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## The problem and possibility of animal minds in Brandom's work: revisiting Heidegger, rationality and normativity

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THE PROBLEM AND POSSIBILITY OF ANIMAL MINDS IN BRANDOM'S WORK:  
REVISITING HEIDEGGER, RATIONALITY, AND NORMATIVITY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
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by  
Joel David Musser  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Robert Brandom denies animals implicit reasoning by emphasizing their inability to make inferences explicit, and in so doing, denigrates animals by likening their behavior to that of machines and artifacts. I contest, however, that animals are paradigmatically more than any similarity or analogy to mechanical processing, just as humans are paradigmatically more than any reductive analogy to animals. The human/animal distinction need not come at the cost of ignoring the difference between animals and artifacts, and I believe we can largely subscribe to Brandom's differentiation of the human in terms of expressionism if we allow that animals can make implicit inferences without making them explicit.

After exposing in Chapter One Brandom's ghettoizing of animal minds, I show in the following chapters what it might look like for humans to perform explication on behalf of implicit animal inferences. In Chapter Two I show where Brandom departs from Heidegger, and how there would otherwise be a place for animals in his thought. After revising Brandom along more orthodox Heideggerian lines, I explore in Chapter Three the early Heidegger's concept of the world in terms of Dasein, animals, and unworlded things with an eye towards Brandom's inferentialism. In Chapter Four I employ Mark Okrent's teleological understanding of rationality to fill out Heidegger's suggested view of animals. I conclude the thesis by showing how humans make explicit the implicit inferences of animals.

## **INTRODUCTION: TRADITIONS AND TERMS**

The charge I bring against Robert Brandom is that in formulating his philosophy of mind and language, he precludes any kind of mental life for animals, even higher-order animals. As Alasdair MacIntyre points out, this oversight, in both analytic and continental circles, results from the linguistic turn, where the over-emphasis on human discourse misconstrues our understanding of intentionality, beliefs and desires, meaning, and communication.<sup>1</sup> It may seem odd, then, that I hope to rectify Brandom along Heideggerian lines, since, according to MacIntyre (and others), Heidegger is one of the chief continental culprits of anthropomorphism—or more specifically, what Nelson Goodman calls “linguomorphism.”<sup>2</sup> I must therefore explain how and why this traditional reading of Heidegger on animals is mistaken.

First, as MacIntyre himself points out, language as such is a major (and most likely *the* major) difference between humans and other animals. Language is what makes introspection and philosophy possible, what makes art and religion possible. Thus any correction of philosophers like Brandom and Heidegger cannot simply abandon language as essentially tied to the distinctly human experience. That is, language profoundly shapes or enables the human mind to be what it

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<sup>1</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Peru, IL: Open Court, 1999), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Nelson Goodman, “The Way the World Is,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 14, no. 1: 48.

is. Unfortunately, many twentieth-century philosophers conflate language and mind, and see the mind as such as inseparable from language.<sup>3</sup>

Brandom outright links the mind with language, and doesn't allow the two to be separated: since animals don't have language, they don't have minds. Heidegger, since he waxes philosophical about the importance of language for world (and implicitly mind), is often viewed in a similar light: his choice of animals—lizards, bees, snails—emphasizes the animal as other, *la bête* in every sense of the word. And yet, as I'll argue, it's a mistake to read Heidegger as overly anthropocentric. Though Dasein is his foremost interest, his philosophy can account for animals in a non-disparaging way; Brandom's account at best uses animals metaphorically to explain what humans are not.

According to Heidegger, things are given as *zuhanden* or *vorhanden*, and we share the former experience of things with animals; Brandom's bifurcation of inferences as implicit and explicit makes the two inseparable, and animals can't have the first since they lack the second. Consequently, Heidegger doesn't view animals as worldless (like rocks), just world-poor, whereas Brandom views animals as mindless machines, simply responding mechanically to the world (like thermostats). If, hypothetically, Brandom had allowed for animals to have implicit inferences, he, like Heidegger, would have a viable philosophy of animal minds. It's the goal of this thesis to show how Brandom should have (and could have) made this allowance for animals.

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<sup>3</sup> MacIntyre carefully shows that animals don't need language to have beliefs, and while they often display advanced forms of communication, no matter how close animals like dolphins are to having true language, they ultimately fall short—they could never have *human* language, though they might perhaps have or acquire an some kind of dolphin "language." See 29-41.

In Chapter One I explain the problem of animal minds in Brandom's work. From there I locate his departure from Heidegger in hopes of realigning him more charitably towards animals. In Chapter Three I discuss Heidegger's view of animal minds and worlds, showing the shared world of Dasein and animals. In Chapter Four I explicate this common world in more analytic terms. For this task I primarily employ Mark Okrent's *Rational Animals*, though I must also critique him at length for linguomorphizing animal minds. The last chapter shows how humans can explicate the implicit inferences of animals—thus keeping Brandom's two-part account of mind intact while allowing for the mental lives of animals.

Before we get started, however, I need to make clear why I don't take the traditional, prima facie reading of Heidegger seriously, and how in fact his philosophy gives a sufficient and substantial account of animals. Additionally, we'll need to be clear about some central terms, especially since the continental, analytic, and Aristotelian/Thomistic traditions are all in play here.

### **The Traditional Reading of Heidegger on Animals and its Discontents**

The charge I bring against Brandom is that in formulating his philosophy of mind and language, he precludes any kind of mental life for animals, even higher-order animals; Heidegger often receives a similar criticism, though it's usually in terms of world, not mind. As far as this thesis goes, I assume that when Heidegger speaks of world and Brandom and others mean of mind, they are essentially after the same thing, perception or experience or engagement with phenomena. It would seem that Heidegger downplays the phenomenal life of animals, especially if one is only familiar with Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) (and this seems to be the case for

Brandom, Okrent, and most of the readers of Heidegger in the analytic tradition).<sup>4</sup> Heidegger's 1929-30 lecture course, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, is where he most directly discusses animals; here too it's easy to misunderstand Heidegger's discussion of the "impoverished" world of animals.<sup>5</sup>

The problem is that people miss the forest for the trees in these two works: *Being and Time* is specifically about Dasein and Being in regard to Dasein as the being that asks after being, and the *Concepts of Metaphysics* is similarly about Dasein and World in regard to Dasein as the being that asks why there is a world and what the world as world means. Often what Heidegger is saying about the being of Dasein or Dasein's experience of the world is mistaken as Heidegger's anti-animal view of being and world, as if we could fault a book about apples for not giving a satisfactory account of oranges. Although we might already fault the animal enthusiast for this, what's more amazing is that the general framework that Heidegger is establishing in the two works, namely Zu- and Vorhandenheit and being in the world, is actually quite charitable towards animals, emphasizing a shared zuhanden engagement with the same world.

