolute lack, is not a deprivation, whereas poverty is a deprivation. He illustrates this with the example of “the poor or meagre flow of water in a stream” (FM 195). This example is particularly instructive because it seems, at first glance, to be an instance of quantitative lack, i.e. a quantitative deficiency in the volume of water flowing in the stream. However, Heidegger maintains that it is not a quantitative lack, but instead is a deprivation, insofar as the characterization of the stream’s flow as meagre “is not merely a case of comparing what is less at one moment with what is more at another” (FM 195).

To understand why the determination of the stream’s flow as meagre is not simply the result of comparing the volume of water flow at one moment with the volume of water flow at another, and so is a deprivation rather than a quantitative lack, recall that poverty, for Heidegger, is a type of deprivation because it is a lack of something that “could be present and generally ought to be present”. As a deprivation is a lack that not only could be remedied, but also *should* be remedied, that which suffers from a deprivation is such that remediation of that deficiency is not only possible for it, but is required of it – its very nature demands remediation of the lack. For the possession of that which it lacks is constitutive of its ontological structure. In this way, that which is deprived is intrinsically, and not merely comparatively, in a state of deficiency. So, that which bears a deprivation would be so determined even if it always had been and always were to be in its current, deficient state. By contrast, a quantitative lack is a deficiency that could be remedied, although there is no reason that it should. For that which bears a merely quantitative deficiency is only determined to be lacking by “comparing what is less at one moment with what is more at another”. That is, its being in a deficient state only counts as such in relation to a previous or subsequent state of that thing. Its bearing a quantitative lack is not intrinsically, but only comparatively, a deficiency; and so the possession of what it lacks is not constitutive of its ontological structure. And as thus comparative, it is not a lack that should be remedied; the nature of the thing does not demand remediation of that lack.

With the above in mind, we can see that certain cases of meagre water flow would count as deprivations, while other cases would be properly characterized as quantitative lacks. For example, meagre water flow would constitute a deprivation if its volume were so low that the stream failed to function as a stream. In such a case, the nature of the stream, its ontological structure, would itself demand that the deficiency in water flow be remedied, and so that deficiency would be intrinsic to the stream, rather than merely comparative. Its meagre water flow would constitute a lack even if it had always flowed at that volume. Thus, it would be a lack that not only could be remedied, but one that should be remedied. It is a case of this type that Heidegger apparently has in mind, when he refers to “the poor or meager flow of water in a stream” as an example of poverty rather than an example of quantitative lack. Alternatively, the stream’s low volume of water flow would constitute a merely quantitative lack if the lack of volume did not affect its functioning as a stream. In that case, the stream’s water flow would not be determined as deficient by virtue of the stream’s nature, but only relative to a higher volume of water flow that the stream exhibited at some previous moment or would exhibit at some subsequent moment. The lack of water flow, then, would be

merely comparative, and so would be a lack that could be remedied, but not a lack that should be remedied because remediation would not be demanded of it.

III.

Up to this point in our analysis, we have followed Heidegger's initial approach to the animal's world-poverty, which proceeds by distinguishing poverty from quantitative lack and from absolute lack. We have found that, in both cases, poverty is distinguished by its being a type of deprivation, which is a type of lack that both could be remedied and ought to be remedied. An absolute lack, on the other hand, is not a deprivation because it neither could be remedied nor ought to be remedied; while a merely quantitative lack could be remedied, although it is not the case that it ought to be remedied. By drawing these distinctions in this way, Heidegger highlights the basic factor that is peculiar to poverty as a specific mode of negation – it is a deficiency that ought to be remedied, a deficiency whose remediation is demanded by the ontological structure of that which is in the state of poverty. Furthermore, we have seen that insofar as remediation of a state of poverty is so demanded, poverty is an intrinsic lack, whereas absolute lack and quantitative lack are merely comparative because remediation of such deficiencies is not so demanded.¹²

In view of the above, we can see why Heidegger initially resisted the anthropocentric interpretation of his notion of the animal as poor in world, why he maintained that world-poverty “must not be taken as a hierarchical evaluation”. Poverty is an intrinsically determined deficiency, and so Heidegger's characterization of the animal as poor in world is “drawn from animality itself”, rather than obtaining “only from the human perspective”. For, as we have seen, it is precisely the apparently comparative nature of world-poverty that, according to Heidegger's own self-criticism, renders his conception of animality open to the charge of anthropocentrism. Heidegger, then, has provided himself with the remedy for the tendency toward anthropocentrism that he recognizes as endemic to his conception of animality, thereby answering his critics in advance. He has articulated the sense in which the deficiency characteristic of animality can be intrinsic, and thus not essentially hierarchical. Still, although the intrinsically determined nature of poverty allows him to avoid an anthropocentric interpretation of the animal's world-poverty, Heidegger, nevertheless, rescinds his assertion of the non-anthropocentric character of his analysis thereof. In order to see why Heidegger would simply concede the charge that his conception of intrinsic lack was designed to pre-empt, immediately after having articulated that conception of intrinsic lack, we must take a closer look at world-poverty, focusing on what, exactly, it is that is lacked by that which is poor in world.

