Notes for a Metamorphosis

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Abstract
A new critical perspective is proposed regarding the ways in which human life is based on anthropocentrism and speciesism. Criticism of human violence and dominion over other living beings is presented, starting from personal experience and moving into an analysis of the ideological subtratum of human culture, taking into consideration philosophy, science, and religion. An assessment of the antispeciesist position of primitive Christianity is briefly discussed.

Keywords
antispeciesism, Christianity, history of cultures, philosophy

The Metamorphosis in Reverse

Gregor Samsa woke up one morning to find himself transformed into an insect—a beetle, to be precise. Whatever the interpretation given to the story “The Metamorphosis” (1915) by Franz Kafka—whether it suggests the refusal to accept diversity of any sort, or is seen as a representation of Kafka’s own illness or a metaphor for the human condition itself (with its dark, subconscious, remote, bodily or animal side)—it centers on the animal. It is the animal that evokes horror and fear in most human beings, with its symbolic monstrosity that must be physically restrained, removed from view, attacked, put to death—as there can be no coexistence with humanity (the exception being companion animals, or those we exploit or use in supposedly scientific research), no comprehension or compassion on our part.

Knowingly or otherwise, willingly or not, the Kafkaesque metaphor must inevitably be based on the difference and the distance that humanity puts between itself and animality: humanity cannot accept (other) animals, but confines them, drives them away, or sacrifices them and puts them to death. In any case, the Kafkaesque metamorphosis marks the end of the parabola of an ancient mythopoetic theme that perceived the transformation between man
and animal, the metensomatosis and the metempsychosis as natural, insofar as it is based on the fundamental continuity of all life forms, of animality and humanity. This continuity permeated humanity’s thinking, its vision of Nature, at least until the Renaissance, even if in practice humanity broke that continuity by its violent way of life in the earliest of times and has systematically violated it since the Neolithic age through agriculture and animal breeding/farming. In antiquity—and as late as the Renaissance—even angels or divinities could be seen as animals (Giordano Bruno still spoke of the stars as “great animals”), and animality did not indicate a sphere of life that was inferior to humanity; rather it represented all that was animated, living, intelligent—even to a higher degree than humanity.

Kafka’s “Metamorphosis,” however, is the product of the dissolution of such continuity in the modern era, marked as it is by the abrupt Cartesian dichotomy that designates animals as machines that exist in the res extensa and places only human beings in the res cogitans. The dreamlike (visionary) experience of Chuang Tzu, recalled by Borges (1976) and described by Herbert Allen Giles in Chuang Tzu (1889), which narrates how “Chuang Tzu dreamt of being a butterfly and, upon awakening, did not know whether he had dreamt of being a butterfly or if he was, at that moment, a butterfly dreaming of being a man,” is no longer possible for modern humanity: the Kafkaesque metamorphosis has become disturbing, distressing, horrific, and frightening.

I wanted to start with a discussion of the Kafkaesque metamorphosis in order to make clearer, through comparison and contrast, the experience on which my reflections are based. One August night, almost thirty years ago, I had been following a rigorous line of thought to its inevitable conclusion and could no longer find peace. I lay half-awake, trapped in a nightmare (I hoped) from which there was no way out—a nightmare or reality that was much more frightening and horrific than Kafka’s metamorphosis. All I can hope is that, contrary to all evidence, I still have not woken up, because when I came to that August morning I found myself confronting a tremendous and miserable reality: it hadn’t been a nightmare. I looked in the mirror: I really was a man, a member of that monstrous species that is homo.

It was like becoming suddenly aware that, as human beings, my own parents were killers, my grandparents and my ancestors, too, as they had all participated, more or less knowingly, in the planned and ferocious violence perpetrated by humanity, who considered it to be normal and inevitable. Everything was false: false, the sentiments; false, the kindness and morals; false, the law and justice; false, progress and evolution; false, beauty and truth; false, likewise, love and poetry; false, music and art; false, science and religion: they were all words without meaning, without sense, mere conventions that
hid the ferocity. What was real was the human world’s gratuitous violence, the devastation of the Earth, which humanity had gutted of life; real were the atoms of those other living beings, torn to pieces or mangled by suffering. Humanity is the most ferocious and violent of animal species, eliminating, randomly torturing, exploiting, and imprisoning other living beings in its desire to possess the Earth.