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); *Sein und Zeit* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1927). All references to *Being and Time*, even in the English, follow the standard German pagination.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. W. McNeill & N. Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); *Der Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit*, Gesamtausgabe Band 29/30, (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983). When appropriate, I reference the German edition's page numbers in parentheses.

Let's discuss the traditional, negative reading of Heidegger and animals, and then I'll show how Heidegger is actually linking Dasein and animals in a fundamental, positive way.

### **Animals in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics***

*The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* is about metaphysics if only in the sense that it is a critique and a reformulation of what the tradition means by metaphysics (and thus may perhaps be more properly called “anti-metaphysics”). The first part of the book discusses metaphysics in terms of Dasein, logos, and physis, and entails a fittingly dry and drawn-out discussion of boredom as a fundamental attunement of Dasein. It is from this discussion of metaphysical boredom that the second part of the book derives. In Part Two we have the discussion of world and the thesis that the stone is worldless, the animal is world-poor, and man is world-forming. Most traditional readings of Heidegger and animals ignore the background metaphysics that undergirds the discussion of world and animals, and thus are at a loss to understand this tripartite division of natural beings. MacIntyre, for instance, just jumps into the discussion of animals as world-poor.

MacIntyre does mention what the key difference is between world-forming and world-poor, though he doesn't heed this enough: what animals lack is the ability to experience something *as* something. The lizard, Heidegger says, is aware of the warm rock and even seeks it out, but the lizard does not know the rock as rock.<sup>6</sup> Heidegger's point—and this is abundantly clear in the overlooked Part One of the *Fundamental Concepts*—is that only humans can

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<sup>6</sup> Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 198; MacIntyre, 44.

understand things as things. This is metaphysics. This is philosophy. This is human. We can know things as things because we can discourse about things and their essence; animals cannot.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, MacIntyre complains that Heidegger understands “nonhuman animals *as such*,” entirely missing the point that only humans can consider anything “as such.”<sup>8</sup> Heidegger is discussing what makes animals animal, and MacIntyre claims that this carries the “underlying assumption...that the differences between nonhuman species are of no importance or almost no importance in any relevant sense.”<sup>9</sup> If by relevant sense we mean metaphysics, then that’s right. This is Heidegger’s aim, though in doing so he is doing more than merely addressing animals as such, as I’ll explain briefly in the next section and then in more detail in Chapter Three.

One of MacIntyre’s main concerns is that Heidegger identifies “captivation” as “the fundamental essence of the organism [animal].”<sup>10</sup> I don’t have the space to adequately expound what Heidegger means by this, but, in brief, he means simply the essential poverty of animals. Animals are captive to their selves and their environment, but in typical Heideggerian form, this captivity is described in terms of openness. It is a very un-Heideggerian reading of MacIntyre to read captivity of animals as limiting rather than as opening.

MacIntyre comes close to understanding Heidegger’s use of “as” when he agrees that animals can’t “grasp the world as a whole,” since this would imply (minimally) a kind of past

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<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 26-33.

<sup>8</sup> MacIntyre, 45.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 258ff.; MacIntyre, 47ff.

and future available only in language; however, he shows again that he misses Heidegger's point by insisting that some higher-order animals understand things "as food or as source of food, as partner in or material for play," etc.<sup>11</sup> This is not the kind of "as structure" that Heidegger is talking about. Both the German *als* and the English *as* denote the Latin *qua*, that is, "in the capacity of," or "as being," and Heidegger means this in the precise, metaphysical sense (categorical description) of something understood anaphorically *as being that thing*.<sup>12</sup>

Joseph J. Kockelmans explains that there are two kinds of "as structures," the "anaphoric *as*" and the "hermeneutic *as*."<sup>13</sup> Both are the "letting something become manifest": the hermeneutic *as* is manifest in our "concernful dealing with things," and the anaphoric *as* is the "articulated structure of understanding something as something."<sup>14</sup> The hermeneutic *as* isn't thematic or articulated; it is the engagement with something *as* something, food *as* food, for instance. Dasein can take "the structure of *something as something*" and make it "*explicitly* understood" anaphorically in language, but this is a derivative *as* structure that we don't share with animals:

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<sup>11</sup> MacIntyre, 47.

<sup>12</sup> "qua," Oxford English Dictionary. Third edition, December 2007; online version March 2012. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/155615>>; accessed 10 April 2012. An entry for this word was first included in *New English Dictionary*, 1902. I compared the English "as" in the OED with the German *als* in *Der Duden in 10 Bänden, Band 2, Stilwörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, ed. Drosdowski et al. (Dudenverlag: Mannheim, 1988).

<sup>13</sup> Joseph J. Kockelmans, "Ontological Difference, Hermeneutics, and Language," in *On Heidegger and Language*, ed. Joseph J. Kockelmans (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 198. See *Being and Time*, 148-160.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 198, 200.

In dealing with what is environmentally ready-to-hand by interpreting it circumspectively, we ‘see’ it *as* a table, a door, a carriage, or a bridge; but what we have thus interpreted need not necessarily be also taken apart by making an assertion which definitely characterizes it.<sup>15</sup>

A horse may understand hay as food, but it cannot understand hay as hay, or food as food, that is, anything *as such*. “Ein Tier kann sich nur benehmen, aber nie etwas als etwas vernehmen” (an animal can only behave (itself), but never examine something as something).<sup>16</sup>

Heidegger claims that in the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* he is trying to do what he did in *Being and Time* (and “On the Essence of Ground” (1929)), but with a different method, namely addressing the problem of world—the question, “What is world?”—that is, his “task is to bring the *worldly character* of the world into view for the first time as the possible theme of a *fundamental problem of metaphysics*.”<sup>17</sup> In the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* the method is a “comparative examination,” asking what the world is for things in the world: material objects, animals, and humans. Animals are poor in world in that they have less access to world:

The bee’s world is limited to a specific domain and is strictly circumscribed. And this is also true of the world of the frog, the world of the chaffinch and so on. But it is not merely the world of each particular animal that is limited in range—the extent and manner in which an animal is able to penetrate whatever is accessible to it is also limited. The worker bee is familiar with the blossoms it frequents, along with their colour and scent, but it does not know the stamens of these

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<sup>15</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 149.

<sup>16</sup> *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 376.

