



Thoreau's civil disobedience to Mahatma Gandhi. Salt argued that each animal is an individual, entitled to live out his or her natural life. He made this statement in oppose to the binary thinking: "*We must get rid of the antiquated notion of a "great gulf" fixed between them (non-human kinds) and mankind, and must recognize the common bond of humanity that unites all living beings in one universal brotherhood.*" These words sum up the animal rights position half century later.

Since the 1980s, animal rights' activism has grown from a fringe movement to an influential force affecting social change. Its rippling effects can be felt across the continents. Although it is a revolution unlike any others, it coincides with Hegel's prediction that the purpose of history is the realization of freedom. One could compare the paradigm shift to that of Copernican's. It overturns the fundamental world view from a human-centric to a bio-centric stance, a sea change in man's consciousness. People are beginning to accept the fact that animals are not resources for food, testing and entertainment. This article is an overview of the philosophical framework of the animal liberation movement including the concepts of moral rights, painism, speciesism, sentientism, veganism as well as differentiating between the abolitionist' position and that of the welfarist's. The economic tie between corporate factory farming and capitalism will also be addressed. As a critical theory of ethics, the article concludes with an internal critique of anthropocentrism according to Giorgio Agamben , a contemporary continental philosopher.

## **2. Sentientism**

Back in the 70s, there were only a handful of books available on the subject of animal rights, even fewer on animal cognition. *Animal Mind* by Donald R. Griffin, a professor of zoology at Harvard, was the first to recognize animals as thinking and conscious beings. Griffin's findings, regarding the similar neural function of the brain in both humans and non-humans, had significant ethical implications in establishing animal sentience. His research confirms that nonhumans also possess complex mental and

neurological faculties. Like us, they are feeling individuals with their own desires and interests.

A clear and simple definition on sentience is best provided by Dr. Webster of the University of Bristol: "*A sentient animal is one for whom feelings matter*". A sentient being has the ability to feel pleasure and suffering and can perceive the world and experience subjectivity. It possesses the mental, perceptual and emotional capability such as consciousness, memory, thought process, awareness, intentionality, feelings of satisfaction or frustration, desires and wants that are relevant to the individual's interests. Therefore, the moral significance of sentientism implies that each individual being is entitled to have legal protection. Both humans and nonhumans share similar desires and can comprehend many basic needs such as food, shelter, comfort, companionship, avoidance of harm, pain and suffering. The concept of animal as sentient beings was written into the basic law of the European Union in 1997. Both the EU and its member states are required to set up protocol of the welfare requirement of animals.

In regard to the sentience of farm animals, Jane Goodall makes it very clear that they also possess mental and emotional lives, and can experience pleasure, joy, fear, anxiety, pain and depression. Like humans, they have self awareness and can comprehend what is happening to them. The book, "*Minds of Their Own*" by the ethologist Lesley J. Rogers, provides insights on animal's intelligence and awareness. Rogers describes chicks develop visual recognition of the hen as well as their siblings. They form attachment to the family soon after hatching. The recognition (through differentiation) of other individuals is a sure sign of mental awareness.

For centuries, animals had been regarded as merely machines or automata. Until the 18th century, a few scientists were willing to acknowledge that animals also have feelings and mental events, thus initiated the studies of animal sentience. Since then, animal cognition and sentience have become important disciplines in the field of ethology. We now have abundant information regarding the different kinds of intelligence and emotional capacities of fellow beings. In July 2012, the Cambridge declaration on animal consciousness proclaims: "*The weight of evidence indicates that*

*humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness. Non-human animals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses, also possess these neurological substrates.*" Many animals have amazing memories, linguistic competence and the ability to solve problems (as practical reasoning).

