

# Anthrozoology and Philosophical Practice

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**Abstract:** Parallel to the philosophical practice movement that was revived in the 80s, human-animal studies, sometimes known as anthrozoology or animal studies, is gaining more and more ground to this day in the Western academic world. In my paper I demonstrate today's dog keepers, as the walking philosophers of the 21st century, by outlining the turns of thought leading to the discipline of human-animal studies through Harriet Ritvo's 2007 animal turn. With the examination of the social role of XXI. century Western urban dog keeping in the light of the philosophical café movement, I argue for the idea that urban dog keeping is an alternative form of philosophical lifestyle, moreover, a significant example of philosophical practice. If we accept the thesis that the dog has always been present next to humans, then the relevant question is how it is present in humans' lives now, and if it is different than before, then what are the reasons behind this. Analyzing Ritvo's animal turn and the practical turn in philosophy, I draw conclusions regarding the reasons for the changes in the post human, arriving at the presentation of the idea of critical dog studies, in short dogism, which is the author's research area and invention.

**Key-words:** animal turn; human-animal studies; anthrozoology; practical turn in philosophy; applied philosophy; philosophical practice; critical dog studies; dogism;

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## **The Animal Turn**

The focus of the first part of the paper is on the significantly different way, a shift in thinking that characterizes the decision-making of the members of the 21st century Western society. There is a new attitude towards animals, a phenomenon that rewrites fundamental concepts that were previously understood exceptionally in the human context, such as family, friendship, grief, freedom or love. The change in thinking was described by the American historian Harriet Ritvo in 2007 as the animal turn (Ritvo 2007).

“There is no mystery to dogs when we open our hearts. They are mirrors of our humanity, and this book offers us some clarity and direction in these times when we are increasingly disconnected from the natural world and fellow creatures wild and domesticated whom we continue to harm. -Michael W. Fox” (Bekoff, 2023).

### *The Philosophical Evolution of Human-Animal Relationship in Western Thinking*

The concept of the animal has a unique role in Western thinking. Animals appear in numerous stories and proverbs as aids to thought when it comes to formulating the unknown to man, such as the legend of Romulus and Remus, human children fed by the wolf at the founding of Rome, or the saying: *homo homini lupus est*, man is a wolf to his fellow man, a telling already used in the Middle Ages but linked to the name of Thomas Hobbes in philosophy. The animal metaphors and allegories in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche also fit into this picture. To complete the list, it is worth mentioning Wittgenstein's famous phrase, when he explains philosophy with an animal metaphor: „What is your aim in philosophy? To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle” (Wittgenstein, 1998, 154).

The list shows that the concept of the animal has been a prominent feature in the work of major figures in the history of philosophy. As a kind of illustrative tool, animals made it easy to imagine, even embody, irrational things unknown to human cognition. This way of thinking is called anthropocentrism.

In anthropocentric thinking, man is the center, while the animal is the arc of the circle, with all points of the arc pointing towards man as radii of the arc. The animal provides countless counterpoints to frame the

concept of man, the human world, and the boundaries of human cognition. Immanuel Kant formulates this relation as follows: „Reason is not to be considered as an indefinitely extended plane, of the bounds of which we have only a general knowledge; it ought rather to be compared to a sphere, the radius of which may be found from the curvature of its surface-that is, the nature of a priori synthetically prepositions-and, consequently, its circumference and extent. Beyond the sphere of experience there are no objects which it can cognize; nay, even questions regarding such supposititious objects relate only to the subjective principles of a complete determination of the relations which exist between the understanding-conceptions which lie within this sphere" (Kant, 2019, 427). Anthropocentric thinking thus places man at the center of this sphere and calls the world something else, in this case „animal”, in relation to him.

### *The Animal Turns*

The first great animal turn in Western philosophy cuts a hole in this sphere when, in 1859, Darwin's *The Origin of Species* was published. The astonishing theory of its time, that man is an animal, still offers Western man such a powerful structure of thought that makes it difficult to argue against. Claiming that a human is not an animal requires constant explanation and leads to a new understanding of the human-animal relationship.

In the middle of the 20th century, at the height of scientific thought, the second animal turn replaced the human with the animal. Before, the animal, animal behavior, was seen in relation to the human world, while in the middle of the 20th century, the animal was studied independently of the human environment, in its own right. As one of the central questions of Western philosophy, "What is man?", was answered with the concept of individualism, so in the mid-20th century an individualistic vision of the animal emerged. As a consequence of this change, the animal began to be studied as a formally identical, but in other ways different being from man and anthropomorphic conclusions were drawn about its nature, intelligence, cognition, perception and consciousness. The work of Konrad Lorenz in ethology, Peter Singer in bioethics and Thomas Nagel in animal consciousness are particularly relevant to this topic.

The third animal turn, that was defined by Harriet Ritvo, aims to carve a new hole in the sphere that identifies the human with the limits of

his own cognition, and thus to transcend the anthropocentric worldview. Ritvo describes the nature of the change that has been taking place in the academic world around the concept of the animal in the last few decades. She argues that, in both the humanities and the social sciences, there has been an increase in the research on animals, and from this quantitative increase, a qualitative transformation emerged in the relationship between the researcher; the human, and the object of the research; the animal. This qualitative change entails a reinterpretation of the past and present role of the animal in our society, which in turn implies a revision of the concept of the human, the other actor in this relationship.