<sup>17</sup> *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 176-178. Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence of Ground,” trans. William McNeill, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, 97-135 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

blossoms *as* stamens, it knows nothing about the roots of the plant. . . . As against this, the world of man is a rich one, greater in range, far more extensive in its penetrability, constantly extendable not only in its range. . . . but also in respect to the manner in which we can penetrate ever more deeply in this penetrability. Consequently we can characterize the relation man possesses to the world by referring to the extendability of everything that he relates to. This is why we can speak of man as world-forming.<sup>18</sup>

This does not mean, as MacIntyre suggests, that Heidegger is anthropocentrically evaluating bees, frogs, and birds in this light—“Every animal and every species of animal as such is just as perfect and complete as any other,” says Heidegger, “this talk of poverty in world and world-formation must not be taken as a hierarchical evaluation”—nor is he chauvinistically indifferent towards our common animality. Indeed, poverty is how man too comports himself:

poverty is not merely a characteristic property, but the very way in which man comports and bears himself [such as in humility or melancholy]. *Poverty in this proper sense of human existence* is also a kind of deprivation and necessarily so. Yet from such deprivation we can draw our peculiar power of procuring transparency and inner freedom for Dasein.<sup>19</sup>

Heidegger does not use the word poverty pejoratively either when describing animals or Dasein. Like every term he employs, he uses it in a very precise sense that must be understood in its precise meaning or usage, which usually derives from its etymology, not according to preconceived or *prima facie* senses of the word in isolation from his text. Moreover, this poor world actually turns out to be quite rich, as I discuss in Chapter Three.

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<sup>18</sup> *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 193.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

## **Animals and *Being and Time***

*Being and Time* is often misread. As I mentioned earlier, those who read it as anthropomorphic somehow miss the point that it is about being and time as regards man, and so it's only anthropomorphic in the sense that a book about war is hawkish. Another major misunderstanding is to see the breakthrough of *Being and Time* as drawing our attention to tools and equipment. But "It never occurred to me," says Heidegger, "to try and claim or prove with this interpretation [of equipmentality in *Being and Time*] that the essence of man consists in the fact that he knows how to handle knives and forks or use the tram."<sup>20</sup> The real breakthrough of *Being and Time*, according to Brandom, is the ontological distinction between *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit*, which emphasizes *Dasein*'s more originary engagement with the world.

Animals are only mentioned three times in *Being and Time*, and in ways only tangentially related to animals as regards the topic at hand. Still, what Heidegger has to say about the being of *Dasein* has (positive) implications for animals. Drawing primarily on *The History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (which is almost a rough draft of *Being and Time*),<sup>21</sup> it is my contention in Chapter Three that animals have a similar originary engagement with the world, and *Zuhandenheit* is a kind of bond between us and them. In *Being and Time*, however, Heidegger limits his discussion to *Dasein*, and so we should first mention this distinction in human terms.

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<sup>20</sup> *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 177.

<sup>21</sup> Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992 [1979]); *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*, in *Gasamtausgabe*, Band 20 (Marburger Vorlesung Sommersemester 1925) (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1975). When appropriate, I reference the German edition's page numbers in parentheses.

In short, *Vorhandenheit* (“present-at-hand”) is understanding beings or a being objectively, whereas *Zuhandenheit* (“ready-to-hand,” “handy”) is the direct engagement of beings. A hammer can be understood in terms of its shape, weight, color, etc.—scientifically, to speak—and it can be understood in its use as a hammer—equipmentally. Heidegger’s insight is that *Vorhandenheit* springs from *Zuhandenheit*, not the other way around: usefulness or engagement isn’t a quality added to an object, as the tradition (through Husserl), would understand it.

Heidegger is often praised for this “inversion” of the subject/object ontological structure, but it’s more correct to say that he has gotten to a deeper, more “originary” ontology only from which the subject/object dichotomy is possible. This is all important. As Jean-Luc Marion puts it,

the analysis of the ready-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*) plays a decisive role in the entire analytic of *Dasein*, since it establishes not only that *Dasein* does not entertain first a theoretical relation to the world, but above all that intraworldly entities are not in the mode of objects constituted by an objectification produced by the subject, but rather in the mode of a handiness which in turn determines *Dasein* itself as it were handled by what it handles.<sup>22</sup>

Although *Being and Time* pertains specifically to *Dasein*, this insight into our originary engagement with the world applies analogously to animals. It’s my contention in this thesis that animals operate (only) *zuhanden*. Everything, “house and yard, forest and field, sun, light and

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<sup>22</sup> ” Jean-Luc Marion, “Le sujet en dernier appel,” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 1 (1991): 78, quoted in François Raffoul, “The Destruction of *Vorhandenheit*,” in *Heidegger and the Subject*, trans. David E. Pettigrew and Gregory Recco (Humanity Books, Amherst, New York, 1998), n.6. This chapter of Raffoul’s is especially helpful for understanding how Heidegger’s notions of being-in, world, nature, derive from his destruction of *Vorhandenheit*.

heat,” is zuhanden.<sup>23</sup> As François Raffoul puts it, “the whole of entities, insofar as they appear in the midst of the environment, are primarily ready-to-hand”<sup>24</sup>; we need only remember for animals too, objects in their environment present themselves as ready-to-hand— “the lizard has its *own relation [eine Beziehung]* to the rock, to the sun, and to a host of other things,” as Heidegger says.<sup>25</sup> We are explicitly not to understand the lizard’s relation to his environment as “vorhanden”<sup>26</sup>; the lizard is closer to Dasein than to the rock in that it and all animals have a world, however ever poor, and it engages that world as zuhanden. I explain the zuhanden life of animals in Chapter Three.

## Terminology

This thesis draws from three traditions and schools of thought which are already in dialogue with one another: the analytic, neo-Hegelian pragmatism of Robert Brandom, the continental phenomenology and existentialism of Martin Heidegger, and the Aristotelian/Thomistic teleology of Mark Okrent and Alasdair MacIntyre. Though the philosophers I discuss are all familiar with and draw from each other’s primary traditions, the threefold (at least) vocabulary can be confusing—cumbersome at best. I try to be faithful to the nuances of the different vocabularies while preserving a clear and consistent usage across the

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), 108. Cf. *Being and Time* 103 and 245.

<sup>24</sup> Raffoul, 171.

<sup>25</sup> *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 198 (291).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

traditions. It may be helpful, however, to here delineate some key terms, both to explain their idiosyncratic usage and to clarify how I will use such terms generally in my discussion. I assume that the teleological and Heideggerian terms are more familiar than those of Brandom, so I'll explain some of Brandom's key terms up front, whereas I'll address the teleological and Heideggerian terms as we go.

I might also add here that I typically reserve the word "animal" to mean a nonhuman animal, though this is done for clarity and shouldn't be seen as downplaying humans as animals (after all, Aquinas of all people, as Alasdair MacIntyre points out, is perfectly content with calling nonhuman animals "*other* animals"; distinguishing man from other animals doesn't imply a denial of human animality).<sup>27</sup> When I do talk of lower- and higher-order animals, I typically am referring to animals such as insects as the former and birds and dolphins as the latter, in keeping (somewhat reluctantly) with common usage. That I'm uncomfortable with the space between lower- and higher-order animals, not to mention those animals that push the extremes towards plants and humans, will become clear as we go on.

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<sup>27</sup> MacIntyre, 6. Richard Sorabji, by contrast, prefers ("For ease of reading") not to call nonhuman animals "other animals" (or mankind "humankind," for that matter), "despite [his] sympathies." See his *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 1.

