Animal Ethics and Sensibility in Levinas

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Abstract: Does Emmanuel Levinas's ethics give us reason to argue that the non-human animal places an ethical demand upon the human subject? I make two central claims: first, previous arguments that the animal calls us to responsibility in the Levinasian sense have not successfully established this conclusion. In particular, arguments emphasizing the ethical significance of animal suffering miss the point of Levinas's ethics, insofar as this makes suffering a phenomenal criterion, or cause, of ethical considerability. Second, I argue that there *is* an alternative way to argue that the human is ethically responsible to the animal other that better aligns with Levinas's philosophy. I begin by analyzing the relation between sensibility and responsibility in *Otherwise than Being*. I defend an interpretation that argues that sensibility and responsibility are *not* identical terms: sensibility is exposure to alterity, but non-human sensibility in itself is not sufficient to produce an ethical call that affects the human subject. But the sensible human subject is a subject constitutively open to being-affected by the other—including, I argue, the animal other. I conclude by describing the encounter between the human subject and the animal by way of two themes that are central to Levinas's ethics: singularization and teaching. By asking how the animal can call us into question and asking how (and what) the animal teaches us, we are able to productively challenge Levinas's own anthropocentrism and establish an animal ethics from within his philosophy that is both faithful to the central themes of his ethics and critical of his anthropocentric biases.

"I am 'in myself' through the others."[1]

"An animal looks at me. What should I think of this sentence?"[2]

Emmanuel Levinas's ethics is a philosophical description and interpretation of ethical life. For Levinas, ethical responsibility is more fundamental than the institution of particular moral codes or norms; responsibility is first experienced in the face-to-face relation, which is the concrete event where the other person makes a certain appeal to which I necessarily respond, and thus calls me to responsibility. Responsibility is not a quality that the individual possesses. Instead, responsibility is something that the other person demands of you, something that you must assume in response to the other person's appeal. This unique conception of ethics, and of responsibility, has become the subject of both inspiration and controversy amongst environmental philosophers. Insofar as certain philosophers seek to argue that some animals possess moral status, and therefore ought to be protected, respected, or even not eaten by humans, one wonders if Levinas could give us a sense of how we ought to treat animals. The central question is whether the animal can compel the human subject to responsibility. Levinas gives us a fascinating account of the experience of human ethical life. But what, if anything, can Levinas tell us about our responsibility toward the other-than-human?

Insofar as Levinas's ethical relation prioritizes the radical alterity of the other person, one might consider the non-human animal as perhaps an even more significant form of otherness that compels the human to responsibility. Derrida entertains this line of questioning, asking "if I am responsible for the other … isn't the animal more other still, more radically other, if I may put it in that way, than the other in whom I recognize" my brother and my neighbor? (2008, 107). Yet by all appearances, Levinas was largely disinterested in the question of the animal, primarily understanding his ethical philosophy as an ethics of the *human* face-to-face relation. On rare

occasions that Levinas does speak of the animal, he remains perplexingly ambivalent ("I don't know if a snake has a face"), or else conceptualizes the ethical significance of the animal as secondary to, and derivative of, the human: "the phenomenon of the face is not in its purest form in the dog" (Levinas cited in Wright et al., 1988, 169-171). Levinas's own statements about animality seem to resist or even preclude a non-anthropocentric reading of his philosophy.

Despite the humanism and anthropocentrism that permeates Levinas's project, this paper is motivated by the belief that it is not only *possible*, but also philosophically worthwhile, to understand the human subject's responsibility to the animal other within Levinas's framework. This argument will not be an extension of Levinas's philosophy in which the human face-to-face relation is transferred onto the animal. I will instead develop an interpretation that turns Levinas's anthropocentrism back on itself, identifying a particular sense in which we *must* take the possibility of other-than-human ethics seriously within Levinas's own philosophy. A central purpose of this paper is to show how Levinas's conception of subjectivity in *Otherwise than Being* sits uneasily against his own anthropocentrism, and thus makes a certain sort of animal ethics possible within his own work.

I will proceed in three parts. First, I offer some background on Levinas's conception of ethics and the face-to-face relation, before outlining and critically assessing two previous attempts to understand Levinas's ethics as an animal ethics. In the second section, I turn toward themes of embodiment, sensibility and subjectivity in *Otherwise than Being* in order to show how sensible affectivity is constitutive of subjectivity. The subject *becomes-subject* only in response to the other; the subject is constitutively vulnerable, or receptive, to being affected by what is other than it. In the third section, I bring this essential interconnection of sensibility, subjectivity and ethics to bear upon the question of the human subject's relation to the animal. I

ultimately mobilize the uncertainty inherent to Levinas's ethics to find two 'openings' for an animal ethics, in Levinas's concepts of singularization and teaching.

I will make two preliminary clarifications before we begin. First, what do I mean by animal? My use of this word is indebted to Jacques Derrida, who asks about the "edges of [the] limit" between human and animal (2008, 31). He makes three points which we must keep in mind. First, the rupture between animal and human is not "unilinear and indivisible"; it is not a line that one can neatly establish (p. 31). Second, "the multiple and heterogeneous border of this abyssal rupture has a history", which Derrida tentatively traces back to Descartes' argument that the human is a rational animal—a being who has being-animal, *along with* other modes of being *beyond* the animal, i.e., rationality, language, and ethics, for example (31). Third, Derrida reminds us that the word 'animal', though ostensibly indicating a singular category of being, actually conceals the multiplicity of non-human life: as Derrida explains, "rather than 'The Animal', or 'Animal Life', there is already a heterogeneous multiplicity of the living ... a multiplicity of organizations of relations between living and dead" (31). The human presumption to speak of *all animals* in their generality is a form of violence that he pushes against; furthermore, he says that the philosopher who speaks of "'The Animal' in the singular and without further ado ... utters an *asinanity* [bêtise]" (31). The animal therefore designates everything, and in the universality of this designation, fails to designate *anyone*; 'The Animal', as a word and concept, fails to grasp the specificity of animal life. When I use this word in this paper, I want to emphasize its ambiguity, and thus potentiality—the animal *could be any animal*. The animal, surely, is also you or me. For the purposes of argumentative clarity, I feel compelled to refer to the general singular 'animal' throughout, but I wish to accentuate that this singular word necessarily refers to a rich variety of lives.

Second, I will on several occasions summarize my argument as an attempt to identify an 'animal ethics' within Levinas's work. With this, I mean that I am inquiring about a potential way to argue that the human is responsible to the animal (to whoever or whatever this latter word refers). The question of whether non-human animals are ethical subjects themselves, that is, whether animals have within-species ethics, or whether animals exist ethically, is beyond the scope of this paper. My argument begins from the presupposition that the human philosopher need not establish the latter in order to defend the former; that is, we do not need to find an innate sense of ethical meaning within non-human life in order to argue that the animal makes an appeal to us, and that the human is therefore responsible to the animal. We can begin from how the human subject encounters the animal, instead of relying upon inferences into the sense of animal subjectivity; in fact, the asymmetry of Levinas's ethics is particularly well-suited for this argument. Our ethical responsibility to animals will not be justified with recourse to the cognitive or behavioral capacities of particular animal species: as I will expand upon below, this is essential to a faithful Levinasian argument on this topic.

1. Can Levinas's Ethical Face be an Animal Face?

The concept of the face of the other is central to both Levinas's ethical philosophy as a whole, as well as scholarly work that engages with the significance of Levinasian animality. Consequently, I will begin by asking what exactly the face *is* according to Levinas. As I will demonstrate, this is a particularly vexed question. Consider the following description of the face in *Totality and Infinity*: "The face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed. It is neither seen nor touched—for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the I envelops the alterity of the object, which becomes precisely a

content" (1969, 194). As something that cannot be fully comprehended in sight nor through touch, Levinas argues that the face is therefore something *more* than its corporeal form. But what does it mean for the face to be "present in its refusal to be contained" (194)?

