

“Outside of Being”: Animal Being in Agamben’s Reading of Heidegger

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In *The Open: Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben draws attention to the fundamental antagonisms and ambiguities that mark the attempt to cogently articulate a definition of man in relation to animal being. Agamben traces the foundational moment of the concept of “life” in the history of Western philosophy to Aristotle’s isolation of the nutritive function in *De Anima*.¹ This isolatable “nutritive life” becomes the ground or essential commonality on top of which other faculties are hierarchically organised. This formulation thus makes it possible to separate higher animals from lower ones, as well as identify the “life” *within* being that is considered “common” or vegetative. It is the possibility of an isolation or separation of this kind that is crucial insofar as it sets up an aporetic relationship between human and animal life, a relation decisive for both Agamben’s political and ontological thought.

It is not surprising that Agamben’s discussion of animal being in this text engages primarily with Martin Heidegger’s work, most notably his 1929–1930 course, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*.² Heidegger’s notion of animality has been charged with a profound anthropocentrism and subject to numerous critiques by philosophers including Jacques Derrida, Leonard Lawlor, Kelly Oliver, Cary Wolfe, Matthew Calarco, and Akira Lippit, among others.³ The problematic and at

times ambiguous nature of Heidegger's theory of animal life has been widely discussed, and is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, the focus of the present inquiry is limited to Agamben's reading of Heidegger in *The Open* and the characterisation of animal life that follows. Agamben critiques the alleged ontological pre-eminence of Dasein through an analysis of Heidegger's notion of profound boredom, in which, according to Agamben, we find man in a state of infinitesimal proximity to animal being. At this critical juncture we can glimpse the nature of man's specific difference from animal being as it functions in Agamben's work. This paper closely examines Agamben's discussion of Heidegger and argues that Agamben's reading is problematic. Consequently, the "letting be" of beings in Heidegger's account grants animal being a more radical externality than that found in Agamben's theorisation. Insofar as the notion of animality is a critical constituent of Agamben's ontological and political theory—the figure of the animal traverses the "doublets" that feature prominently in Agamben's texts, namely *zoē/bios*, living being/speaking being, *homo sacer/sovereign*—there is much at stake in the concept of animal being that Agamben develops through his analyses of Heidegger. In fact, despite its omission from the *Homo Sacer* series, the concepts developed in *The Open* should in fact be read as continuous with those found in *Homo Sacer*, *State of Exception*, and his earlier text *Language and Death*.⁴ As Kelly Oliver argues, "the human-animal divide, then, is not only political but also sets up the very possibility of politics."⁵ As such, an investigation of Agamben's notion of animal life is of relevance not only to the field of "critical animality studies"⁶ but to his notion of bare life, biopolitics and "speaking being," insofar as the concept is absolutely central to—and can in fact be said to underlie or ground—the "political" itself.

I. Reading Agamben Against Heidegger

Heidegger's course, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, includes an extended discussion of animal life; however this is far from its primary focus—rather, animality is theorised with regard to its proper manner of being, in order to develop a concept of man as finitude and being-in-the-world. Heidegger's "preliminary appraisal" at the outset declares philosophy to be a kind of homesickness, a being taken at all times "within the whole"—and the character of this wholeness is the "world."⁷ As always already drawn to this "whole" and yet always awaiting it, there is an intrinsic restlessness to man; Heidegger terms "finitude" the "unrest of this 'not,'" and argues that it is not a state nor an incidental property but rather a "fundamental way of being."⁸ Man's subsequent individuation or solitude is a

result of this becoming-finite, which only occurs because of, and indeed with, "world." Thus the three concepts—world, finitude, and solitude—form a unity, and the discussion of animality must be contextualised as belonging to this larger analysis of metaphysics and the essence of man. Indeed, Heidegger's renowned tripartite thesis constitutes an attempt to understand the essence of "the other beings which, like man, are also part of the world," with regard to their relationship to and difference from the "having world" that marks man: "[1.] the stone (material object) is *worldless*; [2.] the animal is *poor in world*; [3.] man is *world-forming*."⁹ Agamben's critique will consist in drawing attention to a critical proximity between the captivation of the animal and Dasein's thrownness in the state of profound boredom. However, it will be argued that in Agamben's reading of Heidegger he makes a series of claims that emerge as untenable and which, instead of critiquing Heidegger's theses in a productive way (that is, as creating more possibilities for thinking animal life), serves instead to limit them.