### **3. Speciesism and Painism**

Both of these terms were coined by professor Richard Ryder. The critique of speciesism is intended to deconstruct anthropocentrism. It was first introduced by Ryder when he was a member of the Oxford group in the 1970s. The group was then protesting against the use of animals in laboratories. Speciesism (or species hierarchism) refers to the discrimination on the ground of species distinction. It regards homo sapiens as a preeminent species that possess higher value and is superior to all other species. Essentially, speciesism operates with a binary mentality which is identical to racism. Ryder gives his counter argument: *"Speciesism was like racism or sexism-a prejudice based upon morally irrelevant physical differences. Since Darwin we had known we are human animals related to all other animals through evolution; how then, can we justify our almost total oppression of all other species?"* (the film *"The Superior Human?"* on you tube provides convincing arguments). Despite the fact that humans are mammals and belong to the primate species, speciesism, like racism, justifies animal slavery. Bernd Heinrich, a biologist, offers his counter argument: *"We can't credibly claim that one species is more intelligent than another unless we quantify intelligence with respect to what, since each animal lives in a difference world of its own sensory inputs and decoding mechanism of these inputs."*

Implicitly, humanism is a form of speciesism. It has dominated the metaphysical system since the early Greeks. However, Martin Heidegger, one of the leading continental thinkers, in his critique of modern technology, turned against Western metaphysical tradition. He proclaimed: *"Man is not the lord of beings. Man is the shepherd of being."* The German word *"gelassenheit"*, according to Heidegger, signifies *"man must let beings be."*

Richard Ryder later introduced the concept "painism" in oppose to Descartes' claim that animals merely operate through reflex, devoid of feelings and consciousness. Such a notion has long been refuted by science. Ryder defines pain as: *"any form of suffering or negative experience, including fear, distress and boredom, as well as corporeal pain. Things such as injustice, inequality and loss of liberty naturally cause pain."* He further clarifies: *"One of the important tenets of painism is that we should concentrate upon the individual because it is the individual-not the race, the nation or the species-who does the actual suffering."* Painism is the bedrock of a moral theory. An individual being, be it a human or non-human, that can experience pain should have moral standing. Each animal experiences its own pain; the pain of a rabbit, bird, mouse or a monkey should not be denied due to species' difference, because pain is pain. This is central to Ryder: *"All animal species can suffer pain and distress. Animal scream and writhe like us; their nervous systems are similar and contain the same biochemical that we know are associate with the experience of pain in ourselves."* When a lobster is being boiled alive and struggles in violent convulsions, we know the animal is in intense pain. We simply know because we would react the same way when being boiled alive.

Peter Singer, considered as the most influential philosopher affecting social change since Karl Marx, holds similar view on painism that all animals including humans are sentient and share the same interests such as the desire to live a fulfilled life and fear of pain and suffering. It is unjust to assume the pain experienced by the nonhumans is: *"less important than the same amount of pain (or pleasure) felt by humans."*

One other interesting concept that can be linked to the notion of sentiency and Ryder's painism is the carnal philosophy of the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In contrast to the Cartesian view that the animal body is an automaton, Merleau-Ponty proclaims that the body, which inhabits the corporeal world, is the cogito and the subject of awareness. As both the sensory and conscious center, the body is open and present in the world. To borrow a key phrase from Merleau-Ponty, the body is *"the flesh of the world"*. Through sensory awareness, each being

perceives and interacts with the world. His naturalistic notion of the body (with flesh and blood) signifies a sentient character.

#### 4. Moral Rights

Recognizing the moral rights of the nonhumans is the grounding argument of the movement. Those argue against such rights are based on the assumption that animals are unable to perform moral judgment, therefore, cannot be included as members of a moral community. The fact is that many higher mammals possess the ability of empathy and causal reasoning, they too have categorical knowledge such as space and time (from chicken to whales...). Tom Regan, the philosopher of the animal rights movement, explains : "*The Possession of moral rights confers a distinctive moral status*". Rights implies "valid claims", one demands to be treated justly and fairly. Beside the various rights that are recognized by law, moral rights refer to the entitlement of the fundamental rights to life. Regan clarifies: "*Animals have a life of their own that is of importance to them apart from their utility to us. They are not only in the world, they are aware of it. What happens to them matters to them.*"

Kant, the foremost thinker of the German Enlightenment, whose theory of moral imperative requires that each person should be treated as ends, not simply as means. Regan takes his position further to include fellow animals within the moral community. The idea that each individual animal experiences itself as "a subject" and deserves respect is central to Regan's proposition. He proclaims that each animal has "inherent value" which supersedes its usefulness. Regan argues: "*each being is the subject-of-a-life and has its own complex subjective world*". He further extends Kant's ethics to defend the moral right of the nonhumans: "*Human ethics is based on the independent value of the individual: The moral worth of any one human being is not to be measured by how useful that person is in advancing the interests of other human beings...The philosophy of animal rights demands only that logic be respected*". His message is pretty straightforward, animals are not means to serve human interests.