To best understand previous attempts to make Levinas's ethics an animal ethics, I first establish an interpretation of the face of the other that emphasizes both its transcendence *and* its necessary materiality. I then outline two different interpretations of the animal face and demonstrate why these arguments do not succeed in offering an animal ethics that is faithful to Levinas's philosophy.

a) Presence and transcendence in the face of the other

In *Totality and Infinity*, the face of the other is the fundamental relation to the other person. Yet this relation is not a conceptual comprehension of the other person, or a comparison between self and other, because the other person is not a "mere analogue" of myself (Wild, 1969, 13). As I emphasized above, we do not establish a relation with the face primarily through our corporeal senses. The face-to-face is what Levinas calls an "irreducible relation": the face expresses the radical alterity of the other person, insofar as the other is revealed to the self as a positionality that the self cannot constitute nor occupy (1969, 79). The epiphany of the face is the emergence of a "depth" within sensibility that makes an ethical demand of me (198).

Consider a scenario where I set my empty coffee cup on a park bench, instead of in a garbage can, and earn a judgmental glare from a passerby. The stranger's face is arranged in a particular way—eyebrows furrowed, scowling—but the physical features of their face are not where the ethical significance of this moment lies. The other calls this particular action of mine into question; they silently demand, 'why did you do that?' and 'should you have done that?'

Steven Crowell emphasizes two particularly important concepts in Levinas's ethics: normativity and alterity. Levinas intertwines these two themes, arguing that normativity only emerges from a position of exteriority to the self. Perhaps I thought I had my own reasons—supposedly good reasons! —for setting my cup down where I did. Yet this stranger's judgment, this look that says 'I see your action differently than you do', is capable of ripping through my so-called private justifications, precisely by virtue of the other being *not-me*, or, as Levinas explains, only insofar they "situated in height with respect to [me]" (1969, 67). The emergence of the "depth" within sensibility that Levinas speaks of is the emergence of a normative standard to which the subject is held accountable (p. 198; Crowell, 2012, p. 578). This experience of being-held-accountable is Levinas's conception of responsibility, and ethical life as such.

In this scenario, the stranger who calls my actions into question is surely *present*, in the phenomenological sense: they are perceptible to me and share in my immediate experience of our environing world. What, therefore, is "present in its refusal to be contained" in this moment? (1969, 194) Diane Perpich, whose reading of Levinas I will return to, says that "the human being ... can be known and represented as a thing, but our relation to the other is not exhausted by the structure of comprehension or the constative dimension of language" (2008, 75). It is most accurate to think of the face-to-face, alterity, and ethics as such an as *event,* rather than a characteristic. The ethical relation, for Levinas, is a singular event that occurs between two embodied subjects where the meaningfulness of the relation transcends the relation itself—it cannot be fully thematized, meaning put into thought or language.

The enigmatic concept of the face reveals the tension between presence and transcendence that is found throughout Levinas's work. It would be an interpretive mistake to assume that Levinas's emphasis on transcendence means that ethics somehow plays out in a sphere beyond

day-to-day existence. The other is a real person, who might stand before me, physically 'face-to-face' as well as ethically so—crucially, the face of the other is not entirely other-worldly, but rather retains the capacity to signify beyond being *from within being*. Levinas's own language, especially in *Totality and Infinity* and in his earlier works, often does not make this clear [e.g., "the Other remains infinitely transcendent; infinitely foreign" (1969, 194)]. Bernhard Waldenfels emphasizes that the other must *exist*, and manifest in being, in order to express in a way that transcends their own manifestation, arguing that "what deviates from certain orders and exceeds them will turn to nothing unless supported by something which it exceeds and deviates from" (2004, 64). The face ambiguously transcends its own materiality as it expresses an irreducible ethical depth, necessarily conveying the epiphany of moral responsibility from within a finite body that is born, ages, and will ultimately die.

We must therefore resist two overly simplistic readings of Levinas, one which would interpret the face primarily as merely an assemblage of phenomenal characteristics—ear, nose, mouth, skin, even body. Yet we also cannot assert that the face is wholly transcendent, to the point of non-phenomenality: the face is still *of this world*, even as it signifies beyond or in excess of being. According to Levinas, "the face speaks", and this expressivity is a revelation that reveals somebody: a singular person that calls the self-sufficiency of the ego into question (1969, 66). The face is the rupture of comprehension, which exposes the ego to a demand that cannot be fully foreseen or reciprocated. And yet, *most radically*, it is this ethical interruption that is co-constitutive of subjectivity. The demand of the other functions simultaneously as a call to responsibility and the instantiation of an intersubjective milieu; I make sense to myself as 'me' only insofar as the other calls me to responsibility as 'you'.

b) Animal Faces and Animal Suffering

The practice of 'doing environmental philosophy' with or alongside Levinas is neither uncommon nor relatively recent in the literature (see Lingis, 1969, 1988; Sallis, 1988). Especially since the publication of the edited collection *Facing Nature*: *Levinas and Environmental Thought* (2012), the question of whether we can ascertain our determinate responsibilities to animals has been a focus for both Levinas scholars and environmental philosophers more generally. Much of this work occurs through the concept of the face of the other as the animal face: insofar as animals have faces, in the common sense, it is natural to think that one might find inroads to a potential interpretation of the appeal of the animal face as an ethical demand.

Peter Atterton and Christian Diehm both offer an interpretation of the animal face in Levinas. Though they establish and defend this argument in different ways, they both assert that animal suffering can justify the presence of an ethical relation in Levinas's sense: the animal who suffers calls to the human subject in their suffering, and this is an ethical call in Levinas's sense, a demand to which the subject must attend. I will first reconstruct their arguments. Then I make two claims. First, Atterton and Diehm's arguments for a non-anthropocentric ethics of embodiment are insufficient because both arguments mis-characterize the concept of the face and the nature of the ethical demand. Second, a more suitable alternative can be defended with reference to Levinas's conception of (human) subjectivity as ethical sensibility. This is what I will offer in the second and third parts of this paper.

Peter Atterton's argument for the ethical considerability of animals (2011, 2015) is as follows: if 1), interiority, or inner life, is "the most obviously morally relevant characteristic the other possesses" (2011, 624), if 2), we can justifiably say that the fact some animals can suffer is sufficient proof of their inner life, and if 3), "The capacity to express that suffering is what qualifies a being as having a face", (647) then we are *not* justified in restricting Levinas's conception of

ethical considerability to humans. What Atterton means by this is that some non-human creatures make an ethical demand upon humans because they have a face in the Levinasian sense.

Christian Diehm similarly argues that non-human beings can make ethical demands upon humans, but he relies on a more explicit association between Levinas's concept of the face and its embodied manifestation (2000). Diehm says that if 1), "when Levinas says 'face' what he really means is 'body'" (54), or put otherwise, "the claim of the face issues from the body of the other" (57), and if 2), the embodied expression of suffering, such as the expression of weakness, vulnerability, or exposure to harm, is what is revealed in the face and calls the human to responsibility, then non-human creatures, insofar as they are embodied and express "frailty, vulnerability, [and] weakness", have a face and express an ethical demand upon us (54).