## **Key Brandomian Terms<sup>28</sup>**

Sentience vs. Sapience: “Sentience is a matter of being aware in the sense of being awake that we share at least with our vertebrate cousins. Feelings of pain and sensations of red are paradigmatic sentient episodes. Sapient states, such as beliefs and intentions, and sapient episodes such as thinkings, by contrast, have propositional contents that are expressed in English by the use of ‘that’ clauses with declarative sentences as complements.”<sup>29</sup> Similar dichotomies Brandom uses are vocal/verbal<sup>30</sup> and implicit/explicit (see below).

Implicit/Explicit (inferences, norms, etc.): Implicit inferences or norms don’t depend on an attitude or position towards the inference or norm. Brandom claims that litmus paper and iron rusting follow rules—they literally obey norms. Expliciting is the act or attitude of making implicit inferences and norms explicit. Implicit inference and norms also exist socially, linguistically—in every capacity—and they are just as real and objective as iron rusting, though not in the sense of top-down platonic truths. Brandom says that animals obey norms and make inferences only inasmuch as rusty nails do; for him, implicit reasoning requires expliciting (see below).

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<sup>28</sup> For a lucid introduction to Brandom’s work, see Jeremy Wanderer’s *Robert Brandom* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008). His clarity and my debt to him should be evident in this section, in which I draw heavily from him.

<sup>29</sup> Brandom, “From a Critique of Cognitive Internalism to a Conception of Objective Spirit: Reflections on Descombes’ Anthropological Holism,” *Inquiry* 47 (2004): 238.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. Brandom, *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 14 and 17.

Expliciting, Making Explicit: For some reason Brandom says “expliciting,” not explicating; Jeremy Wander’s helpful introduction to his work doesn’t use the neologism, and he considers this concept, central as it is, to be rather unclear and unstable in Brandom’s thought.<sup>31</sup> What is clear is that expliciting is both an ability and a practice. The ability entails language, and involves being able to say or explain (explicit) abilities performed implicitly, like what makes for a good golf swing. Good expliciting, however, doesn’t depend on good implicit ability, as with sports coaches.<sup>32</sup> One can even make explicit social and linguistic practices and norms, and though this is of great interest to Brandom, it doesn’t bear directly on this thesis.

Another way to understand making explicit is according to Brandom’s “two-ply account of observation.” As Wanderer summarizes it, “claiming that ‘the swatch is red’, involves an exercise of two distinct practical capacities...the ability to respond differently to some stimulus, and...the ability to make a move in a linguistic practice.”<sup>33</sup> It’s not enough to be aware of or even respond to something implicitly; one must be able to make explicit and engage explicitly that thing for there to be real rational activity.

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<sup>31</sup> Wanderer, 216, n.3.

<sup>32</sup> Brandom, *Between Saying and Doing: Towards an Analytic Pragmatism*. 2008 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23.

<sup>33</sup> Wanderer, 23.

Normative: “Normative vocabulary,” explains Wanderer, “involves terms that are fraught with ought. Examples include terms such as ‘correct’, ‘should’, ‘good’, ‘permissible’, obligatory’, and ‘right’.”<sup>34</sup> Norms exist and are binding regardless of whether or not they are known or even can be known (see the next section).

When I use the word normativity, I mean the objectively prescriptive good that pertains to and supervenes over different categories of things and concepts, the same against which we can evaluate instances of such categories. Normativity for animals is the objective structure of teleology and flourishing particular to the animal, relevant group of animals, species, etc. I find this in keeping with Brandom’s conception of norms, specifically in regards to socio-linguistic norms, but it also fully encompasses natural (teleological, evolutionary, etc.) normativity in Okrent’s sense and in the Aristotelian/Thomistic sense more generally.

Humans have a unique kind of normativity in that the norms that govern our behavior aren’t natural but rational. We act based on reasons that transcend the individual and social norms set by biology and society. For Brandom, such human norms are Hegelian, though for our purposes, just what those norms are doesn’t matter.

Simple vs. Interpreting Performers, Normative Statuses vs. Attitudes: A simple performer’s performance can be treated as having a normative status, though the performer doesn’t have a normative attitude (in theory or with mechanical or chemical performers). An interpreting

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 36.

performer, by virtue of its normative attitudes, institutes—creates, maintains, or develops—normative statuses.

Inference: Taking one claim or assertion as the basis for another claim or assertion. This giving and taking for reasons is characteristic of sapience. Everything is implicitly connected in a web of inferences (tree, wood, house, hammer, nail, roof, rain, to invoke Heidegger here), and to be sapient is to draw out these inferences (to make explicit), as well as live and move about in the space of reasons, of theoretical inferences (inferences based on beliefs and desires, rules of logic, etc.).

### **Mental Content, Mental States**

Although the distinction between mental content and mental states is not fixed in the literature, I adopt Okrent's usage. For him, mental content is simply the mental stuff that's there (be it some kind of representation or simply perception or whatever), whereas mental states are intentional positions in regard to the mental content. More specifically, mental states are the "beliefs and desires of rational agents" that persist over time, including "natural" (biological/evolutionary) states and "rational" (individual/subjective) states.<sup>35</sup>

Attributing mental content to animals is innocuous enough, though it doesn't really work with very simple forms of animal life (and so I insist in Chapter Four that we just stick with

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<sup>35</sup> Mark Okrent, *Rational Animals: The Teleological Roots of Intentionality* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 148-149.

teleology); attributing mental states, however, is presumptuous and anthropomorphic—indeed linguomorphic—since the real fault is to attribute an overly linguoform view of mental life to animals, for which we have little justification.

All animals have mental content or mental perception, whatever that might be like. Of course the richness of representation and perception varies greatly from frogs to dogs, and from horses to humans, and more basic animals may not have any kind of central “mental” content of perception at all. Intentional states are propositional, though not necessarily linguistic (at least in principle). The temptation (into which I believe Okrent unwittingly falls) is to think of propositions in terms of language; the alternative (my suggestion) would be to think of them not as sentences but as modalities.<sup>36</sup> The implicit grasp of a series of modalities, affected by dispositions and desire, is entirely different from the explicit arrangement of propositions, about which we can discuss and ponder along with our dispositions and desires. Humans have language and reflection; higher-order animals may have a rich and creative grasp of modalities and their own motives and dispositions, but we don’t need to appeal to language or introspection to explain their mental lives. Indeed, to project language or introspection would be to anthropomorphize them—to linguomorphize them—and I argue in Chapter Four that this is precisely what Okrent does, despite his great insight into normative teleology.

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<sup>36</sup> Thanks to Jon Cogburn for introducing the concept of modality into this discussion.