From a different perspective, Richard Ryder's reasoning for the moral rights of animals is based on the concept of moral continuum: "*since*

*Darwin, scientists had agreed that there is no magical essential difference between humans and other animals, biologically speaking, why then do we make an almost total distinction morally? If all organism are on one physical continuum, then we should also be on the same moral continuum."* Granting the moral right of fellow animals is the manifesto of the movement since law and ethics are integral in establish a fair and just legal status for the nonhumans.

Although there are obvious differences between the human animal and nonhuman animal, for example, we have distinct historical, cultural, racial and national identity as well as being aware of our own mortality. Nonetheless, Peter Singer, author of *Animal Liberation*, argues that humans and nonhumans, both have the capacity to feel pleasure and pain. Singer's moral theory is explained through the concept of "equal consideration of interests". It is based on calculative utilitarianism. Singer proposes that the criterion of ethics be determined on the provision of the greatest happiness for the greatest number of morally significant beings. Contrary to the Kant's theory on moral duty, Singer stresses the consequence of an action rather than the intention. He elaborates: *"to take into account the interest of all those affected by my decision. This requires me to weigh up all these interests and adopt the course of action."* For example, ban factory farming would produce the greatest interest for the animals, the environment as well as benefiting human health. Singer's argument is this: *"If a being suffers, there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration, the principle of equality requires that the suffering be counted equally with the like suffering-in so far as rough comparisons can be made-of any other being."*

Additionally, I would propose "The principle of autonomy " in defending the moral rights of fellow animals since it is a prerequisite to establish the individual "rights". Being autonomous is a evolutionary necessity for species' survival. Rousseau once wrote: *" The principle of every action is in the will of a free being. One cannot go back beyond that. It is not the word freedom which means nothing; it is the word necessity"*. Within the bio-system, each animal is endowed with the freedom to pursue fulfillment according to its capability. What is capability? It has to do with various

functions that one could achieve in order to live a form of life that is most suitable and satisfying. As such, the capability of any being should be recognized as the basic entitlement of that individual. The "capability approach" which alludes to the principle of autonomy, is a theory proposed by the law professor Martha Nussbaum. Although her theory is primarily concern with the enhancement of human life, nonetheless, it also includes the consideration of the nonhumans. For instance, the capacity of being able to experience pleasure and avoid pain, to love and care, free to engage social interaction, maintain bodily integrity, to plan things, able to control over one's environment...etc. Unfortunately, animals are deprived of their autonomous status. They are imprisoned in circuses, zoos, marine parks, and in "factory concentration camps" as well as "research torture chambers", unable to flourish.

Marc Bekoff, professor emeritus of cognitive ethology, provides similar reasoning in supporting the principle of autonomy: *"Sentient (conscious, feelings) animals are autonomous individuals. They are not just pain avoiders, they are pleasure seekers. The capacity for pleasure expands an individual's interests beyond merely avoiding pain."* All lives are born free. The joy of a bird is to fly freely in a boundless sky and dolphins' in an open sea; the abundance of a fruit-laden rainforest is for the enjoyment of all those roaming in the wild.

Perhaps, the most radical theorist on animal right is Gary Francione, a distinguished law professor who has been teaching animal rights and law in university. His primary argument is that morally we should not treat animals as property and as resources. He also criticizes animal welfare regulation that provides some protection to animal interests is basically acknowledging the status of animals as property. Francione 's uncompromising position in defending animal rights as being described the "abolitionist approach", meaning the legal and ethical prohibition of animal exploitation in any manner. All sentient beings have the right not to be treated as property or commodities. Francione proclaims: *"An animal's right to live free of suffering should be just as important as a person's right to live free of suffering."*