Atterton and Diehm presume to defend their interpretation of embodied suffering *as* ethical expression by relying upon Levinas's claim that the ethical demand is not *only* a linguistic act: ethical expression is prior to, or in excess of, the linguistic sign, as Levinas repeats throughout much of his work (1969, 206; 2008, 37). Atterton refers to Levinas's talk of the expressivity of the eyes as an ethical demand and speaks of the eyes of the suffering animal (2011, 638). Diehm similarly identifies passages where Levinas figures the face *as* body, such as when he says that "the whole body—a hand or curve of the shoulder—can express as the face" (1969, 262). Using this textual evidence, both authors argue that the corporeal suffering of animals expresses 'as a face', meaning that the suffering animal makes an ethical claim upon the human and demands that we respond to the animal's pain. The ethical demand is not the content of the demand itself; it is instead the event where the subject is called to respond to the demand—Atterton and Diehm are correct to make this distinction. Yet it does not directly follow

that animals who are incapable of linguistic expression (in the human sense), but capable of expressing their suffering to humans, are making an ethical demand in a Levinasian way.

Diehm and Atterton's arguments fail because Levinas does not argue that we are responsible to the other person *because* we can see them suffer. Instead, responsibility is founded upon the way that the alterity of the other person calls the singularity of my own worldview into question. Put another way, the phenomenal evidence of animal suffering cannot be the cause of responsibility for the hopeful Levinasian environmentalist. Rightfully understood, it is not our perception of suffering that demands response. Instead, we are compelled to respond to the very incomparability of the other, the way in which the epiphany of the other is an expressivity that cannot be adequately thematized within being. The nature of the ethical relation is what Levinas describes as "the radical impossibility of seeing oneself from the outside and of speaking in the same sense of oneself and of the other, and consequently the impossibility of totalization" (1969, 53). But it is not only this singularity that is at play. Ethics is both the singular limitation of the subject's freedom, *and* a relation that allows for the emergence of a shared, and meaningful, world. The other, within what Levinas describes as an "outstretched field of questions and answers", confirms that we see the same things, share experiences, stand upon common soil. In this way, the other *gives* me access to a sense of rationality, truth, and justice (96). Levinas, quite evocatively, speaks of how objectivity is "posited in a discourse, in a *conversation* [entre-tien] which *proposes* a world" (96). The other proposes a world; the other gives me a shared world. Steven Crowell relates this notion of being given a world to intentionality, explaining that "the experience of the face will not be *grounded* in perception but will *ground* perception's intentional content" (2012, 567). The fact that humans can evidently *see* that animals experience

suffering is not enough to satisfy these conditions, which is why placing emphasis on animal suffering in this way is predicated upon a misunderstanding of Levinas's ethics.

I contend that a better Levinasian animal ethics can be established not by focusing on the significance of animal suffering itself, but rather on the human subject's capacity to *respond* to said animal and the sense of said response—regardless of the particularities of how this animal expresses itself, the conceptual key to illuminating our relationship with animal others is Levinas's structure of the sensible *human* body. This might seem paradoxical at first: you might wonder, how can we shed light upon the sense of our responsibility to animal others by making recourse to the human body? Yet in the true phenomenological sense—and recalling that even in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas claimed to be writing "in the spirit of Husserlian philosophy" (2016, 183), we must begin by attending carefully to the particular meaning of first-person (human) experience. Sensibility represents the subject's constitutive openness to alterity—and the indeterminacy of the subject's sensible being is the catalyst for a new way of approaching the human relation to non-human beings.

2. Levinasian Sensibility in *Otherwise than Being*

In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas says that "sensibility is exposedness to the other" (75). This exposure is both ethical and corporeal, simultaneously a matter of material contact and interpersonal responsibility. I contend that this peculiar conception of sensibility is indispensable to a reading of Levinas's ethics as an animal ethics. Sensibility is the central theme through which Levinas brings the transcendence of ethics to bear upon the phenomenality of the situated body, showing how material existence is fundamentally ethical in nature. The living body is not solipsistically enclosed, ignorant to the external world and its other inhabitants; the living body,

in its very material openness to the external world, exists in perpetual response to the demands, needs, and contestations of other creatures. By elucidating Levinas's conception of sensibility, I will establish the interpretive basis to argue that Levinas's human subject, as sensible 'life-for-another', is a subject so irreducibly exposed to and constituted by alterity that we cannot entirely foreclose the possibility of human sensibility as 'life-for-the-non-human-other'. Such an argument first requires a comprehensive understanding of Levinas's sensibility, and I will undertake this work in this section.

Levinas's articulation of sensibility as an ethical structure in *Otherwise than Being* must be understood within the context of his critical engagement with Edmund Husserl. Husserl's concept of passive synthesis and the *Ur-impression*, or primal impression, is of specific importance to Levinas's argument. Levinas's relation to Husserlian phenomenology is complex, and his ethics as a whole is neither a simple rejection nor uncritical adoption of Husserl's work (see Bernet, 2004). John Drabinski says that "Husserl's phenomenology is *the* problem of Levinas's philosophical work ... [Levinas's philosophy] is both parasitic on and independent of Husserl, drawing vitally from his findings while at the same time standing in a wholly other horizon" (2001, 9). Drabinski states that it is erroneous to argue, as some have done, that Levinas "points us *beyond* phenomenology" (9). This is made evident when Levinas calls his work in *Otherwise than Being* "faithful to intentional analysis", insofar as he strives to locate a "horizon unrecognized, forgotten or displaced in the exhibition of an object" (2016, 183). Drabinski takes up this notion of forgotten horizons and shows how Levinas finds an ethical sense at the origin of the sensible constitution of the human subject. In this section I will work to determine what sensibility *is*, for Levinas, why sensibility is fundamentally ethical, and ultimately why this notion of sensibility is central to Levinas's structure of human subjectivity. I will then turn to the

topic of recuperability and sensibility, previously emphasized by Drabinski, to illuminate the radical extent to which Levinas insists that the subject is not the origin or source of their own subjectivity or responsibility.

a) Sensibility between *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*

Sensibility in *Otherwise than Being* is best understood by contrast with sensibility in *Totality and Infinity*. Alphonso Lingis, describing the innovations of *Otherwise than Being* with respect to Levinas's earlier work, explains that *Otherwise than Being* "relates sensibility with responsibility in an entirely new way" (1978, xxii). In *Totality and Infinity*, the demand of the other is interruptive of the ego's enjoyment, which Levinas describes as a "an ultimate relation with the substantial plenitude of being, with its materiality" (1969, 133). Sensibility is "the affectivity wherein the egoism of the I pulsates" (135), a way of being that is entirely self-sufficient and content in this finitude: "In enjoyment I am absolutely for myself" (134). But in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas seeks to emphasize that sensibility itself—the very affectivity, or openness, of the ego—is always already an exposure to alterity (Lingis, xxiv). In *Totality and Infinity*, sensible enjoyment is "egoist without reference to the Other", and even "entirely deaf to the Other, outside of all communication and all refusal to communicate" (1969, 134). Likewise, Levinas's description of ethics as a welcoming implies that the interruption of the other is an interruption that the ego accepts (for e.g., 171, 178). But in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas rejects this earlier conception of ethics: "no welcome is equal to the measure I have of a neighbor ... to take hold of oneself for a present of welcome is already to take one's distance, and miss the neighbor" (2016, 88). Levinas worries that his previous articulation of the face-to-face relation, as ethical exteriority that interrupts the ego's sensible enjoyment, fails to establish ethics as a sufficiently radical break with being and presence. The ego is present to itself in enjoyment; the

ego 'takes hold of oneself' in the welcome of the other. Whereas *Totality and Infinity* describes sensibility as the egoist enjoyment of material existence, "deaf" to ethics, Levinas's new articulation of sensibility in *Otherwise than Being* insists that sensibility itself is ethical: as Lingis explains, the exposure to the other in ethics is the "original form of openness" from which other kinds of affectivity—i.e., perception and sensation—emerge (xxii).