## Why Care about this Problem?

Jeremy Wanderer doesn't take issue with Brandom's use of parrots and thermometers as counterpoints to human sapience:

it may seem chauvinistic in the extreme, [but] the intention is not to catalogue purported deficiencies designed to elevate the status of man over beast. ... Without a doubt, this demarcational starting point forces attention on our own case, but such reflection is not anthropocentric *per se*, and not all self-regard need be dismissed as excessive.<sup>37</sup>

Why shouldn't we agree?

First, Brandom is too often and too egregiously "beastly towards the beasts," to use his phrase, for us not to level the charge of anthropocentric chauvinism.<sup>38</sup> I draw this out in Chapter 1. Additionally, his philosophy is simply wrong when it comes to animals, and so in the interest of truth I feel obligated to correct him, especially since his core assumptions (and even some of his superfluous ones) don't commit him to the anti-animal stance he presents. Furthermore, I echo MacIntyre's motive for writing *Dependant Rational Animals*, that humans are a kind of animal, and to misunderstand them is to misunderstand ourselves.<sup>39</sup> Thus, as insightful as Brandom's work is, it's deficient in regard to what we share with animals. In this thesis I hope to draw out our shared engagement with the world in a way that doesn't compromise Brandom's philosophy of language and mind but in fact enhances it.

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<sup>37</sup> Wanderer, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 7.

<sup>39</sup> MacIntyre, 5.

**CHAPTER ONE:  
INTRODUCING THE PROBLEM OF ANIMAL MINDS IN BRANDOM<sup>40</sup>**

*As distinguished from the extantness of material things and from the existence of humans, we call the mode of being of plants and animals: life.*  
Martin Heidegger<sup>41</sup>

Robert Brandom refers to humans as concept-using animals, distinct from other animals in their discursive practices, namely in their ability to articulate inferences, and he convincingly shows how concepts are commitments that are articulatable within a web of reasons. This web links implicit and explicit inferences, and, Brandom claims, is inherently linguistic. If we grant Brandom's definition of linguistic discourse as unique to human cognition (thus precluding discussion of putative nonhuman language and discourse, let alone infants and severely impaired humans who cannot articulate reasons), we still run into a problem concerning nonhuman, higher-order animals (hereafter "animals"), for Brandom lumps animal cognition with mechanical computation throughout his major opus, *Making It Explicit*, and its abbreviated form, *Articulating Reasons*. He often speaks of parrots as a kind of thermostat reacting reliably to stimuli and nothing more. The problem has two dimensions: counterintuitive conclusions and their corresponding (im)moral implications.

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<sup>40</sup> This chapter was originally published as "Articulating Animals: Animals and Implicit Inferences in Brandom's Work," *Between the Species* 14, no. 1 (2011): 40-56. It is reprinted by permission of the editor, Joe Lynch.

<sup>41</sup> *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 14.

There seems to be an obvious categorical difference between animals such as parrots and artifacts such as thermostats, so Brandom's insistent grouping of the two together fails to correspond to our (or at least my) intuitions of reality. Brandom usually associates animals and artifacts when he is emphasizing how human perception exceeds mere stimuli—we see red in a web of inferences, such as blood, wine, stop, rage, etc. Insofar as Brandom is exaggerating the mechanical aspect of animals in order to more clearly contrast them with the discursive aspect of humans, we can grant him rhetorical license. The ease and frequency of this reductive gesture, however, suggests otherwise.

Brandom's philosophical categorization of humans leaves little doubt that he actually views animals as biological machines. What would be nondiscursive (pre-linguistic) inferences in humans are analogous in animals to the nondiscursive deductions of computers. That is, Brandom draws a sharp line between humans and nonhumans: only humans make inferences. If animals are no more than machines, we have no more moral duty towards animals than we do towards machines.

Brandom admits that his project “risks being beastly to the beasts” because it focuses on “the fanciest sort of intentionality”—ours—“that involves expressive capacities that cannot be made sense of apart from participation in linguistic practices.”<sup>42</sup> He claims that his project depends on “the lower grades of intentionality,” presumably of animals, inasmuch as he hopes to show how “linguistic abilities arise out of nonlinguistic ones.”<sup>43</sup> That this pseudo-apology

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<sup>42</sup> *Making It Explicit*, 7.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

follows a discussion of “Descartes’ seminal demarcational story” should clue the reader into the fact that Brandom in truth views animals and artifacts in the same light—both without intentionality except in the basest form, such as iron rusting.<sup>44</sup> The mechanistic logic that denies conceptual mental content with language in animals, as found in Descartes, runs throughout Brandom’s work.

The implications of this Cartesian gesture go against our moral intuitions that recognize some responsibility towards animals based on their cognitive faculties, emotions, ability to feel pain, etc.; but even if this moral intuition, however deeply rooted, is nothing more than an argument from analogy, as Peter Harrison claims,<sup>45</sup> there is still the problem of categorically treating animals as machines, at least in the Heideggerian sense of enframing.<sup>46</sup> That is, the intuition that harming an animal is categorically different than “harming” an artifact goes beyond mere analogies between humans and animals—we humans evidently recognize that the difference between a live animal and a dead animal is not the same as the difference between a functioning machine and a defunct machine. I contend that we categorically view *living things* as having inherent value apart from any imputed value we may attribute to animals and artifacts alike.

To deny this moral obligation humans have towards living things is to label any sentiments towards animals as no different from those we may have towards artifacts (a wedding

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 6; 33-34, Cf. Okrent, 81.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Harrison, “Do animals feel pain?,” in *Philosophy* 66 (1991): 25-40.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *Basic Writings*, 2nd ed., ed. David Farrell Krell, 307-342 (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2008 [1977]).

ring, for example). That is, such sentiments could be dismissed in pursuit of, say, science: live vivisections of animals would be like tinkering with a running machine. This, as in Descartes' day, goes against our moral intuitions about life and about responsibility towards living things.

If we believe there is something that makes animals and artifacts ultimately incommensurable, namely *life*, can we make sense of the distinction of living/non-living in light of Brandom's human/nonhuman distinction? That is, would modifying Brandom's initial distinction between humans and nonhumans create room for the distinction between animals and artifacts? Or, keeping Brandom's initial distinction, what further distinctions need to be made to separate animals from artifacts?

We need to briefly go over how Brandom's theory of inferentialism works before we can hope to locate or create a space within the theory for animals. We also need to show how animals differ from nonanimals in order to group them with humans in opposition to mere things.

### **Differentiating Humans from Animals**

Both *Making It Explicit* and *Articulating Reasons* are about the "use and content of concepts" especially as regards "the nature of *language* [in] . . . us rational, indeed logical, concept-mongering creatures" (and since the latter is the shorter, condensed version of the two, most of my references are to *Articulating Reasons*).<sup>47</sup> Moreover, in the Introduction to *Articulating Reasons*, Brandom lays his cards on the table, showing where he stands on nine philosophical issues that bear on his inferentialism. The Introduction makes clear his

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<sup>47</sup> *Making It Explicit*, 1; *Articulating Reasons*, xi.

disingenuous position on animal minds, and by looking at the first five methodological stances, I hope to pinpoint where his theory could be altered so as to create a space for animals as distinct from artifacts.