The formulation of man as *animal rationale*, the living being that has language, is a metaphysical definition Heidegger consistently rejects, as Agamben points out. This definition of the human being as *zoon logon echon* is for Heidegger a traditionally anthropological description, in which *zoon* is taken as present-at-hand and in time.¹⁰ Later, in the "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger will return to this formulation and characterise it as metaphysical insofar as this "first humanism" [Roman humanism that considers man to be an *animal rationale*] does not ask after the Being of beings—in both the *ratio* of man and the *zoon* of the animal, "an interpretation of 'life' is already posited," the Being of beings is "already illumined and appropriated in its truth."¹¹ Indeed, Heidegger rejects the biological understanding of life: "Life is not a mere being-present-at-hand, nor is it Dasein. In turn, Dasein is never to be defined ontologically by regarding it as (ontologically indefinite) life plus something else."¹² Such scientific theories—Heidegger specifically names anthropology, psychology, and biology—fail to provide an "ontologically adequate answer to the question of the *kind of being* of this being that we ourselves are."¹³ In addition, this conception, which manifests in modern anthropology as a notion of being "where the *res cogitans*, consciousness, and the context of experience, serve as the methodological point of departure,"¹⁴ forecloses the possibility of attunement or *Stimmung*, a crucial concept in Heidegger's work.

Heidegger argues that man is characterised by an essentially different manner of being to that of animal life. In fact, he writes that "it finally remains to ask whether the essence of man primordially and most decisively lies in the dimension of *animalitas* at all."¹⁵ In "Letter on Humanism," this questioning quickly turns into a declaration: living creatures "are in a certain

way most closely akin to us, and on the other are at the same time separated from our ek-sistent essence by an abyss.”¹⁶ In the development of the theme of “world” in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, this abyssal separation between man and animal reveals a “peculiar proximity,” according to Agamben. He writes of the abyss between animal and man in Heidegger’s course: “not only does *animalitas* become utterly unfamiliar and appear as ‘that which is most difficult to think,’ but *humanitas* also appears as something ungraspable and absent, suspended as it is between a ‘not-being-able-to-remain’ and a ‘not-being-able-to-leave-its-place.’”¹⁷ Thus, he will attempt to complicate this abyssal separation between man and animal—an attempt that positions Agamben, albeit only superficially, in line with Derrida’s critique of Heidegger—by throwing into question the seemingly unwavering and unsurpassable fissure itself.

Agamben describes the important influence of Jakob von Uexküll on Heidegger’s notion of animal world and environment, not least because the concepts Heidegger employs seem to correlate directly with Uexküll’s terminology. That is, Heidegger gives the name *Enthemmungsring*, “disinhibiting ring,” to what Uexküll termed *Umwelt* or “environment.”¹⁸ Indeed, in Heidegger’s characterisation of animal life, “the animal is closed in the circle of its disinhibitors just as, according to Uexküll, it is closed in the few elements that define its perceptual world.”¹⁹ According to Agamben, Heidegger departs from Uexküll when he characterises the poverty in world of the animal in contradistinction to the world-forming of man. Captivation (*Benommenheit*) is posited as the mode of being proper to the animal, the fundamental manner of engaging.²⁰ The animal is captivated by its disinhibitor—and is “wholly absorbed” insofar as captivation takes the animal “as a whole”—and as such cannot be said to truly “act” or “comport” itself, but only to “behave” (related to the distinction between “response” and “reaction”).²¹ That towards which the animal behaves, however, is essentially withheld from the animal as a being; thus Agamben writes that “being [is introduced] into the animal’s environment negatively—through its withholding.”²² This withholding, however, is “neither disclosed nor closed off,” there is a central ambiguity in Heidegger’s characterisation of animal openness: according to Agamben, the “not being able to have-to-do-with” that marks the animal is “not purely negative.”²³ Thus, Agamben claims that the essence of the animal’s relation to world is not simply that of pure deprivation, but simultaneously one of *lack*, an assertion that rests on the concept of animal captivation:

The ontological status of the animal environment can at this point be defined: it is *offen* (open) but not *offenbar* (disconcealed; lit., openable). For the animal, beings are open but not accessible. ...