There is a decided physical intensity, or even a kind of gruesomeness, to Levinas's philosophy of sensibility in *Otherwise than Being*. He insists that "the corporeality of one's own body signifies, as sensibility itself, a knot or denouement of being" (2016, 77), and therefore it would be a mistake to cast aside his descriptions of flesh, blood, skin, lungs, and embodied suffering as mere poetic flairs. Speaking of responsibility, Levinas argues that "in this plot I am bound to others before being tied to my own body" (2016, 76). We are somehow held responsible to the other before we have the chance to take hold of ourselves; Levinas now insists, contra his earlier work, that there is no possibility of independent egoism without reference to the other—the interruption of the other has always already occurred. The key to Levinas's defense of this radicalization of ethical exigency into the very *body* of the subject lies in Levinas's transformative adaption of Husserl's passive synthesis. To understand ethics in sensibility, or *as* sensibility, Levinas must reckon with the temporality of lived experience and intersubjectivity in new ways.

b) Subjectivity and temporality in *Otherwise than Being*

Levinas is a harsh critic of Husserl throughout his career, rejecting central aspects of the Husserlian program. His 1930 dissertation, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, calls the primacy of theory in Husserl's phenomenology into question. Phenomenological reflection, as the method through which the subject "seiz[es] upon the already there in the turn of

consciousness to itself", allows the subject to grasp the particular sense of the surrounding world as they intend it (Drabinski, 34). But Levinas' criticism of theoretical abstraction and focus on what he calls concrete life or pre-reflective life is sustained throughout his career: as early as *Theory of Intuition*, Levinas insists that "the whole philosophical value of reflection consists in allowing us to grasp our life, and the world in our life, such as they are prior to reflection" (Husserl 1970, 136). If this seems like a potentially untenable paradox—a reflective practice that affords a pre-reflective grasp—then we can understand the subsequent development of Levinas's ethical philosophy as the intensification and radicalization of this methodological paradox. Drabinski argues that even in 1930, Levinas seeks a "sense signified otherwise than theory. This signification arises from the nonrepresentational stratum of the concrete" (2001, 35). This novel way of signifying sense is developed throughout Levinas's oeuvre, as Drabinski demonstrates, but is articulated most boldly in *Otherwise than Being*.

It is important to note that Levinas's conception of ethical sensibility is a criticism of Husserl that functions, in part, by way of the transformation of Husserl's own work. On one level, Levinas is critical of the dominant sense-constituting power of Husserl's transcendental ego. Consciousness is intentional, for Husserl, meaning that it necessarily intends toward an object of consciousness: first-person consciousness is "consciousness of something", and it is by intended something *as* something that we grasp the sense of an object (Husserl 2014, 172). In *Ideas I,* Husserl says that "intentional experience precisely comes about out of the *sensual [layer] that has nothing of intentionality in itself* (165). Responding to this seeming indifference to the inherent *sense* of sensation and affection, beyond or prior to the intentional ego, Levinas laments that "sensation, a 'primary content' in the *Logical Investigations,* or a *hyle* in the *Ideas*, participates in the meaningful only inasmuch as it is *animated* by intentionality" (Levinas 2016,

65). Consequently, he asserts that he "renounces intentionality as a guiding thread toward the eidos of the psyche", and he instead turns to analyze the "prenatural signification" of the body (68).

According to Levinas there is a type of sense affection that precedes and underlies intentionality, and the fact of sensible receptivity is *not* merely a passive material layer that sustains and enables representational thought. Yet just as centrally, Levinas insists that it is not the subject's *own* corporeal receptivity that constitutes sense; his critical move contra Husserl is not a straightforward insistence upon the pre-intentional significance of affective life. Levinas pushes further and argues that the subject is not the source of this ethical sense. The pre-intentional sense in question comes from without, from beyond the subject; this sense is not 'self-constituting' because it is an appeal from the other. But Levinas actually undertakes this rejection of Husserl *with* Husserl's notion of passive synthesis.

A few remarks about Husserlian time-consciousness are warranted here. For Husserl, experience unfolds within a temporal field where 'consciousness of …' passes over into 'consciousness of what has just been', while simultaneously also anticipating 'consciousness of what will be' (1999, 191). The past and the future condition the experience of the present moment, as Husserl demonstrates with his example of the different tones in a melody: the present tone relates to past tones and future anticipated tones, and the different tones of a melody are synthesized by consciousness and given a unified sense that encompasses both the past and the future (187). Each "now-point", or primal impression, is held onto in retention and experienced as a "sinking back" of the impression into the past (187). Points of temporal duration are also future-orientated, insofar as they are given meaning in anticipation. In the melody, for example, the expectation of the forthcoming tone *and* the memory of the preceding tone both give

meaning to the tone that is presently heard. This is the sense in which Husserl says that the continuity of retention, primal impression, and protention form an "inseparable unity" that structures experience (189).

Levinas contests this "absolute unity" of experience in a methodological move that Drabinski calls an "appropriation of the living-present" (2001, p. 196). Levinas states that "in Husserl, the time structure of sensibility is the time of the recuperable" (2016, p. 34). This is a problem, because Husserl does not sufficiently address the fact that the primal impression, the now-point of the impression that is subsequently retained and remembered, necessarily slips away from the ego. Levinas argues, against Husserl, that the primal impression, as the source-point of rententional consciousness, is fundamentally and radically irrecuperable: the "temporalization of time", in its constant passing-over from present impression into retention, introduces an "irreducible diachrony" into being (34). Levinas's conception of sensibility insists that the diachrony of time is manifested in the very materiality of the ageing body, wherein the body *undergoes* time, revealing the fact that "before the syntheses of apprehension and recognition, the absolutely passive 'synthesis' of ageing is effected" (38). It is of central importance that ageing is not something that the subject actively constitutes—ageing is passivity, a kind of corporeal patience and sensible differentiation of the body that the subject does not have mastery over. The ageing body is revelatory of the way that "time passes", and necessarily eludes the Husserlian absolute unity of intentional consciousness (52).

Therefore sensibility, for Levinas, refers to the fundamental exposure and vulnerability of the body. The body is opened up in this way through the passing of time, where each singular present immediately begins to recede in retention, and the sense of the primal impression takes on new meanings in retentional consciousness. The body ages with reference to this immediate

primal impression, as an "unrecuperable lapse" that falls into the past the very moment it occurs (89). But what does this have to do with ethics? How does Levinas use the irrecuperability of the living-present as a way to describe ethical responsibility? Levinas conceives of the temporal structure of the body and the temporal structure of intersubjectivity as *one and the same problem*. This is arguably one of the most difficult notions in *Otherwise than Being*, and it deserves careful articulation. In Chapter IV, "Substitution", Levinas describes how the ego self-identifies only by virtue of being for-the-other. A central idea in this dense chapter is that the oneself "cannot form itself" (104) and "has not issued from its own initiative" (105). Just as the body is passive to the passing of time, the ego is first and foremost a passive recipient of its own identity, which is given to the ego as an assignation by the other. One could say that the ego *arrives too late* to itself and is thus unable to singlehandedly accomplish oneself: "the oneself comes from a past that could not be remembered" (107). There are two ways to conceive this peculiar relationality which help shed light on how responsibility emanates from this intersubjective structure. First, Levinas calls maternity the "gestation of the other in the same" (75). I did not initiate my own conception, gestation, and birth: in this sense, I am borne from a past that I cannot take up again and remember, a past that is not my own. For Levinas, this is a pre-original source of responsibility to the other.