His first foundational philosophical position, siding with “differentiation” over “assimilation” (prioritizing “discontinuities between discursive and nondiscursive creatures”) bears most directly on the topic at hand.<sup>48</sup> Brandom is not just showing his differential approach towards “creatures”; already—on page 2—he is showing his indifference towards nonhuman animals by assimilating them with artifacts: “the judgments and actions of *concept users*, on the one hand, and the uptake of environmental information and instrumental interventions of *non-concept-using organisms and artifacts*, on the other.”<sup>49</sup> The crux of this assimilation of animals and artifacts is that Brandom opposes them both as non-concept-using to humans, who are, by definition, concept-using.

The implicit reason for rejecting conceptual ability in animals lies in Brandom’s second stance as a pragmatic functionalist, rather than a “platonist.” The “platonist,” here, is one who explains the “use of concepts in terms of a prior understanding of conceptual content”; Brandom, however, “seeks to explain how the use of linguistic expressions, or the functional role of intentional states, *confers* conceptual content on them.”<sup>50</sup> The platonist would consider what conceptual content might or must be and then locate it, presumably by degree, in higher- and

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<sup>48</sup> *Articulating Reasons*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, my emphasis.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, my emphasis.

lower-order animals. For Brandom, however, our unique ability to make “*explicit* propositions or principles form the direction of what is *implicit* in practices” indicates, or rather consists in, our unique capacity to have, through participation, (linguistic) conceptions of reality, and defines us as sapient creatures.<sup>51</sup> According to Brandom, one’s conception of reality (as concepts) is an all or nothing game.

Animals and artifacts don’t have conceptions of the world, according to Brandom, because they do not have language as such, they only have “a primitive kind of practical taking of something *as* something.”<sup>52</sup> For Brandom, neither the mind nor language is the locus of intentionality—his third philosophical position. “Concepts are applied in the realm of *language* by the public use of sentences and other linguistic expressions,” says Brandom, “[and] are applied in the realm of *mind* by the private adoption of and rational reliance on beliefs and other intentional states.”<sup>53</sup> Since animals don’t have a public language, and “concept use is not intelligible in a context that does not include language use,” then they can’t have beliefs and intentional states.<sup>54</sup> Even “[o]ur mammalian cousins, primate ancestors, and neonatal offspring,” though “sentient and purposive but not discursive creatures,” don’t have concepts and intentional states.<sup>55</sup> We may interpret them derivatively as having intentionality, but they do not. If our

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Making It Explicit*, 33-34.

<sup>53</sup> *Articulating Reasons*, 5.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

<sup>55</sup> *Making It Explicit*, 276.

infants and evolutionary forefathers can't make implicit inferences, then certainly there's no room for animal intentionality.

The denial of intentional states with external language in animals corresponds with Brandom's fourth preference for expression over representation as the genus of concepts. The project of "representation," contra Brandom's project, assumes that "simpler forms of [representation] are exhibited already in the activity of non-concept-using creatures, and on that basis elaborate ever more complex forms until one reaches something recognizable as specifically *conceptual* representation."<sup>56</sup> For Brandom, however, expressions ("making *explicit* what is *implicit*") and concepts are necessarily related.<sup>57</sup> The assumption, again, is that only humans can do this unique thing, namely "turning something we can initially only *do* into something we can *say*: codifying some sort of knowing *how* in the form of knowing *that*."<sup>58</sup> ("Initially" seems to apply to pre-linguistic humans, i.e. infants, not evolutionarily pre-human animals, e.g. orangutans.)

The fifth stance, viewing the conceptual as inferential, not intentional, is a major fulcrum of Brandom's theory and, perhaps equally so, of my criticism. (Accordingly, this is the last of the nine stances I will discuss, the other four being less pertinent.) He says, "[W]hat distinguishes specifically *discursive* practices from the doings of non-concept-using creatures is their

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<sup>56</sup> *Articulating Reasons*, 7.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

*inferential* articulation. To talk about concepts is to talk about roles in reasoning.”<sup>59</sup> Key to

Brandom’s inferentialism is that

it understands *expressing* something, making it *explicit*, as putting it in a form in which it can serve as and stand in need of *reasons*: a form in which it can serve as both premise and conclusion in *inferences*. Saying or thinking *that* things are thus-and-so is undertaking a distinctive kind of *inferentially* articulated commitment.<sup>60</sup>

Brandom’s inferentialism, therefore, encapsulates his “constitutive, pragmatist, relationally linguistic, conceptual expressivism” that differentiates humans from animals and artifacts (9).

My criticism is that Brandom unjustly ignores the difference between animals and artifacts by ignoring the minimum (though profound) similarity between humans and animals as living creatures. He fails by his own account:

Of course, wherever the story starts [assimilation or differentiation of the conceptual], it will need to account both for the ways in which concept use is like the comportments of non-discursive creatures and the ways in which it differs. Theories that *assimilate* conceptually structured activity to the nonconceptual activity out of which it arises . . . are in danger of failing to make enough of the difference. Theories that adopt the converse strategy [differentiation] . . . court the danger of not doing justice to generic similarities.<sup>61</sup>

Brandom simply does not do justice to the generic similarities of humans and animals, thereby trivializing what distinguishes animals from mere things.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 3.

## Differentiating Animals from Artifacts

In a rare and all too brief section of *Articulating Reasons*, Brandom distinguishes animals from artifacts:

Sentience is what we share with nonverbal animals such as cats—the capacity to be *aware* in the sense of being *awake*. Sentience, which so far as our understanding yet reaches is an exclusively biological phenomenon, is in turn to be distinguished from the mere reliable differential responsiveness we sentient share with artifacts such as thermostats and land mines. Sapience, by contrast, concerns *understanding* or intelligence other than irritability or arousal.<sup>62</sup>

According to Brandom, the pigeon and the thermostat are alike in their ability to reliably respond to stimuli, only pigeons do this biologically and thermostats mechanically. I'm afraid that would be Descartes' position as well.

But even if animals have no mind similar to humans (no sapience), the reduction of animals to mechanical operations implies the difference between animals and artifacts: what is amazing about a dog performing a trick is that it is performing a trick, that it is trained; the specialness of dog training as opposed to computer programming is made apparent when the dog gets confused and messes up. Machines don't get nervous or distracted by crowds of people; they don't suddenly become more interested in an observer's hat or shoe than in their master's voice or treat. That is, the ability to mechanize animals (imperfectly) only reveals the fact that they are not machines.