Recall that Heidegger conceives of world-poverty as a way of not having a world. Unlike the worldlessness of the present-at-hand, which is a way of not having a world such that the worldless entity is completely unrelated to other entities, world-poverty is not an

¹²In the case of absolute lack, the comparison is between beings of different ontological types. Thus, a stone (whose way of being is presence-at-hand) absolutely lacks access to objects in comparison with a human being (whose way of being is Dasein). In the case of quantitative lack, the comparison is between beings of the same ontological type. Thus, the stream whose low volume of water flow is a merely quantitative deficiency lacks a greater volume of water flow in comparison with itself, i.e. in comparison with a previous or subsequent state of itself. This same quantitative deficiency would obtain if the stream in question were compared with a different stream that had a higher volume of water flow. For a different stream would be of the same ontological type.

absolute lack of access to beings. Instead, entities are in some sense accessible to the animal; they at least somehow pertain to the animal. As Heidegger says, beings are “certainly given *in some way*” (FM 198) for animals. That is, although the animal is poor in world, and so lacks a world, it still has a world in some sense because beings are not completely inaccessible to it. Hence, Heidegger’s assertion that the animal “*both has and does not have world*” (FM 199). While having a world insofar as beings are accessible to it, the animal lacks a world insofar as it fails to apprehend beings *as* beings. That is, although the animal has access to beings, it does not recognize them as such (FM 198). So, the animal’s world-poverty, the deficiency that is definitive of animality, is its failure to apprehend beings as such, its lack of the “as”. Given Heidegger’s characterization of poverty as a deprivation, i.e. as an intrinsic deficiency, the animal’s world-poverty must be a lack whose remediation is demanded by the ontological structure of the animal. However, Heidegger’s analysis of the animal’s lack of the “as” suggests that there is no such demand. For he maintains that the “apprehending of something *as something*”¹³ is impossible for the animal. Furthermore, he sees this impossibility as obtaining by virtue of the animal’s ontological structure.¹⁴

But if, as Heidegger claims, the animal’s lack of the “as” is irremediable due to its very way of being, then this would seem to imply that the animal’s lack of world is not a form of poverty, after all. For, as we have seen, such irremediability is characteristic of absolute lack, which, unlike poverty, is not a type of deprivation. Just as the present-at-hand object is not deprived of access to beings, because such access does not even pertain to it insofar as its worldlessness is an ontologically determined deficiency, so the animal is, apparently, not deprived of the ability to apprehend beings as beings, because such apprehension does not even pertain to it insofar as its failure to do so is ontologically determined. If this is the case, however, then the animal’s lack of the “as” is merely comparative for the same reasons that the present-at-hand’s lack of access to beings is comparative. Because the “as” does not even pertain to the animal, this lack of world is not, properly speaking, a lack at all, although it can be seen as such “from the human perspective”. Therefore, Heidegger’s characterization of the animal as not having a world is not “drawn from animality itself”, but instead repeats the blatant anthropocentrism found in his characterization of the present-at-hand’s way of not having a world. For the analysis, ultimately, fails to conceive of the animal’s constitutive deficiency non-comparatively, and thus as intrinsic. The comparative nature of Heidegger’s analysis again leads ineluctably to an anthropocentric position. And so, he rescinds his assertion of the non-anthropocentric character of that analysis.

Why, then, does Heidegger almost immediately temper the above rescinder with the lecture course’s final word on the problem of animality – that the characterization of the animal as poor in world “must remain as a problem”? Why this indecision as to whether the animal’s lack of world is, in fact, a form of poverty or an absolute lack? How could the animal’s lack of the “as” possibly be a deprivation, when its ontological

¹³Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 247. As Heidegger puts it, “such a possibility is ‘not given at all.’” See also, Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 259, where he asserts that “(a)n animal can only behave but can never apprehend something as something”.