Human Culture as a Hierarchy of Semiotic Systems and Ideology

I had read Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, had understood that the whole of culture, of human civilization, was nothing more than a great self-deception and that what lay behind it was merely an uncontrollable lust for power. Humanity has created great tales *ad hoc* to justify its violence, to justify the extermination of other animals, other living beings, and to justify its destructive violence toward Nature itself, to the point where it has buried the Earth beneath a layer of cement and other human products. Humanity has come up with mythical tales, philosophical, religious, and scientific accounts all designed to separate humanity in some way from Nature, fashioning a certain concept of Nature; stories that assert the superiority of humanity over all of Nature and the necessity of exploiting and destroying it; stories that assert the superiority of humanity over all living beings and the necessity of killing them for food or exterminating them as dangerous to humanity and its civilization.

Human culture, as a collection of theoretical and practical knowledge that is linked to knowing how to do things and having elements of “materiality,” can be considered a hierarchy of semiotic systems. Human culture is not just a simple superstructural reflection of one certain life form and its economic structures, but, in its very technical “materiality,” it fulfills a primary structural role in the organization of human life. The internal hierarchy into which it divides up is linked to the fact that certain semiotic systems, corresponding to certain disciplines, serve as the foundation and legitimation of the others and of the complex form into which human life has organized itself.

Religion, as a cultural practice and as theoretical knowledge in its highest theological expression, has long represented the semiotic system at the root of all others and the basis for organizing human life, both in the Western world and elsewhere. During various epochs, humanity has created great narratives wherein it has expressed awareness of its own place and role in the world, in such a way as to justify its own way of life. Expressly mythical and religious in origin, these great narratives have been transformed in the West into philosophical systems and, more recently, scientific ones.
Basing actions upon linguistically elaborated reflection is a specifically human characteristic; however, linguistic signs can close upon themselves in a circular and idealistic way that conceals and legitimates the violence and dominion that characterizes human organization. What emerges in this case is of an ideological character with negative implications. For a long time it was thought that these negative ideological aspects were exclusive to the great mythical religious narratives, but, as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1969) showed in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, even the great philosophical and scientific systems have carried out and continue to carry out an ideological function that justifies human violence and dominion. This is so not only and not so much because, as these two authors have said, the philosophical and scientific systems have their historical roots deeply set in myth or are converted into myth (giving both myth and religion an absolutely negative connotation), but above all because human culture has given itself a hierarchical structure that has not varied with time, in order to give ideological justification to its violence and dominion. This has been the case, irrespective of any variation in the semiotic system upon which the others were based, or whether this system was mythical-religious, philosophical, or scientific. When the mythical-religious system no longer sufficed for humanity to justify its domination and violence, a philosophical system was adopted, with its connotations of greater “rationality”; in its turn, it had to give way to humanity's need for a more mandatory justification, and so it was replaced by a scientific vision of the world that seemed to have all the blessings of irrefutability.

Studies of early Christianity have clearly shown that the negative ideological function is not inherent in semiotic visions inclusive of the sense of divinity, because the early movement has come to be widely understood as a revolutionary yet nonviolent organization of human life at all levels: economic, social, political, and religious. From Friedrich Engels (1894) to Karl Kautsky (1905) to Ernst Bloch (1968), this has been recognized in the Marxist context as well, even if Bloch, bound to a concept that identified the ideological function of religion in a simplistic way, had to speak of “atheism in Christianity.” The fact is that the cultural system against which this revolutionary creed reacted in an attempt to eliminate every form of domination and violence has absorbed within it the original Christianity in order to neutralize its subversive force. That original Christianity, paradoxically, became the religion imposed by the Roman Empire and was transformed into ideological doctrine. Marxism met with the same end. Although it contemplated the possibility of violent action, it was a revolutionary creed that was transformed into the ideology of the Soviet empire.
This neutralization of revolutionary creeds within ideological doctrines makes them appear today as great narratives that have run their course and should be abandoned, with a result that favors the ideology of dominion and violence, since there is apparently no alternative to the current violent organization of human life. Consequently, a science that is presented today as being neutral and irrefutable fulfills a fundamental and ideological role in the organization of human society. Hence, humanity’s self-understanding of its being-in-the-world now passes through the filter of science.