This *openness without disconcealment* distinguishes the animal's poverty in world from the world-forming which characterizes man.²⁴

Captivation constitutes the essence of the animal's manner of being and is the fundamental mode of access or openness—albeit obscure—to “world.” In captivation, the animal is absorbed or taken by something that remains withheld, and “neither its so-called environment nor the animal itself are manifest as beings.”²⁵ Nonetheless, the animal is driven and “directed in its manifold instinctual activities.”²⁶ As such, Heidegger writes, “because of this driven directedness the animal finds itself suspended, as it were, between itself and its environment, even though neither the one nor the other is experienced as being.”²⁷ However, in Section 57, Heidegger claims that the essence of life and of the organism is “being capable”: “only something that is capable, and remains capable, is alive.”²⁸ To be capable in this sense—as opposed to the comportment of man—is to be capable of behaviour or a “driven performing [*Treiben*].”²⁹ Thus this “suspension” is not a petrification—the animal has the “capability for . . .,” that is, the potential to be disinhibited or affected by something. Agamben emphasises this possibility of being affected; that which disinhibits, despite the fact that it cannot become manifest to the animal, nonetheless “brings an *essential disruption* into the essence of the animal.”³⁰

Furthermore, Heidegger writes that the “self-encirclement” of the animal is not to be equated with “encapsulation,” but rather, “the encirclement is precisely *drawn about* the animal in such a way that it *opens* up a sphere within which whatever disinhibits can do so in this or that manner.”³¹ The animal's poverty in world thus appears to pivot on the characterisation of the mode of access and accessibility to that which disinhibits the encircling ring, in short on the ontological condition of captivation. That is, Heidegger presents an account of animal life that maintains an abyssal difference between man and animal, and yet this distinction appears, at this stage of the argument at least, to apply namely to the question of access or openness to world or environment—and not a difference of substance. Finally, with regard to this obscure or ambiguous access (and ensuing disruption) that marks captivation, Agamben argues that captivation can be conceived as “a sort of fundamental *Stimmung* in which the animal does not open itself, as does *Dasein*, in a world, yet is nevertheless ecstatically drawn outside of itself in an exposure which disrupts it in its every fiber.”³² Animal captivation appears to resonate unexpectedly with the fundamental attunement of profound boredom as explicated earlier in the course.³³ Agamben here claims that “the understanding of the human world” is possible only in relation to this “exposure without disconcealment” that characterises animal being.³⁴ Furthermore, he asserts that it is not that the human is presupposed in the

development of an account of animal being, but rather that the “openness of the human world ... can be achieved only by means of an operation enacted upon the not-open of the animal world.”³⁵ It is in profound boredom that man’s fundamental attunement appears almost to converge with animal captivation.

Heidegger characterizes two structural moments of boredom, “being left empty” [*Leergelassenheit*] and “being held in limbo” [*hingehalten*].³⁶ In the first structural moment, the emptiness of “being left empty” derives from a kind of abandonment by the present-at-hand.³⁷ In a boring situation, the things present at hand in the environing world leave man empty, which is to say, man is “offered nothing by what is at hand.”³⁸ According to Agamben, this being “delivered over to beings that refuse themselves” reveals “the constitutive structure” of Dasein: “Dasein can be riveted to beings that refuse themselves in their totality because it is constitutively “delivered,” and “factically “thrown” and “lost” in the world of its concern.”³⁹ Agamben thus makes his first claim regarding Dasein and animal being:

In becoming bored, Dasein is delivered over [*ausgeliefert*] to something that refuses itself, exactly as the animal, in its captivation, is exposed [*hinausgesetzt*] in something unrevealed.⁴⁰

Common to both this structural moment of boredom and the animal’s captivation is an “*open to a closedness*,” a being bound and delivered over to something which does not manifest itself.⁴¹ The second structural moment, “being held in limbo” [*Hingehaltenheit*] or “being-held-in-suspense”⁴² consists in “being delivered over to beings’ telling refusal of themselves as a whole.”⁴³ In this moment of boredom this telling refusal points to Dasein’s “possibilities left unexploited,” that is, it makes such possibilities manifest through refusing them.⁴⁴ Agamben characterises such possibilities as standing before Dasein “in their absolute indifference, both present and perfectly inaccessible at the same time.”⁴⁵ It is precisely this manifestation via indifference or deactivation, as it were, that reveals the “disconcealing of the originary possibilitization” of Dasein.⁴⁶ Agamben is in the position to make his second claim, again reading animal captivation as conceptually proximate to human boredom:

What the animal is precisely unable to do is suspend and deactivate its relationship with the ring of its specific disinhibitors. ... Profound boredom then appears as the metaphysical operator in which the passage from poverty in world to world, from animal environment to human world, is realized; at issue here is nothing less than anthropogenesis, the becoming Da-sein of living man.⁴⁷