In *"Animals as Persons"*, Francione specifies the notion of right as either the pre-legal or the basic rights of the nonhumans. Vice versa, the exercise of rights can put constraint on man's treatment of fellow beings. Further, Francione holds that like humans, many animals possess personhood such as having sophisticated feelings and the capacities of abstract thinking, planning, solving problems and participating in communal cooperation. He explains: *"Animal rights theory seeks to move at least some nonhumans from the "thing" side of the "person/thing" dualism over to the "person" side. There are at least two reasons to offer in favor of this move. First, there is no characteristic or set of characteristics that is possessed by all humans (whom we regard as persons) that is not possessed by at least some animals. To put the matter a different way, those who support animal exploitation argue that animals are qualitatively different from humans so animals can be kept on the "thing" side of the "person / thing" dualism; animal rights advocates argue that there is no such difference because at least some nonhumans will possess the supposedly "exclusive" characteristic while some humans will not possess the characteristic."* Based on his abolitionist position, Francione is perhaps the most vocal advocate of ethical veganism as the baseline for animal rights. His definition of veganism goes beyond one's diet, it implies a non-violent way of living, without relying on any animal products.

## **5. Modern Asylum**

We humans have insatiable curiosity about everything from the outer space to the deep sea. We cheered when we saw on film, a whale, a dolphin or other injured wildlife being rescued; and yet when it comes to discuss the conditions of animals in labs and factory farms, we turn a blind eye to their suffering, willing to defend our moral inconsistency. The imprisonment of animals is a complete erasure of their capabilities. The remoteness of our relation with animals that are raised for consumption is strategically created by way of linguistic alteration. A cow is converted to beef, pigs means ham and bacon. Each piece of flesh, though neatly packaged, is still a part of a living being that once had a face, with eyes could see horror, ears could hear screams and nose could smell death. Among them, pigs, chicken and turkeys (the space allowed for each chicken is the size of a laptop)

suffer the worse treatment, although the dairy industry is not any less cruel than the meat factories.



Intensive factory farm, in every sense, is a concentration camp that conducts routine animal genocide. The only crime these animals commit is that a godlike species has developed a taste of their flesh. Such a prejudice is no different than the extreme racism that led to the Holocaust. Theodor Adorno, a social theorist of the Frankfurt School, relates animal massacre to the Holocaust of the Jews, *"Auschwitz begins whenever someone looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks: they're only animals."*

The book *"Dominion"* by Mathew Scully, a leading conservative journalist, provides a comprehensive coverage of institutionalized animal persecution. The question Scully poses is: *"Can glorious man peer into these places of stinking, nightmarish bedlam, down to the creatures that creepeth therein, into their brutish hearts to grasp their suffering? Not only can we grasp it-it is our own worst nightmare."* There is a moral urgency in his message: *"What makes a human being human is precisely the ability to understand that the suffering of an animal is more important than the taste of a treat."* Scully gives a detailed report of his visit to the Smithfield factory farms in Virginia- the world's largest producer of farmed pigs (from breeding, farming of animals to processing and packing plants). Inside, sentient creatures are just as intelligent, affectionate, and loyal as dogs, are being treated as agricultural crops, like cabbages, like cars parked in

parking lot. These warehouses are identified by numbers no different than Nazis' death camps. They are, in every sense, modern asylums designed for animals that have been driven mad from fear, helplessness, depression and hysteria: *"Confinement doesn't describe their situation. They are encased, pinned down, unable to do anything but sit and suffer and scream at the sight of gods."* Scully protests. Scully describes the condemned animals: *"Never leaving except to die, hardly able to turn or lie down, horror-stricken by every opening of the door, biting and fighting and going mad."*

The ingestion of toxic tissues from cows, pigs, chicken or turkey is responsible for the gradation of human health. The overcrowding condition of factory farms is the breeding ground of infectious diseases including streptococcus and other drug resistant pathogens. Animals are routinely fed with growth hormones, antibiotics and pesticides. Even worse, pigs are also fed with the remains of their own kind. Recent studies confirmed that these animals have developed stomach inflammation (a painful condition) from being fed with genetically modified soybeans. The intake of GE food also has adverse effects on their immune system, kidneys and reproductive function. Based on a three decades of research, Dr. Collin T. Campbell, professor Emeritus of Nutritional Biochemistry at Cornell University, concludes that meat based diet is the number one cause of common diseases (watch *"The China Study"* on You Tube). He warns that the consumption of animal products creates a vicious cycle from sick animals to sick people and to the sick environment. Factory farm industries continue to receive millions of dollars as subsidies from the federal government!