¹⁴That is, insofar as the animal has access to beings but does not recognize beings as such, it is captivated (*benommen*) by them; and such captivation constitutes “the essential structure of the animal” (Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 239). For Heidegger’s full discussion of animal captivation, see Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 238–248.

structure precludes it from apprehending beings as beings? To answer this question, and thus to make sense of Heidegger's indecision regarding his own anthropocentrism, we begin by recalling that a deprivation, for Heidegger, is a lack of something that "could be present and generally ought to be present"; a deprivation is a deficiency that not only could be remedied, but that also should be remedied. And the animal's lack of the "as" appears not to be a deprivation insofar as it is a deficiency that *cannot* be remedied. We have also seen that Heidegger's attempt to articulate a non-anthropocentric conception of animality conceives of the animal's definitive deficiency as intrinsically, rather than merely comparatively, determined. This is why his manner of distinguishing poverty from absolute lack and from quantitative lack highlighted the fact that poverty is a deficiency that *ought* to be remedied, as the basic characteristic peculiar to poverty as a specific mode of negation. With these considerations in mind, Heidegger could only hold that the animal's lack of the "as" is a case of poverty, a case of deprivation, by maintaining that this deficiency ought to be remedied, despite the fact that it cannot be remedied; the animal's ontological structure would have to both demand and preclude remediation of its failure to apprehend beings as such. That this, in fact, is Heidegger's position can be seen by noting his characterization of world-poverty as a "withholding".

According to Heidegger, "the possibility of apprehending something as something is *withheld* (*genommen*) from the animal ... taken away (*benommen*) from the animal" (FM 247). That is, as withheld, the animal's lack of the "as" is a lack of something that is taken away from it, and so is a lack of something that belongs to the animal. And this is not simply a contingent fact about animals, but is due to their very way of being. Remediation of the animal's lack of the "as", then, is demanded by virtue of its ontological structure. It is an intrinsic lack, a deficiency that ought to be remedied. Yet, the animal could never possess the "as", and this impossibility, too, is due to the animal's way of being. Remediation of the animal's lack of the "as", then, is as much precluded as it is demanded by virtue of the animal's ontological structure. Therefore, as a withholding, the animal's failure to apprehend beings as beings is an intrinsic deficiency that ought to be remedied, although it cannot be remedied. This is how the animal's lack of the "as" can be a deprivation although its ontological structure precludes it from possessing the "as".

IV.

Given Heidegger's notion of a withholding, and of world-poverty as a deprivation of this specific type, we must ask again about his indecision regarding his own anthropocentrism. Because the animal's lack of world is a withholding of the "as", rather than an absolute lack thereof, Heidegger seems to be absolved of the charge of having drawn his characterization of the animal as poor in world, not "from animality itself", but "only from the human perspective". So, why the indecision? As we have seen, one reason that Heidegger himself cites concerns the unresolved issue of the precise nature of "world". Our entire analysis, thus far, has aimed at side-stepping this rather enormous problem, by conceiving the question of Heidegger's anthropocentrism in terms of the distinction between intrinsic deficiencies and comparative deficiencies – an expedient that Heidegger's own analysis of animality endorses. However, even his explication of world-poverty as a withholding, which is an intrinsic deficiency, leaves him unsatisfied. This dissatisfaction is intensified, when

Heidegger offers another, somewhat cryptic, consideration regarding his conception of animality: “if deprivation in certain forms is a kind of suffering, and poverty and deprivation of world belongs to the animal’s being, then a kind of pain and suffering would have to permeate the whole animal realm and the realm of life in general” (FM 271). However, he continues, “(b)iology knows nothing of such a phenomenon” (FM 271). Before addressing these remarks, let us first consider a more obvious reason that could account for Heidegger’s suspicion of his own analysis, i.e. the sheer coherence of his conception of world-poverty as a withholding.