Agamben can now locate that passage which would enable continuity between man and animal that Ernst Haeckel had posited and later claimed to have found evidence of, in the ability of man to become profoundly bored. He argues that the “irresolvable struggle between unconcealedness and concealedness” which defines “world” for Heidegger is nothing other than “the internal struggle between man and animal.”⁴⁸ His final assertion:

Dasein is simply an animal that has learned to become bored; it has awakened *from* its own captivation *to* its own captivation. This awakening of the living being to its own being-captivated ... is the human.⁴⁹

The problem of “world” would thus be analysed in terms of a becoming-human, which is founded on the captivation of animal being. As such, Agamben claims to have uncovered the “metaphysical operator” that can explain anthropogenesis but which resists both the notion of man as essentially distinct from animals, and the continuity thesis that propounds an evolutionarily intermediary “stage” between the two. In an archetypal theorisation, Agamben claims that anthropogenesis occurs through the suspension or deactivation of animal captivation, and thus questions the extent to which Heidegger escapes the “metaphysical primacy of *animalitas*”—insofar as humanity must necessarily “keep itself open to the closedness of animality.”⁵⁰ The mechanism of suspension (similar to that which sanctions the inclusive exclusion of *zōē* in the *polis*) allows him to maintain the separation of animal and man while retaining the sense of intimacy and tension between the two.

II. Reading Heidegger Against Agamben

We can now outline Agamben's reading of Heidegger. He first postulates that in the fundamental attunement of profound boredom we can discern a remarkable proximity to the captivation that defines animal essence. In his analysis of the second structural moment of boredom, being-held-in-suspense, he argues that Dasein is “delivered over” *exactly* as the animal is “exposed” in captivation; in this telling refusal the originary possibilitisation of man himself is revealed. Up to this point, Agamben is primarily concerned with demonstrating the structural similarities between the two by setting them up alongside each other—however, in his final argument these converge in the thesis that Dasein is “simply an animal that has learned to become bored” to the extent that animal life is equated with the living being of man: “the awakening of the living being to its own being-captivated ... is the human.”⁵¹ That is, in his final argument the emphasis shifts from a dis-

cussion of the essential mode of access or openness to world, that is, the relationship with its disinhibitors that would define the essence of a being's "manner of being," to an assertion regarding a commonality of substance, a shared ground which would pre-exist the distinction between world and poverty-in-world, captivation or being-taken, behaviour or comportment, as well as the intrinsic ambiguity of openness. Insofar as Agamben's argument regarding the human thus far revolves around two poles, the specific relation between them, and the political articulations they permit—man and animal, speaking and living being, *bios* and *zoē*—this assertion constitutes an attempt to found a commonality in which the human was pre-historically essentially "united," as it were, prior to the open realm of pure possibilities. Indeed, as Agamben writes in *Infancy and History*, the disjuncture between language and speech is the precondition for the historicity of man; for Agamben, "animals do not enter language, they are already inside it," while man, "preceding speech, splits this single language and, in order to speak, has to constitute himself as the subject of language."⁵² In other words, if man is the animal that has become bored and becomes a speaking being, this specific "becoming" that Agamben designates as anthropogenesis must itself derive from something which both exceeds and is more originary than these conceptual doubles—a more originary realm that the human is capable of interrupting or suspending. This anthropogenesis occurs through the compulsion towards the "singular extremity" of an "originary making possible," the "utmost extremity of the possibilitization proper to Dasein as such."⁵³ In Agamben's account, it is through this exposure to, or being-driven-towards, its own being-possible that marks man's essence, insofar as it reveals (through a refusal) all the concrete possibilities of man, and thus constitutes the moment in which man as such departs or diverges from animality. On the one hand, Agamben stresses the proximity between animal captivation and the state of profound boredom, and thus problematises Heidegger's abyssal distinction between human and animal. On the other hand, as Dominick LaCapra points out, "Agamben himself seems to assume or require a radical divide between human and animal," in order to conceive of the "abyssal, alluring divide itself, as a zone of indistinction between human and animal."⁵⁴ Thus it is both this posited convergence of the essence of man and animal, as well as the revelation of originary possibilitisation, which constitute the main contentions of his argument. In order to analyse this, we must engage in a closer reading of Heidegger's course.