But it is not only the ego's literal birth that engenders responsibility. Drabinski points to the notion of animation in *Otherwise than Being* to elucidate the sense of responsible subjectivity: "Animation captures how the life of the Same cannot escape its possession by and obsession with the Other. The I is hostage. That is, the unicity of the I is already animated by alterity" (2001, 209). The ego must be living, that is, embodied and sensible, in order to be receptive to the other to such an extent that the call to responsibility *cannot be declined*.

Animation means that "I am 'in myself' through the others'"—I am animated from without. This is what it means to be a subject, according to Levinas (2016, 112). We can think about this with reference to birth and parenthood, or in the terms of the everyday face-to-face. Each singular encounter between the ego and the other, whether it be a passing glance with a stranger or a complex discussion with a life-long friend, is precisely what enables the subject to be the person who they are. This is what Levinas means when he says that "the psyche is the other in the same, without alienating the same" (112). I am perpetually becoming-myself through a recurrence of myself to myself, and this very self-recurrence is an animation of the same by the other. It is this indebtedness to the other—to *every* other—that demands my responsibility. In this way, when Levinas says "sensibility is exposedness to the other", this exposure is corporeal, insofar as it is the living exposure of a body of flesh and blood, a body that can be wounded (75). But this exposure is simultaneously ethical: it is an exposure through which the ego is animated from without and is responsible to the other that both challenges and subtends their being.

Levinas says that "signification is the-one-for-the-other which characterizes an identity that does not coincide with itself. This is in fact all the gravity of an animate body, that is, one offered to another, expressed or opened up" (70). What Levinas means here is that the very fact of sensible embodiment and vulnerability opens the identity up, or makes the ego vulnerable, in a way that we cannot entirely contain, predict, nor prevent. This is a centrally important idea for my argument in the third section of this paper. Levinas's comments about animals and animality, which are few and far between, give an undeniable impression that the animal cannot be the other against which and through which the *human* subject crystallizes. But in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas opens the sensible body up to ethical signification to an extent not seen in his previous works. "The disclosure of being to itself" occurs first as a pre-intentional affectivity

(105), in the ethical moment where the "subject is accused in its skin" (106). How are we supposed to quantify or qualify the extent of our sensible receptivity to the other, when this delimitation of the *source* of the subject's animation would go against the very sense of Levinas's argument? Wouldn't a decision about what 'counts' as other be a way to constrain, to somehow pre-determine or *rationalize*, what Levinas calls the "impossibility of proximity" and the "impossibility of eva[sion]"? (87, 109) We cannot choose the extent to which we are susceptible to affection at this pre-intentional level. Consequently, I assert that there is no reason, aside from Levinas's own anthropocentric biases, to insist that the human subject is not receptive to the animal, and thus not sensibly vulnerable to the potential appeal of the animal other.

3. Animal Questioning and Teaching

In the first section I reviewed relevant themes in Levinas's ethics, and then critically analyzed previous attempts to conceptualize the face of the other as an animal other. I then presented an exegesis of sensibility in *Otherwise than Being*, where I traced Levinas's theory of sensibility through his engagement with Husserl to demonstrate how Levinas 'ethicizes' Husserl's theory of passive synthesis, resulting in a radical notion of human subjectivity as embodied affectivity to sense. Now that the subject's potential receptivity to the animal call has been established, I turn to the animal demand itself: what does the animal say in its approach, and to what extent is the human responsible to the animal in this approach? I assert that if we attend to the sense of the experience of being face-to-face (or body-to-face) with the animal, we see that two themes often emerge: the animal questions the subject, and the animal teaches the subject. Ethical responsibility follows from these two themes, and I will show how this is the case. The final problem, which is a problem that haunts Levinas's philosophy in

general, is the issue of scope, or delimitation, of responsibility. I conclude by making some tentative remarks on this subject.

I argue that if we are serious about following Levinas's notion of subjectivity in *Otherwise than Being* as the radical material openness to affection by the other, we must refrain from delimiting the source of our ethical responsibilities in advance. In other words, with this commitment to subjectivity as corporeal exposure, we must affirm the irreducibility of this very sense of exposure: just as we cannot say that *this human* calls upon me, but this *other* human does not, we cannot definitively say that an animal does not call me into question in its own particular way. I ultimately assert that the best way to understand how we are held responsible to the animal call is through two concepts in Levinas's ethics: singularization and teaching. These two concepts are generative of a new animal ethics, one that avoids the pitfalls of previous interpretations.

a) Ethical Questioning: Perpich and Derrida

I will begin by discussing the positions of Diane Perpich and Jacques Derrida on the question of Levinasian ethical singularity. Both Perpich and Derrida emphasize the fundamental uncertainty of the ethical call, which will be central to my argument about the sense of the animal demand. Consequently, their arguments, read alongside one another, will best permit me to clarify my own view.

In her article "Scarce Resources? Levinas, Animals, and the Environment", Perpich's argument works in two steps: first, she correctly refutes what I describe as a 'criteria-based ethics', which I will define below. Then she rejects the possibility of mobilizing Levinas to meaningfully conceive of an ethical sense that emanates from the animal to the human—not necessarily because it cannot be done, but seemingly because the ethical is such ambiguous

territory, for Levinas. She clearly states her concerns, saying that "an extension of the notion of the face [to animals] may indeed be possible, but only if we take Levinas's thought beyond the borders in which the author himself seems to have kept it" (68). On her reading, to speak of the animal to whom we are *ethically* responsible is to delimit the meaning and source of ethical responsibility prior to the singular moment in which we are called upon as responsible for the other.

Her critique centres upon the claim that Levinas's environmentally minded readers mistake the face, or the other in general, as the *source* of ethical responsibility, and thus try to de-anthropocize Levinas by searching for ethical 'criteria' in the animal. This criteria-based approach, which Perpich calls a "causal account" (78), purportedly lies at the root of many previous attempts to 'do animal ethics' with Levinas. Perpich explains that the face is not what causes responsibility; the relation between effect and cause is posterior to the lived experience of ethics, where the subject is overwhelmed with a demand of which they are not the source, and whose intensity and immediacy precludes the ability to fully thematize its meaning. Levinas, for example, says that "the responsibility for the other cannot have begun in my commitment, in my decision. The unlimited responsibility in which I find myself comes from the hither side of my freedom…" (2016, 10). As I emphasized in the previous section, responsibility is felt before it is known, as you become aware of an itch only after it has begun to trouble your skin. Therefore, understanding the other as a *cause* of responsibility would be a misstep, insofar as the other would simply be known as the cause of an effect. The other would be thematized in this relation, their enigmatic being made understandable. An interesting paradox follows from Perpich's argument, one that she does not fully explore. The demand of the other resists delimitation because as soon as the theorist asks, 'does this creature demand responsibility of

me?', the theorist risks forgetting that the very possibility of asking this question, of inquiring into the sense of particular animal's relation with a human subject, is reliant upon the fundamental susceptibility of the human subject to external affection. It is only because the animal reveals itself and the subject is susceptible to this revelation that this attempt to find particular ethical criteria has anything to stand upon. The strange relation between revelation and receptivity is what Levinas seeks to emphasize in his ethics, and the question of pre-determined ethical criteria, which works to simplify the responsibility generated in this relation, actually occurs at a level of abstraction far removed from the concrete experience of ethics.