## **6. Veganism as political activism**

*"I have enormous respect for vegetarians. They are further ahead than most of us. They have gone through the thought process in making their eating choices."* Says Michael Pollan, who understands the urgency of veganism. Each year, more than forty eight billions farm animals are slaughtered globally; that's eight times of the human population. Our food choices are crucial and urgent, one either chooses compassion or destruction. As a social movement, veganism will become the way of the future, if we want to avoid a global catastrophe. Like Buddhism, vegans

cultivate compassion, non-violence and a diet refrains from animal products. Since the development of the industrial farming about half century ago, choosing a vegan diet has becoming an ethical imperative (watch "*Ethics in a Meat Free World-Philip Wollen at TEDx Melbourne*" on you-tube. Mr. Wollen was the vice president of the Citibank).

A vegan is someone who takes a stand refusing to participate animal exploitation. One important sector of veganism is the vegan anarchism, an ideology became popular in 1995. It supports the same objectives with the animal rights and Earth liberation movement. Vegan anarchism, a form of bio-politics, regards the global animal agriculture represents the epitome of capitalism which is essentially a reductive materialism. Vegans and anarchists, they view animal liberation as an extension of the human rights movement. As such, their goal is to free both humans and animals from political and economic oppression. Together, they form an alliance to counter the destructive practice of the oligarchy of multi-national corporations since they have already infiltrated the government dictating its food policies.

For the vegan environmentalists, factory farming is utterly unsustainable and has serious impact on climate change (watch "*A River of Waste-The Hazardous Truth about Factory Farms*-on you tube). The nitrous oxide and methane produced by the meat industries account for the major factor in green house emission. Methane, from farm animal wastes, traps heat and causes temperature to rise. According to reports, an intensive dairy farm with 2500 cows can produce as much animal wastes as a city of 411.000 people. Scientists have recently confirmed that greenhouse gas, a man made cause, is at its highest level in two million years. Another urgent reason to promote veganism is that the world population is expected to increase to nine billion by the year 2050. The demand of meat production will be much greater unless people are willing switch to a plant based diet.

In fact, the rationale that a meat based diet is essential for one's health cannot be validated (watch Dr. Melanie Joy on Carnism on you tude). Physiologically, our teeth show a great different from that of carnivores. For thousands of years, Buddhists have lived a healthy life by following a

compassionate vegan diet. Our food preference of a carnivorous diet is basically misguided by propaganda. Many athletes prefer a vegan diet. Chimpanzees and gorillas, our closest relatives, are mainly vegetarians. They build their powerful physique by living on a plant based diet. 98% of their food sources are from seeds, flowers, leaves, barks. How close are humans related to other primates? Researchers have confirmed that the human genome closely resembles that of the gorilla, the largest living primate.

## 7. The Animal Manifesto

Based on the study of animal cognition, we have learned that many mammals have the ability to deduce or infer from experiences based on causal connection. They can intuit the moods and thoughts of another animal from its facial expressions and bodily gestures. Animals with mental sophistication can also use tools, have culture, possess self awareness and the ability to empathize. In short, they understand the world around them and of each other. Professor Marc Bekoff tells of fascinating cases of animal intelligence and emotions such as: *"Monkeys teach their kids to floss their teeth, magpies recognize their reflection, bees display consciousness, and crabs don't just feel pain but remember it." ... "birds can become pessimistic or optimistic according to their living conditions, fishes recognize individuals and favor some over the others. They have life long memories. ..fishes of different species hunt cooperatively"*. As for farm animals such as cows: *"display strong emotions; they feel pain, fear, and anxiety, and studies have shown they worry about future."*

Like Francione, Bekoff stresses the fundamental difference between animal welfarists and abolitionists. In *"Minding the Animals"*, he clarifies: *"the welfarist position assumes that it is all right to use animals to meet human ends as long as certain safeguards are employed. They believe that the use of animals in experiments and the slaughtering of animals for human consumption are all right as long as these activities are conducted in a humane way...the pain and death animals experience are sometimes justified because of the benefits that humans derive "*. The rightists hold that animals have moral and legal rights, in particular, the right to live

freely without being caged or chained. Another uncompromising voice that supports the rights' view comes from Tom Regan: *"It is not refinement in research protocols that is called for; not mere reduction in the number of animals used; not mere generous use of anesthetic or the elimination of multiple surgery...no larger cages, but total abolition."*