At the beginning of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger addresses the ambiguity of the meaning of *physis* or nature in Pre-Socratic thought. *Physis* is "that which prevails," meaning "not only *that which itself prevails*, but that which prevails in its prevailing or the *prevailing*

of whatever prevails”—*physis* appears to encapsulate the totality of object, subject, and action, crudely put.⁵⁵ On the other hand, *physis* also denotes the nature of beings, that “innermost essence” or inner law, that meaning which we put to use when speaking of the nature “of” something.⁵⁶ In Aristotle, *physis* remains a unity of two meanings, which have shifted: *physis* now means “beings as a whole,” as well as having “the sense of *ousia*, the essentiality of beings as such.”⁵⁷ Aristotle calls “First philosophy” or *prote philosophia* this questioning concerning both the notion of “beings as a whole” and the essence of beings. According to Heidegger, the term “metaphysics” that he uses in this course is to be understood both as descriptive and, more fundamentally, as a task: we must understand the “originary understanding” of First philosophy as expressing “philosophizing proper,” which is what metaphysics must become—it is not that metaphysics gives rise to First philosophy, but that metaphysics must be given its meaning “from out of an originary understanding” of *prote philosophia*.⁵⁸ That is, our inquiry into “world,” animal being and man as world-forming is a properly metaphysical inquiry that must investigate both the “as a whole” and the essence of beings. It is only *Dasein* that has access to this “as a whole” and as such can have “world,” insofar as man is capable of encountering beings as beings.

The ambiguity of the openness of animal captivity has been noted by Agamben. Heidegger is adamant that an understanding of animal openness can stem from neither the mechanist conception of life nor the vitalist tradition. We have seen that the self-encirclement of the animal does not constitute a totally closed encapsulation—encirclement constitutes the possibility of an openness to that which disinhibits. Heidegger writes that the animal’s poverty in world is “nonetheless a kind of wealth,” and that the life of the animal “possesses a wealth of openness with which the human world may have nothing to compare”; that is, Heidegger maintains that this impoverishment does not establish a value judgement on the *kind* of substantial life of the animal, but rather denotes a difference in mode of accessibility.⁵⁹ He claims: “The animal is acquainted with the ditch it jumps over as a simple matter of fact [*Sachverhalt*], but not as a concept [*Begriff*].”⁶⁰ However, if animals in their captivity cannot grasp beings as being present at hand, that is, if beings are not “disclosed” to it, this means that neither are they “closed off” from it: captivity in Heidegger’s account is indifferent to this possibility, which is to say that animals do not have “less” world in a substantial sense, but have an openness to world that essentially differs from the mode of access to world of *Dasein*.

As William McNeill writes, the animal “moves outside of the play of disclosedness and concealment, beyond the possible alternative of Being

or not Being.”⁶¹ It is not that the animal is incapable of negativity, but rather that this capability stands outside the realm of animal being, which would be outside or indifferent to this mode of access. That is, for Heidegger, the animal is outside of the “not-capable” of negativity. Thus Michel Haar asserts that “animals do not know nothingness,” and that animal being can neither “let beings be” nor not “let beings be.”⁶² Since we are analysing animality “in the realm of what is essential,” Heidegger claims that the question of whether the animal is a “lower” form of life and man a “higher” one, is “questionable even as a question.”⁶³ Indeed, according to Stuart Elden, animals “are not distinct from humans in any straightforward way in Heidegger’s analysis, but only through a comparison to the particular mode of existence of humans.”⁶⁴ In fact, Heidegger himself concedes that “it is only from the human perspective that the animal is poor with respect to world”; it is only from the standpoint of the human that we can comprehend something like the deprivation of world.⁶⁵

As such, Heidegger argues that we must attempt to determine the concept of poverty in world insofar as it relates to the “phenomenon of world,” but not in a manner that would hierarchise this relation. Insofar as the difference between animal and Dasein is, strictly speaking, an ontological one in the sense that for Heidegger animal life has a fundamentally *other* way of being, an otherness that is not ontic but pertains to the very essence of animality, Agamben’s formulation of man as an animal that has *become* bored is difficult to maintain. Heidegger nowhere maintains that man and animal derive from a singular origin. On the contrary, Haar asserts that “Heidegger wants to show the impossibility of an *original* and fundamental implication or entanglement of human Dasein in living beings, to destroy the idea of an *animal lineage*.”⁶⁶ Tracy Colony cogently argues that Agamben’s account of Heidegger’s course rests on the “unquestioned presupposition that a living being is the origin of the openness proper to human being.”⁶⁷ Rather, living being or animal being does not firstly exist as an ontic substance that is subsequently made open; openness is intrinsic, coeval with being. Additionally, Agamben pinpoints the difference between animal captivation “and the opening of the possible in Dasein” to the “single operation of allowing the original captivating power of the animal’s environment to be deactivated.”⁶⁸ This single “cut,” as it were, defines and orients a “linear” difference in the sense that this metaphysical operation acts as a bridge and not as a division. This authorises Agamben’s argument that “the nontruth that also belongs originarily to the truth” (the secret of unconcealedness at the center of truth as *aletheia*), is “the not-open of the animal,” and that this “irresolvable struggle between unconcealedness and concealedness ... which defines the human world, is the internal struggle