Perpich believes that many philosophers reading Levinas have made the mistake of looking for causes, sources, or criteria for ethical responsibility. Seemingly, the criteria-based reading is so erroneous, and the tendency to make this mistake on the subject of animals so large, that Perpich ultimately turns toward Levinas's politics for a sense of animal justice ("Scarce Resources", 78). For Perpich, the central reason that the animal cannot signify ethically relates to Levinas's conception of the question, and the event of being-called-into-question. Perpich asserts that the other compels a "demand to produce a justification" for my actions (93): recall my example of the stranger who saw me litter. With a single glance, the stranger was able to question my decision to set my coffee cup down on the bench and not place it in the garbage. An experience was passed between us; I felt as though I needed to justify my decisions, which were suddenly held under a spotlight. As Levinas would emphasize, I was *forced* to justify them—I was brought under scrutiny by the other. The central question is whether it is only the *human* other who can "oblig[e] entering into discourse", as Levinas says (1969, 200). Is it only the other human who is able to compel the human subject to respond to, and thus to take responsibility for, the singularity of their own actions? In response to this

question, Perpich acquiesces to the humanist and anthropocentric language dominating Levinas's philosophy, ultimately granting that "what is distinctively human is the question itself … The human face is that which demands anew that we justify and explain ourselves, that we give an account of our values and how we apply them in practical situations" ("Scarce Resources", p. 93).

Perpich is therefore unwilling to read Levinas's conception of questioning and justification in a non-anthropocentric light, which, when combined with her critique of the animal face as a cause or source of obligation, leads to a reluctance to speak substantially about the animal other and the potential ethical sense of its approach. Yet in another text published that same year about Levinas and applied care ethics, she emphasizes the "constitutive uncertainty and fragility" of Levinas's ethics ("Don't Try", 128). Turning to this text is insightful because the content of her critique of Levinas-inspired nursing and psychology theories largely reflects the same reasons she rejects the possibility of a Levinasian animal ethics; for example, she once again notes that Levinas's notion of the face is not a cause or origin of responsibility, and thus theorists of care-giving professions "cannot find in his work what they most often hope to find there" (128). Noting that many applied ethicists who gravitate toward Levinas are responding to the fact that "traditional moral theories are unable [to] adequately conceptualize caring relationships", Levinas's irreducible ethical *event* challenges us to see the other person in their singularity (151): as 'you', not as one patient amongst many; as someone radically unique, as someone who is calling upon me to respond to them. This is where Perpich sees the value of the "uncertainty and fragility" of Levinas's ethics (128). For the care ethicist, Levinas's philosophy "is a provocation, a call to glimpse and *describe* the other's vulnerability, to face the ambiguity that structures human experience, and to frame this as a moral experience

rather than an emotional or psychological one" (128). Levinas therefore cannot offer us a firm ground with which to justify applied ethical decision-making, but he can certainly challenge our very understanding of what an ethical relationship is and what such a relation entails.

Perpich's argument is ultimately weakened by the fact that she does not question what the very sort of questioning Levinas speaks of might entail; she understands that ambivalence and uncertainty are paradigmatic ideas in his philosophy but does not use these themes to trouble Levinas's own anthropocentric assumptions. Perpich explains why the animal to whom we are responsible cannot be determined in advance of the singular ethical relation, but from this indeterminacy, it does not follow that we ought to set aside the question of the animal other in Levinas. This is why her ultimate shift toward politics, and away from ethics, is troubling: it leaves Levinas's philosophy unproblematized in its own anthropocentrism.

I assert that it is imperative that we question the very anthropocentrism of the experience of being-questioned in Levinas. But even the most hopeful environmental reader of Levinas must admit that the animal did not emerge as a central problem for him; the question of the animal, when it did arise, was characterized as a derivation of the singularity of the human: in a 1986 interview with graduate students from the University of Warwick, which has become infamous for the way Levinas addresses the notion of the animal, he says that "[o]ne cannot entirely refuse the face of an animal. It is via the face that one understands, for example, a dog. Yet the priority here is not found in the animal, but in the human face. We understand the animal, the face of an animal, in accordance with *Dasein*" (Levinas cited in Wright et al., 169). Even as we strive to call such claims into question, we cannot forget the circumstances through which Levinas lived and the moral and political evils to which his philosophy primarily responded. I believe that we can and should take Levinas to task for this (mis)theorization of animal alterity, but that this

critique must remain situated within the horizon of his philosophy as a whole. Perpich's decision to leave the question as a human event could initially appear guided by a justifiable desire to respect Levinas's humanism as it stands, insofar as Levinas's ethics is a humanism provoked in part by the profound *dehumanization* of the Holocaust.

Nevertheless, the figure of the animal—and the theme of animality, more broadly—is traced throughout Levinas's work. Diehm, in an article published several years after the argument I analyzed above, refers to an "intricate thinking-of-the-other-than-human animal, forged in the context of an attempt to conceive of the human as a break from the animal condition" (2006, 38) He shows us that Levinas's exclusion of the animal does *work* in his philosophy; the animal is not innocently forgotten, but rather excluded for reasons that Derrida relates back Levinas's participation in Cartesian and humanist traditions. Diehm notes that in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas describes animality as being-for-itself, in contrast with human ethics, which is being-for-the-other (36). Ethical transcendence is something wholly different than animality; it is a radical rupture from the animal condition. But he asks whether the distinction between human and animal, or animality and ethics, does not "begin to blur at a certain point" within Levinas's philosophy, strongly implying, in line with his earlier paper, that the ethical import of corporeal vulnerability in Levinas's thought opens the door to being-faced by the suffering animal (38).[3] But how do these distinctions blur? Diehm says that Levinas's notion of animality as generic being is in tension with "the best phenomenological evidence" demonstrating that humans who engage closely and regularly with animals engage with such creatures as singular individuals, not exchangeable members of a common species (38). This is surely true; the cats I live with are indubitable proof of the radical singularity of animal life, and I believe that most people who share spaces with animals would say the same. But again, our

ability to realize animal individuality is not sufficient for responsibility in Levinas's philosophy. We must go even further, emphasizing not the singular animal, but the capacity of the animal to *singularize me*.

To work through this idea, we must gain further insight into the sense of ethical questioning, i.e., the way that the ethical encounter is, in its essence, a questioning of the ego by the other. Perpich, for example, argues that being-questioned by the other entails a need "to produce justifications for one's actions, and these justifications rise to the level of being reasons" ("Scarce Resources", 93). What she implies but does not state is that we cannot give meaningful reasons to the animal—consequently, a shared intersubjective space does not open between us. I acknowledge that I cannot give reasons to my cat in the same way I give reasons to my human friends, and that it is likely that my cats and I do not 'share a world' in precisely the same way as my friends enrich my intersubjective world and I enrich theirs. But this is not an impasse; on the contrary, I argue that we must interrogate the anthropocentrism of the identity of the 'who' that puts me into question.

My central contention is that Levinas's anthropocentrism about the 'who' that can put me into question becomes self-contradictory, and thus untenable, when we consider it within in the context of his larger philosophical attempt to conceive of ethics as a radically undeterminable and ambiguous event, or, as he says, a "signification without a context" (1969, 23). When I speak of his anthropocentrism about the question, I refer to two interconnected claims: (1), his apparent belief that only the other human calls me into question, in the sense that only the other human singularizes me, or identifies me as *me,* and (2), his corresponding assumption that only an ethical relation between two humans can co-constitute an "outstretched field of questions and answers" through which a meaningful, shared world emerges (p. 96). When Perpich refers to

the "distinct humanity" of the question for Levinas, I understand her to be referring to these two points ("Scarce Resources?", 93). For clarity, I will call (1) the *singularity* premise, and (2) the *co-constitution* premise. In the remainder of this paper I will refute both of these arguments. In this refutation, I will introduce a particular way to understand how the animal both calls the human subject into question and confers meaning onto said subject. As I will show, the significance of the animal as a power of human singularization can be easily seen. Refuting the co-constitution claim will require us to ask to what extent a non-human animal can engage the human subject in something akin to what Levinas calls a "conversation which proposes a world" (1969, 96).

b) Ethical Singularity and Singularization

Ethical singularity is ambiguously two-sided, for Levinas, simultaneously signifying both the uniqueness of the other *and* the irreplaceability of the ego who must account for the demand of the other. But the singularity of the other is not *comparable* to the way I am subjected, and thus rendered irreplaceable, in the ethical relation. In the ethical encounter, neither the other nor the subject are variations of a common type, or members of the same genus: Levinas says that "I, you—these are not individuals of a common concept. Neither possession nor the unity of number nor the unity of concepts links me to the Stranger, the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself" (1969, 39). In Levinas's view, the other person is a human, just like the subject to whom the other makes their demand. But the ethical force of the face-to-face is not borne from similarities—and certainly not biological nor evolutionary ones.