Regarding the animal model for bio-medical research (the numbers of animals used in research in 2012, not including rats, mice and birds are about 949,584 ), Bekoff argues: *"Animal models have very limited utility, they are expensive, and they raise all sorts of ethical questions. Why pursue research methods that harm animals and provide results that are not particularly relevant for humans?"* The archaic animal model used for medical research, pharmaceutical and product testing is simply unreliable, it is flawed by design. There are inherent differences between humans and other animals in anatomy, physiology, metabolism and immune system. This explains why 9 out of 10 drugs that have tested on animals failed in human clinical trials. The results of animal experiments are merely approximation. The logic of antivivisection is simple, Bekoff gives his reason, *"because humans are not mice or rabbits!"*

As one of the most dedicated activists, Bekoff advocates compassionate activism (similar to the practice of engaged Buddhism): *"Any manifesto is a call to action. This animal manifesto is a plea to regard animals as fellow sentient, emotional beings, to recognize the cruelty that too often defines our relationship with them, and to change that by acting compassionately on their behalf".*

Forty years after the Oxford Group's campaign for animal rights (Peter Singer was among them), the subject matter of the human/non-human intersection is now part of the academic studies. The Oxford University Press has published two books, *"Animal Rights"* in 2001 and *"Animal Studies-An Introduction"* in 2013. Both were written by its graduate, Dr. Paul Waldau, a lecturer on animal law at Harvard Law School and the legal director of the Great Ape Project for the rights of chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas and orangutans. *"Animal Studies"* covers a broad spectrum of the movement as well as philosophical, legal and political debates. Another

activist professor is Steven Wise of Harvard Law School. He redefines the moral dimension as well as specific legal strategies to protect individual animal or species. Wise has been championing the legal rights of animals for over two decades. In *"Drawing the Line"*, Wise documents case studies to prove that certain species do meet the criteria of personhood, such as the non-human primates, dolphins, elephants, dogs and other mammals as they also possess self awareness, intelligence, emotions, desires and language capability. Man can no longer use the distinction theory, us versus animal others, to justify the tyrannical behavior towards fellow beings.

All lives are born free. The emancipation of non-human animals is directly linked to the liberation of our own species, says Steven Best, professor of philosophy and a radical activist: *"Human and animal liberation movement are inseparable, such that none can be free until all are free."* Professor Best connects the unprecedented destruction of the environment and the massacre of animals with *"The Sixth Great Extinction Crisis"* in the history of the planet (the last one being 65 million years ago). His message is an urgent calling for a new paradigm in the way we think and behave, if man wants to avert such a crisis. This is the reason why he proclaims: *"Animal rights is the next logical step in human evolution"*.

## **8. The Anthropological Machine**

What is man? How did he come on the scene? And how has he maintained a privileged place as the master of the animals? Contemporary Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben investigates the ways in which the "human" has been thought of as a kind of being that is essentially different from the rest of animals. In *"The Open, Man and Animals"*, He examines the Western history from the ancient Greek, Christian, Jewish texts to twentieth-century thinkers such as Heidegger, Benjamin... that the categorical "human/nonhumans" division has been the logical presuppositions of Western thought, as such, it prioritizes our thinking in terms of human interests. The analysis of his political philosophy provides further understanding of the moral exclusion of the nonhumans.

Although Agamben's main arguments are intended to offer a diagnosis regarding the human atrocities during WWII, he has developed several key

concepts to shed light on the holocaust, of the humans and the nonhumans, such as the notions of "*homo sacer*", "*self exception*" and "*the anthropological machine*". These concepts are interconnected, intended to disclose the root cause of man/animals categorical demarcation. Are we a species ruptured from its bio-genealogy? Is the logic of self-exception a set up through which man achieves a sovereign power.