However, contrary to mythical knowledge, the ideological-philosophical system has never completely managed to be an alternative to religion but has instead played a supporting role. Just as Platonism was linked to a certain theology and ideological astral religion (on which the Aristotelian concept also depended), later philosophy served to help reduce Christianity to an ideological doctrine.

When the Earth was no longer considered the center of the universe by Copernicus; when the Earth, and even more so, human beings, came to be seen by Giordano Bruno as no more than an infinitesimal part of an infinite universe, a manifestation of the infinite power of God, then the reaction became stronger and the ideological tale harder and more drastic.

Thus, Western humanity constructed an ad hoc modern Christian theology, starting at least from the Protestant Reformation onward, by which, in its fight against the presumed residues of paganism in the religion of Nature, it mistakenly affirmed that in order to exalt the power of God, it was necessary to denigrate Nature, denying it a soul, denying it life. To exalt human beings, who were made in the image of God, it was necessary to sanction their uniqueness with regard to the rest of Creation; necessary to denigrate other animals and living beings, deny them a soul and any real life, any real suffering. This opened the way to the concept of Nature as a machine, of animals as machines, regarding which no ethical problem need be posed. This tale was called science—modern science—the foundation of which is the concept of Nature as mechanical. If there was an infinite universe above and beyond humanity, it was purely mechanical, mere inert and passive matter, lacking any real value. The technique for dominating Nature and the other living beings has become a part of science, of mechanical experimentation. Animals today are present in scientific laboratories, where they are cut up, tortured, fatally infected with terrible diseases, genetically modified, sacrificed on the altar of a presumed science, for the ostensible good of humanity.

With modern science strictly linked to this mechanistic concept of Nature (Giannetto, 2005), with its mathematical necessity and its technical experimentation, it is possible to sustain an ideology that justifies exploitation,
technical domination, and humanity's violence toward Nature and other living beings, which have been relegated to the status of mechanical objects and deemed unworthy of ethical consideration. That is not all; this mechanist conception of Nature is specified as a determinism regulated by the laws to which all bodies, including human, are subject. There is no longer any room for ethics or any possibility to alter a cosmic and physical order that humanity itself must also obey; in the end, all human actions and the economic, social, and political order in which they occur are univocally determined.

Modern science, born from that long process that occurred between the 16th and 18th centuries, which historians have called the “scientific revolution,” has completely changed our way of approaching the various problems that were previously posed within a philosophical context: an argument now needs to be demonstrated mathematically and experimentally (Giannetto, 2005). The concept of determinism has acquired a scientific configuration within modern physics, where motion trajectories or the temporal evolution of systems can be obtained through geometric constructions or the univocal solutions of differential equations (theorem of existence and uniqueness of solutions). Experimental proof (apart from the movement of planets observed in the solar system) was limited to the motions produced in the laboratory. It was the French scientist Pierre Simon de Laplace who, at the end of the 18th century, generalized regularity of motion into the notion of a cosmic determinism. However, even if this idea became dominant, from this point of view, it was merely an illicit extrapolation.

At the end of the 19th century, the work of Poincaré, which gave birth to the physics of chaos as a science of complexity, demonstrated that the determinism of classical mechanics and celestial mechanics was nothing more than an illusion. In the 1950s, the physicist Max Born spoke of determinism as a myth or fiction (Giannetto, 2005). At the start of the 20th century, indeed, quantum physics showed that indeterminism was fundamental at a microscopic atomic level and in the constituent elements of matter and light; at the deepest level at which things exist, determinism and mechanism had collapsed definitively. Fundamental physics was probabilistic; descriptions and predictions were uncertain and probabilistic—and not because of human ignorance or the limits of the instruments used, but because of Nature's constitutive indeterminacy (Giannetto, 2005).