Admittedly, there is little evidence Levinas believed that a particular animal *could* be meaningfully grasped in its singularity by the human subject. We might be tempted to argue that this is simply not the way that humans necessarily perceive, interact with, and react to

animals. One might say that by denying singularity to the animal, Levinas overlooks that this is often precisely how we encounter 'the animal'—not as an encounter with the general animal, but as an encounter with *this specific creature*. The singular animal is not a mere iteration of its type—for the subject, an animal can be addressed in the first-person, as 'you'.

But we must distinguish between the individuality of the animal, or our ability to recognize this individuality, and the animal's ability to individualize us. The Levinasian environmentalist must acknowledge that there is no particular characteristic, social-behavioural nor cognitive, that grounds our responsibility to non-human animals. This differs sharply from many contemporary animal rights theories, who seek to identify a particular characteristic of animal life, e.g., subjective experience, and then determine which animals have rights based on possession of subjective experience and which human responsibilities follow from these rights (for a good overview of this approach, see Andrews 2015). Derrida's experience of being naked before an animal—in this case, a cat—exemplifies the animal's ability to unsettle, disturb, and surprise the human subject. This is a more promising way to figure animal singularity; the singularity in question is not a characteristic that the other possesses but is rather a sense that the other bestows upon the subject. Derrida insists that the question of the animal "in its entirety comes down to knowing not whether the animal speaks but whether one can know what *respond* means. And now to distinguish a response from a reaction" (2008, 8). Whereas Perpich argues that it is *only* the human that can call me into question, Derrida asks us to reflect upon what it would mean, or could mean, for the animal to respond. He remarks,

> I often ask myself, just to see, *who I am*—and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of the animal, for example, the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time [*du mal*] overcoming this

embarrassment. Whence this malaise? I have trouble repressing a reflex of shame.

Trouble keeping silent within me a protest against the indecency. (3-4)

This reflex of shame testifies to the cat's ability to make him rethink his own presence before the cat's gaze; the malaise that he identifies is nothing less than his cat's ability to unsettle him, to call him into question. In opposition to the arguments of Diehm and Atterton, Derrida does not think that the cat is an 'animal other', in a Levinasian sense, *because* the cat suffers or because the cat is embodied. The ability to suffer and the fact of embodiment are not *sources* or *causes* of responsibility. In this way, Derrida escapes Perpich's critique of the 'causal interpretation' of responsibility. Instead, Derrida emphasizes the way that this cat watches him in a manner *that makes him feel watched,* in the sense that he is being seen *by another*—in fact, the cat's enigmatic presence before his naked body brings about a strange self-awareness about the significance of his own nakedness. Derrida describes the animal gaze as both a real, grounded event, an experience in which he is subjected to embarrassment, self-consciousness, and shame, *and* a radically indecipherable and uncertain relation.

Derrida's reflection upon the significance of his nakedness before the as laden with questions, and resists easy answers: "I say that I am close or *next to* the animal, that I am (following) it, and in what type or order of pressure?" (10); "What does this bottomless gaze offer to my sight [*donne a voir*]?" (12); "what is at stake in these questions?" (11). Derrida's description of the cat's gaze is centrally important to my argument *because* of how he seems to relish in the ambiguity of the moment. He asks, "an animal looks at me. What should I think of this sentence?" (6). Then he reflects upon this manner of questioning: "what is at stake in these questions?" (11). His method of questioning is radically open-ended, insistent, and rigorous; he questions his own questioning, he questions the very way he speaks and writes about his animal

interlocutor. And the very existence of this text, in itself, ultimately testifies to the fact that the cat was *able* to be his interlocutor, contrary to what Levinas seems to have believed.

In effect, Derrida elucidates the very "constitutive uncertainty and fragility" that Perpich emphasizes ("Don't Try", 128). The gaze of the animal *exposes* Derrida to the fact of his own nakedness, and in this exposure, the presence of the cat motivates a deep hesitance about the meaning of his being-naked in front of the animal—if the cat can unsettle me like this, Derrida wonders, what does it mean to be animal and what does it mean to be human? Am I caught here naked as a man, or naked as an animal? Evoking Levinas quite strikingly, Derrida says of the cat in this moment that "nothing can ever rob me of the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized" (2008, 9). Yet the certainty of his awareness that the cat is "*this* irreplaceable living being", and an "unsubstitutable singularity", is necessarily only given as certain insofar as the ethical relation itself is fundamentally *uncertain*—because the encounter remains shrouded in mystery, because he is left grasping at its significance, he is therefore confident that something *meaningful* has passed between them (9). According to Perpich, Levinas presents "an ethical demand that somehow registers with complete urgency, but without recognizable or determinate foundations" ("Don't Try", 150). What else is Derrida offering us here, other than a relation between human and animal that is simultaneously urgently felt in the body, resistant to straightforward recognition, and indeterminate in significance?

c) Ethical Co-constitution

Levinas asserts that the ego and the other, *together*, constitute a meaningful intersubjective world. In the first section, I explained how Levinas understands an "outstretched field of questions and answers" to open up between the other and the subject. The other's appeal

is a reminder that meaning is not the ego's isolated creation, and that truth and objectivity must be "posited in a discourse" in order to exist (1969, 96). But what type of meaningful, co-constituted field of existence does the approach of the animal offer to the human? This is the question that we must now ask.

In *Totality and Infinity*, objectivity and truth require the intersubjective encounter: "truth arises where a being separated from the other is not engulfed in him, but speaks to him", which means that for objectivity to emerge, my perspective alone cannot suffice (1969, 62). In discourse, which Levinas characterizes as a questioning, the other *affirms* that the ego lives, acts, and reasons within an intersubjective horizon. To return once more to my coffee-cup example, even the disparaging glance from the stranger was an *affirmation* of my involvement in a shared world where my reasons for action are necessarily subject to the reasons of others. According to Levinas, "to speak is to make the world common, to create commonplaces" (76). In this sense, the face of the stranger spoke to me silently.

Because, as Levinas says, "to speak is to make the world common", we arrive at the complex relation between language and animality in Levinas. Following Derrida, we must first clearly acknowledge that Levinas *does* deprive the animal of language, if we remember that language bears a specific ethical sense in his philosophy (2008, 32). For Levinas, to 'have language' refers to something more profound than the possession of a communicative system: "language (*langage*) can be spoken (*se parler*) only if the interlocutor is the commencement of his discourse, if, consequently, he remains beyond the system, if he is *not on the same plane* as myself" (1969, 101 / 1971, 104).[4] It is true that Levinas describes this ethical language in ways that exceed or differ from linguistic communication: in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas describes the expressivity of the face as "eyes that look at you" (178) and asserts that the other commands

me "in the total nudity of his defenseless eyes" (199). In *Otherwise than Being*, ethical proximity also evokes an ethical sense, or an expressivity, that cannot be fully encompassed or grasped by the linguistic sign and signifier (2016, 81). I assert that commentators on Levinas and the animal question have been misled by what they assume to be the non-anthropocentric potential of such passages (see Diehm 2000, 53; Atterton 2011, 639). It is certainly possible to be compelled by the pleading eyes of a vulnerable animal or feel called to care for an animal that is suffering. Following Levinas's sensible subjectivity, I believe that the sensible human self is radically susceptible to this sort of non-human suffering. But what sort of shared world emerges between us?