between man and animal.⁶⁹ Thus Agamben subsumes animal life insofar as he locates the problem of animal being as that of living being (*zoē*), in the direction of the *human*, a development that is not supported by Heidegger's analyses of animality, from which Agamben claims to have derived his assertions. In his reading of Heidegger, Agamben claims to have discovered the metaphysical operator that gives rise to the notion of the human as a conflicted relation between animal and man that inheres in the human.

Additionally, Colony writes that "while Agamben stresses the continuity between animal captivity and the sense of captivity proper to profound boredom, the term which Heidegger almost exclusively uses ... is not captivity but rather, entrancement," a notion which Heidegger will understand in relation to the crucial dimension of temporality, which will then need to be taken into account.⁷⁰ As noted above, for Agamben the "originary making possible" which is disconcealed in profound boredom reveals the originary and proper possibilitisation that belongs to the essence of man (tied to his notion of pure potentiality outlined elsewhere). The temporal character of this "being held in limbo" proper to profound boredom is not discussed by Agamben, but is a critical element in Heidegger's account of "world." In profound boredom, it is the "one" who is attuned, not—no longer, or not yet—the "I." What is revealed is the "it is boring for one," not "*this* or *that* being that we are bored by."⁷¹ As such, the "it is boring for one" is tied to the notion of the "as a whole." In this situation, all beings present at hand "recede into an indifference," including the self of *Dasein*—and yet "this peculiar impoverishment ... first *brings the self* in all its nakedness *to itself* as the self that *is there* and has taken over the being-there of its *Da-sein*."⁷² In profound boredom, or the "it is boring for one," being is "delivered over to beings" telling refusal of themselves "as a whole."⁷³ This refusal or withdrawal of beings as a whole can only be possible "if *Dasein* as such can no longer go along with them," if it is "entranced."⁷⁴ According to Heidegger, "*what entrances* is nothing other than the *temporal horizon*" itself, which is "neither merely the present nor merely the past nor merely the future," but "their *unarticulated unity*."⁷⁵ That is, profound boredom is marked by an experience of time in which time itself (as understood chronologically, as a sequence of "nows") seems to recede.

In *The Time of Life: Heidegger and Ethos*, McNeill explains that living being must "take up an independent stance in relation to something outside of and beyond not only that which is presenting itself, but beyond the present of whatever is presenting itself at each moment" in order to endure within the temporal flow.⁷⁶ Thus the temporality of *Dasein* is characterised as ek-static, insofar as *Dasein* can assume a stance "outside of its own Be-

ing, a stance or ‘holding’ of oneself.”⁷⁷ Heidegger terms this possibility of self-disclosure “freedom.”⁷⁸ Since Dasein is not present at hand, but is “set in the midst of beings” in the temporal horizon, Dasein “is *there* [da], that is, opens itself up [*sich aufschließt*] in its manifestness, that is, resolutely discloses itself.”⁷⁹ Heidegger writes that “the moment of vision [Augenblick] is nothing other than the *look of resolute disclosedness* [Blick der Entschlossenheit] in which the full situation of an action opens itself and keeps itself open.”⁸⁰ Thus in the entrancement of boredom, Dasein is impelled “into its proper essence, i.e., *toward the moment of vision* as the fundamental possibility of existence proper.”⁸¹ Therefore, as Colony points out, the proximity Agamben detects between captivity and the being taken in profound boredom is not as self-evident as it would first appear. It is difficult to maintain the thesis that profound boredom “appears as the metaphysical operator” that bridges animal environment and human world, insofar as animality is exempt from the essential temporality of Dasein and cannot take up a free stance in the midst of beings. While animals are captivated—and open, in a certain way—by their encircling ring, the so-called “captivation” that is proper to profound boredom is the entrancement by the unity of the temporal horizon; this difference is one of essence and cannot be conceived as a continuity.⁸²

III. “Letting Be” of Beings

Agamben concludes *The Open* with a chapter entitled “Outside of Being,” in which he writes:

Insofar as the animal knows neither beings nor nonbeings, neither open nor closed, it is outside of being; it is outside in an exteriority more external than any open, and inside in an intimacy more internal than any closedness. To let the animal be would then mean: to let it be *outside of being*.⁸³

Animal being is excluded from the political, inhabiting a realm of the non- or extra-political that is nevertheless not a state of exception; not banned but barred, animality is the necessity that serves as the counterpoint to human potentiality, the natural life that pre-exists the natural-ised life of the *zoē/bios* doublet. Paradoxically, it lacks the indistinction and oscillation that gives rise to the formulation of man as that which lacks a proper vocation. It is the specific lack of the human that gives rise to an ontological difference, a “lack” different in kind or in essence from the animal’s lack of world. Denoted as life governed by necessity, as a being that has no stake in its own life or way of living, animality grounds the empty uncertainty or negativity of

man. Without language use (because it is already “in” language), it “prepares,” so to speak, the ontological ground for the subsequent definitions of man. Furthermore, such definitions retroactively posit the animal as marked by privation. The ways in which both concepts of negativity function must be clarified and exposed, in order to grasp what is really at stake in Agamben’s formulation of animality and his critique of Heidegger. Heidegger achieves an externality, an “outside” that is more radical, insofar as animal being is outside of negativity; for Agamben, in his account of anthropogenesis and the being’s suspension of its disinhibitors, the animal becomes incapable of negativity, of interrupting its realm of im-mediacy. The risk in letting being be “outside of being” is that animal being is *already* outside if the concept of “being” itself is always already traversed by the human—it is not Aristotelian simple, natural life, not politically qualified life, and neither can it be the life that is “taken out,” the bare life of the exception, the properly political element. It is an “outside” marked by the mechanism of suspension. Insofar as the notion of animality grounds the understanding of natural *zoē* and thus bare life, animal life can be said to belong to a realm from which “living being” has been subtracted, but whose humanist configuration remains in force. That is to say, when Agamben describes the stopping of the anthropological machine according to Walter Benjamin’s notion of “dialectic at a standstill,”⁸⁴ this “resolution” remains a humanist concern.

Agamben concludes *The Open* with a call to render inoperative what he terms the “anthropological machine” that “governs our conception of man” and which functions through the “simultaneous division and articulation of the animal and the human.”⁸⁵ Yet it can be argued that Agamben’s reading of Heidegger constitutes such an articulation in the development of his final thesis: not only do we find an attunement in which *Dasein* comes close to the essential manner of animal being, but Agamben claims to discover in this proximity a possibility of continuity between the two. Here, where an essential distinction collapses into an account of anthropogenesis, animal life (or “living being” in Agamben’s parlance) is taken, suspended, and consequently included via exclusion. As such, it can be argued that the notion of the letting-be of the animal, with which Agamben concludes *The Open*, is more “positive”—in the sense of permitting an “outside” which would not be the externality which is included via exclusion—in Heidegger’s conception than in Agamben’s. McNeill writes that while the animal “in its radical openness” is refused the possibility of a free stance in relation to beings, this can be understood as “precisely the *refusal* in which the animal shows itself to us in its specific otherness.”⁸⁶ In maintaining the essential abyssal difference between *Dasein* and animal openness, Heidegger thus appears to grant animality an externality more radical

than that of Agamben's unsavable, blessed life at the end of history. That is to say, the topology of the otherness of the animal in Heidegger's account constitutes an externality that is "outside" in a different sense to the "outside" in Agamben's formulation; for Agamben, animality, insofar as there is an animality-humanity continuity, is an interiority that is suspended, taken outside. Accordingly, the place of animal being in Agamben's messianic politics remains unclear. Agamben's scrupulous and rigorous critique of biopolitics, sovereignty and law constitutes a critical appraisal of modern politics, and his formulation of a "form-of-life"⁸⁷ and "coming community" outlines an exigent political project. It is perhaps all the more necessary, then, to investigate the ontological human-animal distinction that subsists in the notion of the human as "pure potentiality," itself derived in part from the posited ontological otherness of animality. This would in turn lead to an analysis of the conspicuous absence of animal life in Agamben's writings on biopolitics, insofar as ontology and politics are inseparable in Agamben's philosophy.