At first glance, the coherence of Heidegger’s notion of world-poverty seems questionable insofar as it maintains that the animal is beset with a demand that is, in principle, beyond any possible resolution – an “ought” without a “can”. How could remediation of the animal’s lack of the “as” be required if such remediation is impossible, particularly when both the requirement and the impossibility are ontologically determined? At first glance, a being with such an ontological structure seems to be nothing more than a blatant self-contradiction, thereby invalidating Heidegger’s conception of animality, along with his attempt to avoid anthropocentrism. Still, Heidegger does not seem to take the apparently self-contradictory nature of world-poverty as cause for concern. And this should not be surprising because a similar internal tension is found in the ontological structure of Dasein, most clearly in *Being and Time*’s characterization of Dasein as ontologically guilty.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes Dasein’s ontological guilt as “*being-the-ground of a nullity*” (BT 272). Dasein’s way of being is a nullity insofar as it is always in a state of lack, of negativity; Dasein is “determined by a not” (BT 272). Specifically, Dasein, as thrown, always finds itself already in a situation that is not of its own making.¹⁵ Therefore, it can never take itself over; it can never remedy its failure to fully determine itself. And this failure is due to its very ontological structure.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Dasein’s way of being demands that it remedy this lack of self-determination. As Heidegger puts it, although Dasein can never overcome its thrownness, and thereby be its own basis, “it *has to take over being the ground*” (BT 273, my italics). This demand, like the impossibility of meeting it, is ontologically determined. For it is, precisely, “*in existing*” (BT 273, my italics) that Dasein is beset with this impossible demand. So, as in the case of the animal’s world-poverty, Dasein’s ontological guilt saddles it with a demand that is, in principle, beyond any possible resolution, a demand whose resolution is withheld – an “ought” without a “can”.

Given that, for Heidegger, both Dasein’s guilt and the animal’s world-poverty are cases of withholding, we can save his conception of animality from being reduced to a blatant self-contradiction by ascertaining how he saves Dasein from such a reduction in *Being and Time*. He does so by characterizing Dasein’s negativity, its nullity, as a type of potentiality – Dasein is “being-possible”, or “potentiality of being” (BT 139). That is, Dasein’s way of being is to be in a constant state of potentiality; its ontological structure is such that it is always driven toward a possibility. Furthermore, that which is thus possible for it, that which it can be, is precisely itself.¹⁷ Thus, Dasein is its own possibility, the potentiality

¹⁵See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 272: Dasein “exists as thrown, brought into its ‘there,’ but *not* of its own accord”.

¹⁶As Heidegger puts it, “*(e)existing*, it never comes back behind its thrownness” (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 272, my italics).

¹⁷See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 139, where Heidegger maintains that Dasein is the potentiality for “being as existing”.

to be itself. Because it is always driven toward being itself, the actualization of this possibility is demanded of Dasein by virtue of its ontological structure. However, this same actualization is also precluded by virtue of Dasein's ontological structure. For insofar as Dasein's striving to be itself is its very way of being, it can never reach that toward which it strives; as driven toward itself, as potentially itself, Dasein can never be itself. Both demanded and precluded by its way of being, Dasein's self-actualization is withheld. Dasein's ontological nullity, being a withholding, renders it, ontologically, in a state of potentiality, of potentiality of being. As such, Dasein is an unactualizable possibility, a possibility that must always remain a possibility, which must always remain unfulfilled. Dasein is the unactualizable potentiality to be itself.¹⁸ Its ontological guilt, its negativity, thought in terms of potentiality, is its inability to overcome its "being-possible", and thereby be itself actually.

In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger addresses the apparent self-contradiction inherent in his conception of world-poverty in the same way that *Being and Time* addresses the problematic structure of Dasein's ontological guilt – he conceives it as a possibility that must always remain a possibility, that must always remain unfulfilled. Specifically, he describes poverty as "not-having *in* being able to have" (FM 211). As a "not-having", poverty is a type of lack; and as a lack "*in* being able to have", it is a lack in the mode of being able to have, in the mode of potentiality. Again, a withholding is thought as a potentiality. In the case of the animal's world-poverty, the "as" is potentially possessed insofar as it belongs to the animal, but, as withheld, the "as" can never actually be possessed by the animal. Thus, it is a potentiality that can never be actualized, an unactualizable potentiality.

V.

Whether or not the notion of an unactualizable potentiality is, ultimately, any more coherent than that of an "ought" without a "can", Heidegger's invocation of the former in his characterization of world-poverty suggests that his indecision regarding the anthropocentrism of his own conception of animality does not issue from a concern about the sheer coherence of the idea of world-poverty. For this invocation suggests that Heidegger sees the negativity that lies at the heart of animality to be no more incoherent than that which lies at the heart of Dasein. Both Dasein and the animal are beset with an ontological negativity, insofar as both are driven by a withholding, rendering them in an irremediable state of potentiality. Because the peculiarities inherent in the structure of this type of negativity did not lead Heidegger to suspect the legitimacy of his conception of Dasein, we can suppose that his apparent dissatisfaction with his notion of world-poverty, and thus with the legitimacy of using this notion in order to articulate a non-anthropocentric conception of animality, is not the result of his having concerns with the coherence of the notion of world-poverty. This, then, must not be the source of Heidegger's indecision regarding his own anthropocentrism.