Sociologist Hanna Mamzer calls the animal turn of the 21st century a meta-turn. By meta-turn, she means that the turn is not only manifested in the method through which the world is being investigated, but above all, in the way we relate to the world we are investigating. She sees the reason for this change in the post-humanist pluralism that is emerging today. According to this idea, all interpretations of reality can be considered to be a relevant representation of reality. According to Mamzer, from this position, however, it follows that if the existence of a myriad of worlds is possible, -with each interpretation representing a distinct mental world- the mental subject who performs the interpretation is not in relation to the world in itself, but only to the representation of the world that is created by the mind that discovers and interprets it. Interpretation, as a representational possibility, thus gives legitimacy to the existence of innumerable individual worlds, but at the same time it deprives the subjects exploring the world of the basis of what they could call a common world independent of them (Mamzer, 2019. 8-9). Such phenomenon can be called mental individualism, which is an exclusive human characteristic, which, in the context of human-animal relationship, indicates an important border between human and animal, given that no such interpretations can be cognized in the animal world.

Margo DeMello envisages a new 'Copernican turn', where she explains human-animal studies as a way of seeing the world, in contrast to the worldview that is used in natural sciences. She compares human-animal studies to sociology, and uses the term sociological imagination, coined by C. Wright Mills. DeMello believes that human-animal studies is characterized by a similar vision, defined by its subject - human-animal relationships - but also, importantly, by the diverse ways in which we view

and relate to animals. Classification, according to human-animal studies, is much more dominant in human culture than biology itself. The physical, biological identity of animals is much less decisive of their status and our treatment of them than their symbolic and social determinants, she argues. The aim of human-animal studies is to understand animals in the human context. Its focus is on the animal in the human world, looking at the animal as a social construct. For „What is an animal outside of culture? - DeMello asks the rhetorical question. And from this question arises the philosophical inquiry: “What is culture without the animal?” (DeMello, 2012, 9)

### **The Practical Turn of Philosophy**

What do I mean by philosophy when I say that 21st century dog owners are the walking philosophers of our society? To answer this question, we need to look at the meaning of the word philosophy. I will present the practical meaning of philosophy through the distinctions outlined in László Nemes' keynote, highlighting the practical, dynamic, procession meaning of philosophy (Nemes, 2018).

#### *The Nature of Philosophy*

When we examine the nature of philosophy, we can take two significantly different paths: on the one hand, when we talk about philosophy, we can think of a certain knowledge, and on the other hand, we can think of a process of cognition that we do when we practice philosophy. The first approach presents a rather static picture, the second a dynamic process. This dual nature leads to different philosophical practices, where the role of the philosopher also varies depending on the philosophy he or she is dealing with. When the philosopher views philosophy as a kind of knowledge, he or she typically engages with questions of the philosophical tradition in an academic setting as a researcher among a limited circle of fellow scholars. He constructs and supports his own thinking with texts from the existing philosophical canon, and contrasts them with those of his colleagues who are also familiar with the same canon. Whereas, if the philosopher looks at philosophy as a practice, this ability manifests itself as a process that permeates his whole life. If he cultivates this philosophy in community, he

does not give lectures, but encourages conversations in which he initiates philosophical reflection, reflection through concepts. These two basic definitions reflect the contemporary understanding of the concept of philosophy. Nemes points out that philosophy is not limited to these areas: "Throughout its history, philosophy has appeared in a wide variety of places, forms and contexts, with alternating periods of decline and recovery, often only recognized afterwards. Philosophy is like a chameleon: it changes its appearance in response to circumstances. At times it adapts to religion or the arts, at others to politics, the social and natural sciences, else it becomes closer to literary criticism, or it becomes a life-coaching or even a therapeutic activity. Sometimes it is done alone, in community, sometimes in writing, other times orally" (183).

The manifestation of contemporary philosophy is thus mainly confined to the ivory tower of the university, the "academic ghetto", where theoretical philosophy is cultivated. It was in response to this marginalized role that philosophical practice began to emerge in the 1960s.

#### *The Triple Taxonomy of Practical Orientation*

Practical philosophy became increasingly popular in the 1960s, and one of the most spectacular examples of this phenomenon was the spread of the so-called applied philosophy. Various branches of philosophy began to be applied to smaller, more specific areas, such as ethics in relation to animals - giving rise to the discipline of animal ethics. Another form of the practical application of philosophy is to change the practice of everyday life. A good example to such philosophy is veganism. In both philosophical positions, theory makes sense in practice and in both cases, theory is clearly separated from practice. The third element of Nemes's taxonomy is the kind of practical philosophy where we do not deal with theories but we practice philosophy. „We don't apply philosophy, we do it" (186). The practice of philosophy is better understood from here. This latter philosophical stance is thus practical not in the sense of translating philosophical knowledge into practice beyond the academic world, making sense of philosophy through the application of philosophical knowledge, but in the sense of philosophy itself as a kind of dynamic process, a way of life that permeates everyday life, in which philosophy can be present in all areas of life, or, one might say, in which all areas of life can be seen as manifestations of philosophy, philosophical thought and reflection.