Animal being in Agamben's formulation appears to be both "outside" and the "ground" that subtends subsequent articulations of man. However, this "outside" is no longer the radical difference (abyssal for Heidegger) of externality, but rather becomes intrinsic to anthropogenesis—animal being is captured, encoded within an anthropogenic trajectory and suspended in the becoming-man of man as "pure potentiality," as the power of deactivation, the capacity to become bored. As Colony writes, for Agamben "the openness which defines the human" in Heidegger "harbor[s] within it an implicit structural dependence upon the living being as the site from out of which an operation of anthropogenesis has been achieved."⁸⁸ Heidegger's *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* does not support such a reading.

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NOTES

- ¹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 13.
- ² Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 5.
- ³ See for instance Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington & Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); and *The Animal That There-*

fore I Am, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); Leonard Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Kelly Oliver, *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us To Be Human* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Cary Wolfe *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal* (London & Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Matthew Calarco, "Heidegger's Zoonology," in *Animal Philosophy: Essential Readings in Continental Thought*, ed. Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton (London; New York: Continuum, 2004); and Akira Lippit, *Electric|Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (London; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

- ⁴ Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (California: Stanford University Press, 1998); *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press 2005); *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. Karen Pinkus & Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982). *The Open* is omitted from the *Homo Sacer* series, despite being published in the midst of these texts. The series also includes *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, published in 1998. An elaboration on the reasons behind this omission would constitute an interesting study in terms of what it indicates about animality and the political; unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this more thoroughly.
- ⁵ Kelly Oliver, "Stopping the Anthropological Machine: Agamben with Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty," *PhaenEx: Journal for Existential and Phenomenological Theory* 2, no. 2 (2007): 1.
- ⁶ See *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (2009), in particular Kimberly W. Benston, "Experimenting at the Threshold: Sacrifice, Anthropomorphism, and the Aims of (Critical) Animal Studies," 548–555.
- ⁷ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 5.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 177. Unless otherwise noted, all citations with italics are italicised in the original.
- ¹⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 48.
- ¹¹ Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Krell (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 154.
- ¹² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 49 (quoted in Agamben, *The Open*, 50).
- ¹³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 49.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.
- ¹⁵ Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 154.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.
- ¹⁷ Agamben, *The Open*, 50–51.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 52.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 53.

²³ Ibid., 54–55.

²⁴ Ibid., 55.

²⁵ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 248.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 236.

²⁹ Ibid., 237.

³⁰ Agamben, *The Open*, 61.

³¹ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 25.

³² Agamben, *The Open*, 62.

³³ Ibid., 61.

³⁴ Ibid., 62.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 86–87.

³⁷ Ibid., 103.

³⁸ Ibid., 103.

³⁹ Agamben, *The Open*, 65.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Agamben's rendering of *Hingehaltenheit*.

⁴³ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 140.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 140–141.

⁴⁵ Agamben, *The Open*, 66.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 69.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 70.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 73.

⁵¹ Ibid., 70.

- ⁵² Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History*, trans. Liz Heron (London; New York: Verso, 2007), 59; see also 65, 67.
- ⁵³ Agamben, *The Open*, 67.
- ⁵⁴ Dominick LaCapra, *History and Its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 166.
- ⁵⁵ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 30.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 244.
- ⁶⁰ Heidegger quoted in Stuart Elden, "Heidegger's Animals," *Continental Philosophy Review* 39, no. 3 (2006): 278.
- ⁶¹ William McNeill, *The Time of Life: Heidegger and Ethos* (New York: State University of New York Press: 2006), 26–27.
- ⁶² Michel Haar, *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 29, 28.
- ⁶³ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 194.
- ⁶⁴ Elden, "Heidegger's Animals," 276.
- ⁶⁵ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 270.
- ⁶⁶ Haar, *The Song of the Earth*, 29.
- ⁶⁷ Tracy Colony, "Before the Abyss: Agamben on Heidegger and the Living," *Continental Philosophy Review* 40 (2007): 7.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ⁶⁹ Agamben, *The Open*, 69.
- ⁷⁰ Colony, "Before the Abyss," 7.
- ⁷¹ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 142.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 143.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 147.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.
- ⁷⁶ McNeill, *The Time of Life*, 44.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.
- ⁷⁸ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 149.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² For an interesting discussion of Heidegger's deferral of the problem of animal time, see Brett Buchanan, "The Time of the Animal," *PhaenEx: Journal for Existential and Phenomenological Theory* 2, no. 2 (2007): 61–80.

⁸³ Agamben, *The Open*, 91.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 83.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 92.

⁸⁶ McNeill, *The Time of Life*, 48–49.

⁸⁷ See Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 3–12; and Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 188.

⁸⁸ Colony, "Before the Abyss," 3.