A promising way forward begins with the acknowledgement that the interaction between the animal and the human, though meaningful in its own right, *does* differ from the interaction between two human subjects. As we seek to carefully determine the sense of the animal's appeal, I am all-to-wary of the threat of anthropomorphizing language, and Levinas's ethics as a whole; we cannot justifiably argue that everything Levinas says about human ethics simply extends, or applies, to the relation between the animal and the human. Thankfully, we do not need to prove that the animal commands the subject "thou shalt not kill" in order to argue that the animal is the originator of a discourse, or a "field of questions and answers"—there are other ways to support this argument. The theme of teaching is helpful to turn to on this topic. Levinas insists that language is spoken from "beyond the system" (1969, 101), meaning beyond the unity of the ego. For this reason, Levinas calls "the essential of language" an experience of teaching (*enseignement*). (1969, 67 / 1971, 62). He explains that "teaching (*enseignement*) is a way for truth to be produced such that it is not my work, such that I could not derive it from my own interiority" (1969, 295 / 1971, 328). It is imperative that language or speech works in this way.

The separation between teacher and pupil is what makes truth possible: for the ego to learn something *radically new*, something that takes them by surprise, they must be taught by someone radically other in Levinas's sense of this term.

If Levinas describes the ethical encounter as both a questioning *and* a teaching, one must ask what the difference is between these two concepts. Is teaching just another way of conceiving the experience of being put into question? What then would be the point of bringing it into this argument, seeing as I have already explained, via Derrida, the way that the animal other can question and thus singularize the human subject? I argue that while both these words give us ways to talk about what ethical relationality means, questioning and teaching actually carry slightly different senses. The subject who is subjected-to-questioning must answer for themselves; they are held responsible, or singularized, in this questioning. The subject-taught is given something in this questioning relation. Teaching and questioning both refer to the same fundamental ethical structure and are indissociable within the ethical appeal: the other necessarily both questions *and* teaches. But teaching inevitably implies content taught; teaching "introduces the new into a thought" (1969, 219).

The ethical encounter with the animal introduces the very possibility of being otherwise-than-human; the "new" that is introduced into human thought is the strange and ultimately inaccessible reality of existence that is not only beyond the ego, but *beyond the human.* Upon the approach of the animal, the ambivalence of both animal *and* human existence is brought to the fore; attending to the animal interlocutor, the very stability of one's identity *as* human is called into question. The cat's appeal, for Derrida, provokes an "encounter" with the "difference" between the nudity of the cat and the nudity of the human: Derrida asks, "before the cat that looks at me naked, would I be ashamed *like* a beast that no longer has the sense of its

nudity? Or, on the contrary, *like* a man who retains the sense of his nudity? Who am I, therefore?" (2008, 5) There is undeniably something transpiring between the two, in this moment, but this is not Levinas's intersubjective space of human reasons.

I argue that the teaching of an animal is the teaching of existence and experience radically beyond the human. The animal's approach is revelatory of the nearly inconceivable variety and complexity of organic existence. We are led to wonder at the astonishing depth of evolutionary time and grapple with the rich possibility of different kinds of minds and experiences, whose histories diverge from that of the human's hundreds of millions of years past. Certainly, it is not *only* through animals that the human subject can encounter the depths of time in this way; Ted Toadvine compellingly describes the "phenomenological encounter with the vertigo of deep time, of which I catch a glimpse in the fossil" (2014, 276). Toadvine explains that "belief in the reality of the fossil motivates belief in another reality, namely, the past that it indicates" (271-2). Consequently, "the fossil ... embodies the very paradox of our encounter with the immemorial past" (272). The stone does not speak, but it draws something forth from the subject: this vertiginous experience of peering back into an elemental history "that both invites and refuses us" (272). I believe that the encounter with the animal can have a comparable impact upon the human. Caught by the gaze of a particular animal, you invariably return the stare, frozen in place. The sense that is generated in this relation is nothing more or less than a disruption of the subject's identity as human. Wondering 'what might it be like to be you?', there is a sense in which you might leave your own humanity behind, if only for a brief interval, in order to follow the path of this question. Therefore, the animal *does* teach; the animal teaches us, albeit uncertainly and indistinctly, the sense of the otherwise than human.

4. Conclusion

I was at a park recently when a large seagull approached me. Only feet away, the bird's unblinking, red-ringed eye tracked me as I ate my breakfast. I felt compelled to attend to it; the genuine strangeness of being face to face with an animal so different than myself was palpable, inescapable, and immediate. These moments of proximity readily provoke reflection about the very *nature* of human-and-animal existence. What sort of existence does this bird participate in? Who am I to this bird? What does this bird think, feel, need, or understand? To what extent to we live in the same environing-world, perceiving our shared physical surroundings as meaningful in both similar and less-than-similar ways?

Levinas never sought to describe the approach of the animal with true fidelity to this world of questions—questions whose potential answers seem so alien, so unreachable, that it is as if both the question *and* the possibility of an answer has its origins in the animal, and not the subject. For Levinas, "there is only man who could be absolutely strange to me" (1969, 46). As I have shown, rehabilitating Levinas as a generative source for animal ethics requires that we do more than mobilize themes of embodiment and corporeality that could apply to both humans and non-human animals. I have sought to illuminate what is most idiosyncratically Levinasian about the ethical moment: the questioning that singularizes, and the teaching that imparts a truth that comes from without. My focus on sensible human subjectivity in the second section endeavored to establish that Levinas's own conception of subjective susceptibility can be refigured as radically receptive to animal questioning and teaching.

Such a relation of teaching and questioning compels the subject's responsibility: the subject is irrevocably responsible for the other(s) through whom the subject is "in itself", because this existence-in-itself only coheres as a subject by virtue of this assignation (2016, 112).

It is not only other humans who assign me in this way, both reaffirming and disturbing my self-possession—the animal both questions and teaches me. But which animals? Every and any animal? A question of scope and delimitation haunt my argument, and thus the ethical approach is simultaneously always a matter of what Levinas calls politics: the mediation between multiple parties to whom I am responsible. In our personal, cultural, and socio-political lives, we are tasked with making sense of the ambivalence through which the encounter with the animal is expressed. Levinas reminds us of this necessity as the remarks that "philosophy is called upon to conceive ambivalence, to conceive it in several times" (162).

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[1] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 112

[2] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am,* 6

[3] It is worth noting that Diehm's "Ethics and Natural History", published in 2006, does deviate in certain significant respects from his earlier article "Facing Nature: Levinas Beyond the Human", and thus serves as a partial corrective to my criticism of his earlier position. In a footnote to the 2006 text he writes the following: "I now believe it to be more correct to say that Levinas denies other-than-human others the expressivity of the face not because of their lack of linguistic capabilities, but because of what he believes is their 'generic' being. This is the line of thinking that I am developing in the ensuing sections of this paper" (41). But in 2006 Diehm is still emphasizing the significance of the fundamental expressiveness of the body, and it is this expressiveness that implies a sense of other-than-human expressiveness. He says, for example, that "the suffering body [is] the locus of the call to responsibility for the other (2006 39). My project differs insofar as I am first prioritizing the fundamental *passivity*, or *vulnerability*, of the human body, and then inquiring about how animal others impinge upon this passivity.

[4] Where I have included the original French, the French page number follows the English translation.