Henceforth, physics was no longer capable of fulfilling an ideological function as the basis of all other semiotic systems; this role could now belong only to biology and, in particular, to genetics and neurobiology, which appeared to lend themselves to the incorporation of a new form of determinism. More than that, this new form of determinism, which was expressed neither mathematically
nor experimentally, was immune to attack both internally and externally. Darwin's theory of evolution, despite linking human beings to other living beings via a common origin and with the implication of an evolution that denied a hierarchy of values between species, was based on the idea of fighting for survival. In this way, it was and still is considered easy to legitimize the egotism and violence of human dominion as part of one of Nature's wider laws.

As the world has become increasingly human, and creation and the created have disappeared from view, the theological tale was no longer needed, and we have been left with only the scientific one. Religion has been disposed of; it is not needed now to justify humanity's violence and predatory ferocity but could even represent an obstacle to its greed for power and violence, which today goes by the name of “freedom of scientific research” and gives its servile assent to the genetic modification of nonhuman lives (and human ones, too) as need be.

The specific nature of Darwin's theory and the evolutionary mechanisms that it evoked have become a fundamental part of the justificatory account that humanity still recites to itself—namely, the struggle for life and the natural selection of the fittest. If life is just a struggle among every living being or species, then violence and extermination are legitimated. You are either predator or prey—thus humanity is justified in killing nonhuman beings in order to feed itself or guarantee its survival. Nature is not only a blind machine but also a violent one, and our violence is natural and necessary. We do not realize that accepting the theory of evolution does not necessarily imply accepting the mechanism of the struggle for life, where violence is an inescapable law of Nature. The evolution from single-cell to multicell organisms implies cooperation and symbiosis, notwithstanding the transparent ideological attempts to introduce egotism at a genetic level.

What about the feelings of solidarity and compassion that we feel for other living beings, not only humans, or that we even come across occasionally between cat and dog? Nothing, merely illusions. This is the view of another science, psychoanalysis, which humanity has invented for itself in order to close the scientific circle; everything is merely egotism, whether it be individual or of the species or in our genes, while solidarity is just a mask for that cruel survival instinct to which everything must be sacrificed.

Should we still be tempted to speak of Nature, of something above and beyond humanity, then anthropology and philosophy answer. What is Nature? Nothing more than a culturally determined concept that is ethnically relative, responds the anthropologist. Nothing more than a concept, constructed by human languages and practices, respond the philosopher and the epistemologist. Literature, which incorporates within it (in a seemingly neutral way),
elements of the modern scientific account, actually serves as the primary vehicle for spreading this ideology—The Great Account that legitimates the violence of humanity, the absolute, despotic, terroristic, and exterminating kingdom of human beings. This is the miserable and deceitful state of the world as promoted by our culture, our civilization, our philosophy and sciences: a history written by the human “winners,” the ideological mirror to our violence, our crimes against Nature, against animals and other living beings, crimes that know no ethical restraint or critical reflection.

The Human Condition

In “The Immortal,” the opening tale in his collection *El Aleph* (1952), Borges portrays a common identification of all humanity in the figure of Homer; it was a false consciousness, albeit alluring. Unfortunately, we are far from being the same poet but are rather the same assassin. We are all the same human being, Adam/Eve, who ate the forbidden fruit of animal life from the tree of the world, thereby becoming carnivores; we are all Cain, who killed the other animals, his living brothers and sisters, for his own ends.

Yet it is now clear that the process of “hominization,” the process that has specified our way of being in the world as the human species, as distinct from other possible evolutions, has practically coincided with the choice of a carnivorous and omnivorous diet; and we are not fully aware of the anthropological consequences of this choice. Maybe we began by eating carrion, animals who were already dead, before making the first dietary step toward considering other animals as potential food. According to a new interpretation that links the theory of biological evolution to development (known as “evo-devo”), even at the embryonic or first stage of development, this change of diet brought about a series of genetic rules or limitations that imply potential problems for those who, today, make the decision to be vegan (such as the need to integrate vitamin B₁₂). The carnivorous diet that was adopted in the development phase has imposed on us, as it has to a greater extent on other predatory animals, certain genetic restrictions that are hard to reverse and that represent a veritable biological original sin from which it is practically impossible to free ourselves.