## **Critical Dog Studies. Dogism**

In his book *The Palliative Society*, the South Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han describes the man of the age as a lonely, mechanized person who, after exploiting the Earth, foreign cultures and other people, has now begun to exploit himself. He sees the reason for this thinking in the change of focus of attention, which has narrowed down to the individual. "The neo-liberal concept of happiness distracts us from the existing relations of domination insofar as it only forces us to introspect. It makes sure that each person is concerned with himself alone, with his own psyche, instead of critically questioning social relations. The suffering for which society should be responsible is privatized and psychologized" (Han, 2019. 22.) Comparing the trends described by Han with the qualitative and quantitative changes in dog ownership in contemporary society and the transformation of man's relationship with the dog leads to the question of whether man today is not seeking in dogs/ dog ownership the exercise of human values which he can no longer exercise in the human world described above, or whether the hitherto customary exercise of these values is meaningless. If philosophy can be seen as a way of life, it follows that at the root of any significant change in lifestyle, it is reasonable to assume that there may be philosophical reasons behind. It is a process of fundamental change in which not only the object of one's attention changes, for example, one changes one's job, but one changes oneself: "Philosophy was a method of spiritual progress which demanded a radical conversion and transformation of the individual's way of being. Thus, philosophy was a way of life, both in its exercise and effort to achieve wisdom, and in its goal, wisdom itself. For real wisdom does not merely cause us to know: it makes us "be" in a different way" (Hadot, 275.)

If we accept the thesis that the dog has always been present along the human, then the question is relevant: how it is now present in human's life, and if differently than before, what the reasons for this change might be. I call critical dog studies, dogism in short, the beliefs and actions that we build around our dogs and project into them. By projection of beliefs and actions I mean the process whereby our beliefs and hence our actions are determined by and gain meaning through feeding the animal's needs, i.e., the animal is the object of our fulfilment, and we experience the

satisfaction of our needs through the dog. This animal turn is so powerful that it radically changes the way we live our everyday lives, forcing us to change our way of living. My hypothesis is that in this process, a more natural, "wild" human is the result of the transformation, one who is present with minimal vocabulary but with a lot of touch and time spent together contemplating existence. It is a pre-cognitive state that preserves human needs through the dog and projects the post human. I call the concepts that take on new meanings in this transformation, such as family, companion, grief, freedom or love, furry concepts. The aim of developing the philosophy of critical dog studies is twofold: on the one hand, bringing the study of dog-owner behaviour into the realm of scientific discourse can contribute to more conscious actions, which, in the long term, may even contribute to improving the quality of human life, making it a source of our development. In contrast to Thomas Nagel's question "What is it like to be a bat?", the central question of my research does not ask about the scientific (intersubjective) interpretability of subjective experience, but about subjective human experience, i.e. I do not try to answer the question "Can a human be a dog?", but rather: What is it like to be a human who imagines himself to be a dog? Such a person, for example, walks aimlessly in nature every day, regularly touches a living body with his hands, uses his speech to express emotions next to information, etc. All this makes a significant difference to the way he perceives the world compared to a person whose life lacks all this. My further question is: what are the implications of this way of thinking and living for both human and dog?

### **Conclusion**

As the place of the dog in our society has changed, so has the appearance of philosophy in our everyday lives. Between 2010 and 2020, I worked in an NGO to integrate the value of the unity that is created by man and dog in 21st century Hungarian society, reshaping the inherited anthropocentric, individual-centered worldview that attributes culture solely to man. In the field of human-animal studies, it is precisely this freedom and depth that results from the study of this relationship: in the 21st century, man is rethinking his relationships, and his companion in this process is a non-human animal, the dog. In the first part of my paper, I emphasized the importance of the concept "animal" in the development of



Western thinking. “Animal” has been used as a companion to the understanding of the concept of human. I called different animal turns the changes, where the relationship of the two concept significantly changed, for example from the opposite to the antecedent in Darwin’s theory. The current animal turn is described in my paper by the approaches of three scientists, Harriet Ritvo, American historian, Hanna Mamzer, Polish sociologist and Margo DeMello, American anthrozoologist. Their description of the current animal turn defines a significant change in the thinking of the modern man, which is characterized by an alteration in quality (Ritvo), method (Mamzer) and focus (DeMello) at the same time.

In the second part of the essay, I was exploring the nature of philosophy. The question for me was if philosophy can be interpreted something outside the mental world and concluded from practice. The taxonomy of the practical turn in philosophy (Nemes), highlights the dynamic understanding of philosophy that is where philosophical practice can be understood. This interpretation of philosophy gives an opportunity to look at philosophy as a lifestyle and understand that behind every change in lifestyle there must be philosophical reasons.

All in all, the investigation of the animal turn and the practical turn in philosophy creates a foundation to my hypothesis, which is that the interpretation of dog ownership in the 21st century as the fusion of the animal turn and the practical turn of philosophy is an adequate philosophical stance.

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