Consider this typical, inhumane comparison of a thermometer and a parrot: "The difference between a tape-triggering thermometer or a parrot trained to utter 'It's getting

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 157.

warmer' when exposed to suitable changes of temperature and the human observer's . . . lies . . . in the *understanding* of the classificatory significance attributed to those responses," i.e., lies in the human's understanding of the meaning of "it's getting warmer" and the thermometer/animal's lack of understanding.<sup>63</sup>

Now let us conceive of the situation differently and see how Brandom's conclusions fare. Let's keep the thermometer and the human observer from off the street, but instead of a parrot let's use a foreigner who can't speak the native tongue, but whom we taught to successfully announce when "it's getting warmer" without teaching her what the words mean.

That "the [American] observer does and the instrument does not grasp or attribute such a signification to its own response" still is true in the adapted situation, but what about with the foreign observer?<sup>64</sup> Are we to assume that even though she doesn't have the linguistic analogues to "it's getting warmer," she wouldn't (or couldn't) grasp the implicit meaning of her response to stimuli, namely that *it's getting warmer*?

I think it is fair to assume that, given human intellect, humans can understand implicit meanings even without any ability to make explicit (in the English language, for example) what they understand implicitly. That is, the foreigner would understand that it is getting warmer, and that getting warmer corresponds to the sounds "ĩts gĕt tĩng wŏrm'ər"; she would be able to understand the semantic correspondence to the stimulus no matter whether she were trained to say "es wird wärmer" or "plank slab block." We know this because, as Brandom points out,

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<sup>63</sup> *Making It Explicit*, 32.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

humans can understand inferences theoretically. If we grant that animals can't understand *theoretical* inferences, on what grounds besides presumption does Brandom assert that animals have no more implicit understanding of *practical* inferences than artifacts such as thermometers do? Mark Okrent is able to give a compelling account of animal rationality grounded in teleology while still maintaining a unique kind of linguistic rationality in humans (grounded in their self-determining teleology). That is, even if Brandom is right to assert that humans alone can perform theoretical inferences, Okrent shows again and again how animals perform what can only be called practical inferences.

Okrent works off Donald Griffin's description of the plover bird's "broken wing display,"<sup>65</sup> a creatively variable defense mechanism used by other bird species as well, and perhaps also by fish.<sup>66</sup> The plover feigns injury to distract predators away from the bird's nest, but not in a programmatic way; rather, the bird behaves in a richly versatile way, adapting to the changing situation, taking into consideration, so to speak, variable environmental factors and actions of the predator, what Michael Wheeler might call flexible, adaptive richness.<sup>67</sup> Of note to Okrent is that the bird isn't merely responding to given stimuli according to biological programming (if you will) or innate goals, as lower-order animals do. The *Sphex* wasp, for instance, displays a kind of rationality that adapts to changes in its environment, but it adapts in a

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<sup>65</sup> Donald R. Griffin, *Animal Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 88-90.

<sup>66</sup> Ruxton, Graeme, Thomas Sherratt, and Michael Speed, *Avoiding Attack: The Evolutionary Ecology of Crypsis, Warning Signals, and Mimicry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.)

<sup>67</sup> Michael Wheeler, *Reconstructing the Cognitive World: The Next Step* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

predictable, systematic way when an experimenter moves the food for its eggs, a caterpillar, as the wasp checks the burrow before adding the caterpillar.<sup>68</sup> Okrent comments,

What the plover does is *more* versatile and adaptive than what the wasp does in a wider range of circumstances. The plover can deal with the presence of experimental intervention [of a scientist] far more effectively than the wasp can, for example. And the plover is far more capable of adjusting her behavior in light of what seems to be a recognition of the failure of a previous behavior to achieve its proximate end than is the wasp. You won't find a plover endlessly repeating a failed subroutine in the way that the wasp in the example does. For those reasons, among others, we say that the plover's behavior is more *rational*.<sup>69</sup>

By more rational, Okrent means that lower-order animals only have an instrumental rationality (teleology), whereas higher-order animals act according to goals that are determined by their rational beliefs and desires (though they lack mental awareness of intentionality). Okrent's contention that higher-order animals act on (non-conscious) intentionality is a stronger claim than I am making, that animals make practical inferences. Okrent shows that animals act according to the general principles of their teleology (innate goals), and in ways that are "flexible, versatile, and appropriate in novel ways" (intentionality),<sup>70</sup> and this intentional teleology fits—if not exceeds—Brandom's description of the "intrinsically motivating preferences or desires" of practical inferences and rational action,<sup>71</sup> thus showing that practical inferences are prior to, or at least separable from, theoretical inferences.

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<sup>68</sup> Okrent, 7; working off a description by Dean E. Wooldridge in *The Machinery of the Brain* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 82.

<sup>69</sup> Okrent, 8.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>71</sup> *Articulating Reasons*, 31.

Therefore, to return to the thermometer parrot story, the parrot is more like a foreigner than a thermometer in saying that it's getting warmer, for they are both recognizing and acting upon a desired goal, a practical inference, as opposed to the thermometer which simply responds to "merely external factors," as Okrent would put it.<sup>72</sup> Though neither the parrot nor the foreigner understands the semantics of the English language, they both recognize the inference that when it gets warmer, they say "it's getting warmer," whereas the thermometer can't make practical inferences. Thus, rather than showing animals as reducible to biological machines, Brandom's example actually highlights the similarities of humans and animals as distinct from artifacts.

### **Synthesizing Animal Implicit and Human Explicit Understanding**

Although Brandom's anti-animal rhetoric in *Making It Explicit* and *Articulating Reasons* pervades his very system of inferentialism, the task of creating a space in his theory for animals to make implicit inferences may be easier than it seems. In fact, an earlier work of his gives us a rubric for incorporating animal inferences into his schema.

Brandom's 1985 "Varieties of Understanding" delves into familiar categories of understanding, "that which remains *implicit* in practice, and that which becomes *explicit* in principles."<sup>73</sup> Of course, Brandom is interested in "the sophisticated kind of understanding which is explicitly instituted, codified, and communicated in the form of explications" (which are

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<sup>72</sup> Okrent, 81.

<sup>73</sup> Robert B. Brandom, "Varieties of Understanding," in *Reason and Rationality in Natural Science*, ed. N. Rescher, 27-51 (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 27.

ultimately founded upon *implicit* practice), but he rather candidly (for him) affirms implicit inferences apart from (not merely prior to) explicit understanding, albeit somewhat condescendingly: “Students of animal learning are concerned with the simple kind of understanding which is implicit in the skilled practice of prelinguistic performers whose behavior must be treated as regular rather than rule governed.”<sup>74</sup> In contrast with his recent work which emphasizes a differentialist approach to rationality, here Brandom the “pragmatist emphasizes the continuity of human understanding with animal understanding . . . by contrast to the platonist’s emphasis on the discontinuities marked by animals’ incapacity to act according to explicit principles.”<sup>75</sup> Let us discuss his pragmatist approach here before reconciling it with his later, more platonic approach.