But that is not all. Reducing other life forms to a new form of food to give us energy reserves for our vital metabolism, has not had and does not have merely dietary consequences but has completely changed our way of being-in-the-world. This devouring of other living beings, reduced to mere objects for our own consumption, has become the paradigm of our relationship with
“otherness” at all levels, not just with other species and Nature, but also within the species. All human activities are repressed Eros, as Freud maintained, as long as phagocytosis of living beings is a distortion of the vital sex fusion among cells; human activities in fact consist of a hypertrophy, an expansion of a distorted nutritional approach to other spheres of life: the relationship between humanity and Nature, between man and man, between man and woman, sexual and social relationships, and even various symbolic practices have all become various forms of that violent, real, or semiotic-ideal devouring, that violent and distorted form of nutrition.

As the perspicacious and erudite Robert Eisler (1951) has suggested, maybe human beings have imitated the other predatory animals—in particular the wolf, as revealed by myths and classical sources—but the human pupil has long overtaken the master wolf. Homo homini lupus is not merely a speciesist locution—formulated by Plautus (c. 254-184 BCE) and reinvoked by Hobbes in the 17th century—but the outcome of losing knowledge of the “hominization” process, which transformed a pacific, vegan, fruit-eater into a ferocious predator. The reason behind the habit of dressing up in the skins of other animals was not merely for the human to keep warm but to camouflage him/herself as a predator, like the wolf; there were even references to this animal on certain Nazi uniforms. Myths and legends of lycanthropy also have a real basis in this practice of violent and ferocious predatory camouflage, corresponding to the abandonment of original vegetarianism. Masochism and sadism, gang rape, and other forms of sexual violence can all be seen as alterations of sexuality, following that paradigm of the violent devouring of other beings, which has turned the pleasure associated with nutrition into a pleasure linked to predatory violence and the corresponding pain of another. That crazy and criminal pleasure that humanity finds in violence toward other men and women is tied to this distortion of pleasure associated with carnivorous nutrition. War and genocide can only be explained in terms of the introjection, within the human species (i.e., at an intraspecies level), of hunting and the extermination of other animals (at an interspecies level). Carnivorousness is the anthropological mutation that alone can explain the gratuitous criminality that led to Auschwitz.

The agricultural revolution and animal husbandry of the Neolithic period (Giannetto, 2005) were just a regulating of the original predatory violence and devouring, justified ideologically with the religion of the sacrificial cults, wherein the killing of other animals and feeding off them became ritual acts that were legitimized by those divinities who were called into complicity through the making of offerings. The return to being vegans or fruit-eaters would mean trying to restore the primitive human condition to how it was
before its global distortion due to carnivorousness, trying to free it of all that violence that has ensued and that has made our every act a violent and predatory one.

The Loss of the World

The consequence of the original violence on which human civilization is based is that we have lost our sense of the world, our sense of being-in-the-world, the sense of being of this world; we have lost our sense of Nature. Today, we increasingly live in a purely human world, especially in large cities. We live in houses made of cement; travel along tarmac roads in cars made of steel or tin and down rails in metallic trains; work in buildings made of metal, glass, and cement that crowd closer together and ever higher, lost within the gray smog of factories and industry. That is to say, we live in a world of artificial products, where everything seems to be made by humanity; a world of mechanical, electrical, thermal, and nuclear machines that are all made by human beings. Humanity has produced a world of human artifacts that has blotted out the world of Nature, that has overlaid it with a “second, false nature” that seems “naturally” to direct our violent choices in life. We have devoured the world, the whole of Nature, not just the other animals.

The other living beings, the plants and animals, are not world-poor in Heidegger’s (1983) sense, but they are world-poor in the sense of inhabiting a world transformed by humanity according to the principle of usage by and for it, in the sense of the violent expropriation of their natural world. The various chemical products that humanity uses to treat the trees and plants on cultivated land also prevent them from being used by other animals; we have deprived them of their living environment. The other living beings “have no world” in the sense of having possession or dominion but are only “of the world” in the existential sense of being-there. The nonpredators have not renounced their specific Dasein, their own being-in-the-world.