In contrast to the conventional assumption of what man is, a being that possesses reason, Agamben puts forth the question "*what is man?*" by way of an internal analysis, and he concludes that humanity has no real meaning; it is, in fact, an empty ideal. The human species, in his view, appears to be a self exception from its inherent animality. Agamben thought that the problem of setting ourselves apart from the rest of the animal kingdom has its origin in Aristotle's metaphysics. In it, the central notion involves a binary of two kinds of life forms. Aristotle ranked human beings as *bios*, a higher life form that participates in political activities, whereas the nonhumans are "*zoe*:", meaning bare life or naked life with the sole purpose of reproduction. Such a fundamental distinction has since become the axiom of thinking in the history of Western philosophy.

The concept of self exception, which separates man from bare life, involves a paradoxical reasoning according to Agamben. On the one hand, self exception allows man to obtain sovereignty by excluding himself from the rule of law, or to be precise, above the law. On the other hand, man has the power to determine if a being either be protected by law, or be killed and excluded from the law. For example, the prisoners of Auschwitz were assigned to a state of exception. One can extend the logic of exception further, say, dogs and pigs are both intelligent and companionable; and yet dogs are granted the status of human companion; whereas pigs are supposed to be killed as food, excluded from legal and moral protection. Such irrational and unjust discriminations have become a socially accepted norm, we simply take it for granted.

Another concept with a historically factor explored by Agamben is the notion of "*homo sacer*". In the middle ages, *homo sacers* were those stripped of social/moral/legal significance. Agamben draws a conceptual



link between the idea of homo sacer and the modern day prisoners in concentration camps. As a political apparatus, homo sacer justifies the extermination of certain race. The same applies to the treatment of animals in agricultural industries. Pigs and chickens and cows are treated as homo sacers, muted and marked only by numbers, deprived of individual dignity and basic rights. Today, the number of food animals killed in the US alone is about ten billion land animals and eighteen billion marine animals per year. They are murdered not for our self defense but simply because they are considered as "zoe". In this respect, we are still entrenched in the ignorance of the middle ages. We have a long way to go before proclaiming the achievement of true enlightenment.

Agamben further introduces a new concept, "*The anthropological machine*", as his ontological critique. The machine has both metaphysical and political implications. Philosophically, it is a "*production of man through the opposition man/animal, human/inhuman*". Such a distinction (or misconception) has been imbedded in the Western thoughts from Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Kant and onward. In fact, the mentality of the enlightenment, and the mechanical view of animals since the 16th and 17th century, reflect the antagonism of man against Nature. It presupposed the superiority of humans based on a criterion of rationality. Classical metaphysics, in Agamben's view, is both a system of privileging man and a reductive treatment of beings. It has nothing to do with reason or ethics, rather, it operates through an instrumental rationality; a means to justify man's dominance.

Regarding the ontological demarcation of humans and animals, Agamben exposes the hidden agenda of Western ontology: "*Ontology, or first philosophy, is not an innocuous academic discipline, but in every sense the fundamental operation in which anthropogenesis, the becoming human of the living beings is realized.*" Operating through the anthropological machine, ontology has strategically severed the species' continuum of the homo sapiens. The isolation of the nonhuman element within the human is achieved by creating a category within itself. Agamben explains: "*Within man-separates man and animal, and to risk ourselves in this emptiness.*" The sense of emptiness and alienation differs from that of Karl Marx and

Existentialism. Here, alienation has to do with man's own suspension from a greater bio-community, and with increasing dependence on technology.

All animals come from a common ancestry; the only way for humans to close "the great gulf", internally and externally, is through the cultivation of a "relatedness" with fellow creatures. Each being seeks its own expression as self presencing. The birds are singing outside as I am composing this essay. They have returned to celebrate the arrival of spring. In the garden, the bees are humming from blossoms to blossoms. Yonder, green meadows bid animals to feast and play; and yet, we take it for granted that the so-called "food animals" have no such rights. For them, days are eternal nights and life is nothing but slow withering.

The animal rights' movement challenges us to rethink the question "What is it to be human?"

Note: Dr. Jane Goodall prefers to use she or he for animals instead of it.

Also, in Amy Blount Achor's *《Animal Rights》*, she write: "An animal is not an it; an animal is a he or she, an individual with his or her own distinct character." p.7

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