So we are left with Heidegger's previously cited remarks, concerning deprivation and suffering, as the apparent source of his misgivings about his conception of animality.

¹⁸This is why Heidegger characterizes Dasein as ontologically "*ahead of itself*", or "*beyond itself*" (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 185).

There, Heidegger maintains that characterizing the animal as poor in, and thus deprived of, world implies that “a kind of pain and suffering would have to permeate the whole animal realm”, insofar as “deprivation in certain forms is a kind of suffering”. Heidegger is hesitant to unequivocally endorse his non-anthropocentric characterization of the animal as deprived, then, because this would imply that pain and suffering are constitutive of the animal’s ontological structure, and so “permeate the whole animal realm”. Why did Heidegger find this implication to be not only problematic, but so problematic that, rather than endorse it, he prefers to jeopardize his entire analysis of animality, and, with it, his successful avoidance of anthropocentrism?

Without an explicit answer from Heidegger, we can only conjecture as to his reasons. To follow one such line of conjecture, recall that, throughout his work, Heidegger’s references to animals typically characterize them as deficient in relation to human beings. In so characterizing them, he also repeatedly makes a point of maintaining that this deficiency constitutes an ontological abyss between Dasein and animals.¹⁹ In this regard, the 1929–1930 lecture course is no exception.²⁰ Heidegger’s misgivings about the analysis of animality carried out there could be born of an uneasiness with the extent to which his characterization of the animal as poor in world maintains that abyss?²¹ This may be the source of Heidegger’s misgivings because Dasein and the world-poor animal share a definitive similarity insofar as both are irremediably potential, driven by that which is withheld, intrinsically deficient, structured by a negativity. On the one hand, this structural similarity shared by the human being and the animal does not identify them, as what is intrinsically lacked in each case is different. Whereas Dasein can never overcome its thrownness, the animal can never overcome its failure to apprehend beings as beings. Still, this difference, i.e. the difference between thrownness and world-poverty, may fall somewhat short of an abyss. Dasein’s thrownness renders it powerless in the face of beings, and thus capable of being affected thereby – submitted to its world (BT 134). Because this submission makes Dasein’s affectivity possible, it makes it possible for Dasein to suffer. In Dasein’s thrownness, then, lies the possibility of suffering; it is, precisely, as thrown that Dasein suffers. Heidegger claims that to characterize the animal as poor in world, as deprived, carries this same implication.

According to Heidegger, if the animal were essentially poverty-stricken, then it, too, would suffer; in fact, it would be “permeated” by pain and suffering. Heidegger’s suspicion of this conception of animality, then, could well be grounded not in its failure to avoid anthropocentrism, as he himself, along with his later critics, maintains, but rather in his attempt to reserve the realm of suffering, of finitude, for the human being. It may be that Heidegger shrinks back, not in the face of an abyss, but in the face of the closing

¹⁹See Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”, 248; Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 16; and Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 152.

²⁰See Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 264: “the animal is separated from man by an abyss”.

²¹Derrida also suggests that Heidegger’s version of the animality/Dasein division does not amount to an abyss: “can one not say just as legitimately that the having-of-world has for man the signification of some *unheimliche* privation of world, and that these two values are opposed?” (Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 50. See also, Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 159–160). Giorgio Agamben suggests a similar proximity between Heideggerian Dasein and the animal’s world-poverty, when he asserts that “(t)he jewel set at the center of the human world and its *Lichtung* {clearing} is nothing but animal captivation” (Agamben, *The Open*, 68). In “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject”, Jean-Luc Nancy sees Heidegger’s reference to the animals “sadness linked to its ‘lack of world’” (111), as the point at which his attempt to distinguish the human being from the animal breaks down. As Nancy asks, “(h)ow could sadness be non-human? Or rather, how would such a sadness fail to testify to a relation to world?” (111) Neither Derrida, Agamben, nor Nancy, however, link this proximity with Heidegger’s misgivings about his own analysis.

of an abyss, the closing of the abyss between the animal and the human. Because it is Heidegger's non-anthropocentric definition of animality that forges the proximity between Dasein and animality, it may be that, for Heidegger, the closing of the animal/human abyss is too high a price to pay for his escape from anthropocentrism. On the other hand, for those who do not share his uneasiness with an ontological proximity between the animal and the human, Heidegger's conception of the animal as poor in world need not be regarded as anthropocentric, but can be seen as the point of departure for a fuller explication of a non-anthropocentric view of animality.

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