These days it is hard to see the sky free of smog or artificial lights; very few stars can be seen, and it is practically impossible to see the Milky Way, the galaxy to which our solar system belongs. Where the climate is temperate, in winter it is very hard to see either the sun or the moon. It is rare, too, to see large expanses of green, with trees and plants, except maybe rushing past train windows, in postcards, documentaries, or in children’s cartoons. It is also unusual to see animals, unless they are acquired as companion animals (like cats and dogs) or birds, whom humanity is unable to control and who still manage to find shelter in those few remaining trees in our cities. There are a myriad of living species, but we know so few of them directly. Even the animals on
whom human beings feed are known merely in the shape of the tins to which they are reduced, or in the form of the leather and fur that human beings wear. Likewise, we know the plants only for the fruit that we eat. The animals human beings eat are bred and selected by humanity and are regarded as human products, just like the ham or sausage meat to which humanity reduces them. Plants are cultivated and selected by humanity, even genetically modified now, and are grown only where, when, and how human beings desire and, therefore, are to be considered human products too.

Nature, in its living and wild state (the real *Natura naturans*, not “naturalized” by humanity), as found in uncultivated forests and plants, has no place in the “civilized” world, except in parks and oases that humanity has delimited, as in parts of Africa, Asia, or Latin America. Animals who are living relatively wild and free are only to be found in parks, oases, and other enclosures within human boundaries (Fiorani, 1993). Our world today is merely a human one, produced or modified by humanity for its own use and made in its own image. Humanity, which is not a particularly strong or powerful animal species (in fact, impotent before other, greater forces) has used the violent weapons of its “culture” to make itself master of the world, exploiting and destroying the Nature of the Earth, completely transforming it with means and methods that have become increasingly powerful and efficient since the scientific and industrial revolution began. Animals and plants just appear as dead things on a plate, after being imprisoned in livestock and breeding farms, ready to be killed in slaughterhouses (Rifkin, 1991; Singer, 1975). Animals have now almost completely disappeared, even from those places where they were once exploited for their hard labor, such as the fields, or were humiliated for entertainment, as in circuses.

However, it is not enough just to become vegan or fruit-eating in this world that has been almost completely devoured by human beings and their machines; as Tolstoy said, to become vegan is just the first step. Even the houses in which we live are monuments to our violence and dominion. It is necessary to sweep away the whole of human civilization, retire into Nature in order to recreate the foundations of an authentic life, free of violence.

**An Ethical Practice**

If the world is a human world, a human product, what ethical practice could humanity ever have toward its machine-objects? What ethical practice could humanity ever have toward living beings it has never known, never seen alive, with whom it has never had any kind of relationship, either cooperative or scornful? What ethical practice could it ever have toward beings who have
practically always been dead on its plate and, even before that, had been in its food reserves for who knows how long? What ethical practice could humanity ever have toward beings when it has never heard their terrible cries of pain, felt their agony when they are butchered, or really seen them dying? What ethical relation and with what world, since that in which we live is just a human product? Before we can even talk of an ethical practice, we must acknowledge that this is a human being who has renounced and negated its *Dasein* and is no longer even a real being-in-this-world. Human beings' very nature has effectively been removed, negated, and rendered impossible. It is hard to conceive of an ethical awareness within this human world.

On the other hand, even to suppose that an ethical practice must be drawn up for human beings, with values established by human beings, is to give it a human and anthropocentric perspective. The human being as a being-in-this-world cannot make itself the subject of ethics as a subjectivist discipline without denying its very nature. The only possibility is via an “ethical onto-logy” of the being of Nature (in the sense of a subjective genitive), which obliges us to recognize and respect all living beings as beings generated by the same Being (Giannetto, 2010). Human beings can only change their ethical practice by finding themselves again in Nature and abandoning themselves to the Grace that manifests itself in Nature’s activity. Yet, humanity cannot see beyond the end of its nose, beyond its own world, beyond that part of the world it has transformed in its own image. So, the more the terrestrial world has been transformed into a human world, the harder humanity has found it to see or perceive the divine *logos* in the *physis*, its epiphanic revelation. We live merely in the kingdom of humanity, where humanity, having destroyed Nature, has made a divinity of itself and, in so doing, has lost itself. For true life to be restored, the kingdom of humanity must come to an end.

**A New Language to Liberate Animals and Nature**

We have lost the sense of life and the evocative sense of words. Marcuse, in his *Essay on Liberation* (1969), pointed out how language has lost all meaning because it has become the language of dominion and oppression, the language of the victors and the oppressors—their most sophisticated instrument. According to the law and order established by human beings regarding the relationships to the other animals, violence is, first, that of the “ferocious beasts” against human beings from which they have to defend themselves. Second, they consider to be violence the actions of the animalists, vegans, and deep ecologists who protest against the oppression of animals and Nature, who call for the liberation of animals and Nature. Vegans and animal advocates
are the enemies of the human species, of the natural order established by God and the law of humanity. Love is a purely human value, just like justice and liberty.

It is now time, in the broadest Marcusian sense, to give meaning back to words, but in life; these should be living words that are made flesh, body, and life. The word God? Only if it is made flesh. If “God” made itself flesh in humanity, it could have made itself flesh in a donkey, said Ockham (Boenher, 1942). According to Matthew 20.16 (So the last shall be first, and the first last; KJV), there cannot be any hierarchy among beings. A Christian perspective must be antispeciesist! The same God was incarnated as a human being in that the human being is the last/worst being—i.e., the most violent, ferocious, wicked, and despicable being on the Earth—so human beings are the beings with the greatest need of redemption. If “God” was made flesh in a human being, it was merely to overturn the human logic of devouring and sacrificing other animals, to sacrifice Itself and partake of the suffering of the other beings who are offended and killed by humanity, to make Itself nonviolent food, namely to give Its life for those animals who are sold and sacrificed in the temple-market/den of thieves and assassins, to destroy that system. If “God” made Itself flesh in a human being, it was only to transform human being from a wolf into a lamb; not the wolf-man, but literally the Lamb that is “God.”

The violence that is devastating, absolute, terrible, and horrific is the human one. Order is the profound respect for every life, whether human or not, living in peace without a reciprocal devouring. “Love” is that vital cosmic force that animates every being and the entire universe, the compassion that unites all living beings, which not only causes no harm to other life, but actively strives to limit suffering. “Love” is not just something to say, a philosophical discourse, an intraspecific concept limited to two or more human beings, but a living, enjoying, and suffering of all lives and deaths—because, compressed between the earth and the sky, all life is one single Being.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was published in Italian under the title “Note per una metamorfosi” in Liberazioni (2010), 1(1), 9-23.

2. See Giannetto (2006) and references therein. The first historian to show the veganism of Jesus and primeval Christianity was the scholar Robert Eisler (1931). See also Vaclavik (1986). Christian veganism is to be related to proto-logical and eschatological perspectives: the Edenic veganism of the beginnings before the original sin must be restored at the end of time. The meaning of Jesus’s attack on the temple system was the end of animal sacrifices: Jesus was killed by Romans as a rebel against the Empire, but it was for this attack that Jesus was really condemned
by the high priest, and he really gave his life to save lambs and the other usually sacrificed living beings. The meaning of the Eucharist meal was the turning upside down of the logic of phagocitation by killing other living beings: one has not to eat (paschal) lamb or other living beings, but one has to eat vegan and to give one’s own life for the other living beings. Gospel fish stories were symbolic because the fish was a symbol for Jesus, the Messiah. The Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus to be realized here and now on the Earth is the destruction of the kingdom of humanity: following Isaiah 11:6-9, living beings can no longer eat each other (The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea; KJV) and a messianic universal peace among them has to be realized. However, this is not enough. Often a hierarchy of creation and creatures is attributed to Christian doctrine, but this is indeed only the result of the Western embedding of Christian thinking within Platonism: in this respect, medieval and modern Western Christianity are to be considered anthropocentric and speciesist. Platonism was based on the dualism soul/body and Heaven/Earth, but primitive Christianity was not. However, primitive Christianity was not a doctrine or a philosophy: it was a conscious ethical practice of reverence for life. Primitive Christianity was antispeciesist as long as the Jesus principle by which “the first ones will become the last ones” and vice versa referred to every feature of reality, turning upside down every kind of hierarchy. And the continuous call to the origins by many modern Christian groups was fundamental for the spread of vegetarianism and the rise of modern vegetarian societies in England and America.

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