The first move of the pragmatist “is to try to explain understanding *that* something is the case . . . in terms of understanding *how* to do something, and further to understand understanding . . . simply as being able to do something, to perform appropriately according to some practice.”<sup>76</sup> Implicit inferences involve doing the appropriate things appropriately—a cat waiting for a mouse, a man shooing a fly. While this is prelinguistic, I don’t see why it mustn’t include rationality, broadly construed, perhaps even what we call *phronesis*.<sup>77</sup> We needn’t attribute

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Indeed, Aristotle and Aquinas attribute *phronesis* to some animals and humans. See MacIntyre, 5-6. Sorabji, however, believes that the denying of *logos* and *doxa* and the expansion of perception (*aisthanesthai*) in animals is precisely the error of Aristotle that marks the “crisis”

beliefs and desires, as Mark Okrent does, to quasi-rational animals to admit some form of rationality to animals. Simply put, higher-order animals seem to display flexible and adaptive goal-directed behavior, what I want to call *phronesis*, much like we do—but this does not obviate the extreme gap between such shared *phronesis* and the uniquely human rationality of self-reflection, anxiety, soul, conscience, Dasein, or, as Brandom would have it, the explanatory understanding involved in making inferences explicit.

Brandom continues: “to describe the form of such an account [of explicit understanding],” however, “is not to offer an account of explicit understanding.”<sup>78</sup> Even if we can give an account of a broken-wing display performing bird in terms of beliefs and desires (as Okrent does), our description does not imply such explicit understanding in the bird (as Okrent rightly points out).<sup>79</sup> That is, even if the bird is reasoning (adapting to unique situations with unique goals), it is, for all we know, *not* reasoning in a reflective way (“If I do such and such maybe—I hope!—such and such will happen”); rather, it is reasoning only on the implicit level (as we do when we judge whether to scoot our seat forward or back when sitting). When we hail a taxi, it involves some kind of thought or desire (a taxi) and requisite action (signaling), but this thought and action isn’t reflective (“I find myself wanting a taxi”); just so with animals—actions, rationality, desires, or what have you, are reflexive, but not self-reflexive.

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of animal minds in the West; *phronesis* is not enough, for the denial of reason necessitates an expansion of perception in order to account for what animals do; Aquinas’s *vis aestimativa* comes to mind here. See Sorabji, 7-16.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Okrent, 2.

What distinguishes humans is the ability to make explicit such implicit desires, reasons, etc.—“inferences,” according to Brandom—in an explanatory gesture. Animals, however, can’t explain to themselves or to us *how* something is, only *that* something is. This “expliciting,” according to Brandom, goes hand in hand with “impliciting”; but if animals can’t “explicit,” how do they “implicit” inferences? The later Brandom seems unable to leave room in his philosophy for animals to be able to make implicit inferences, and so lumps the animals with the artifacts. Nonetheless, I contend that we can redeem Brandom’s later two-sides-of-the-coin approach to inferences by appealing to his earlier account of understanding, and so rescue animals from the ghetto of Cartesian objects.

We can allow for animals to have implicit inferences but not the ability to make such inferences explicit, without rejecting the two-sided coin account of inferences, if we allow humans to make explicit animal inferences on their behalf. In order to “turn [implicit inferences] into an [explicit] account one must at least be prepared to offer a pragmatist story about how to build explicit understanding as codified in principles out of forms of understanding which are merely implicit, manifesting themselves only in appropriate practice and not in such principles.”<sup>80</sup> Such an explication, however, cannot be mere description, as noted above. For example, such an explication cannot merely appeal to evolutionary biology or behaviorism. We need a story that goes beyond mere description or ascription, and we will attempt that in the following chapters.

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<sup>80</sup> Brandom, “Varieties of Understanding,” 28.

## CHAPTER TWO: LOCATING THE PROBLEM WITHIN BRANDOM'S APPROPRIATION OF HEIDEGGER

*Commonly the arguments run something like this. Some particular capacity is made the object of enquiry....And it is then shown how, contrary to the views of some philosophical predecessor, the human exercise of this particular capacity involves the possession and use of language. It is finally further concluded that, because nonhuman animals do not possess language, or at least the requisite kind of language, they must also lack the capacity or ability or power in question.*

MacIntyre<sup>81</sup>

Finding out how Brandom appropriates Heidegger into his philosophy is a rather easy task, for he discusses Heidegger in relation to his work explicitly in his book, *Tales of the Mighty Dead*. *Tales* is a “historical” presentation of Brandom’s philosophy, whereas his other works—he mentions specifically *Making It Explicit* and *Articulating Reasons*—have been of a more systematic nature.<sup>82</sup> Brandom’s heroes are, as he puts it, a “motley group,” but they are also not unsurprising: Spinoza, Leibniz, Hegel, Frege, Heidegger, and Sellars.<sup>83</sup> He has an essay or two on each thinker besides three introductory chapters. The three chapters form Part One, which stands alone as a discussion of the tradition generally, and in the brief Heidegger section of Chapter 2 we can see how Brandom’s appropriation of Heidegger goes awry.

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<sup>81</sup> MacIntyre, 13.

<sup>82</sup> Robert Brandom. *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

## **Brandom's Inferentialist Reading of Zu- and Vorhandenheit**

Brandom seems to think, perhaps rightly, that Heidegger's most important contribution to philosophy is the ontological distinction between Zu- and Vorhandenheit. Unfortunately, Brandom manipulates the terms so that while maintaining their basic meaning, he trivializes the primacy of Zuhandenheit by making the two mutually dependent. This, I will argue, explains why Brandom cannot account for animal minds whereas an orthodox take on Heidegger's Zu- and Vorhandenheit can.

Brandom reads Heidegger as a pragmatist, which is an understandable (even if not a desirable) reading, and I don't think Brandom's pragmatism directly sets him up for failure with animal minds. Prima facie, Brandom's description of the pragmatist project, "to explain knowing *that* in terms of knowing *how*," looks to line up quite nicely with Vor- and Zuhandenheit, the ontology of a thing as an item of inquiry and as an item in use.<sup>84</sup> I believe that Brandom's pragmatism and Heidegger's Vorhandenheit/Zuhandenheit ontology can match up in an interesting way, but not as Brandom develops it.

Similarly, and more importantly, Brandom reads inferentialism into Heidegger. He reads Vorhandenheit as "high-end intentionality" and Zuhandenheit as "a kind of *preconceptual* intentionality."<sup>85</sup> I believe we can understand inferentialism in terms of Vor- and Zuhandenheit, and indeed we ought to, but the way Brandom develops the connection fails, particularly in regards to animal minds as I shall argue.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 75.

## A Review of Heidegger's Zu- and Vorhandenheit

Let us begin by rehashing briefly the genius of Heidegger's zu – and vorhanden ontological distinction. Heidegger's insight is that we do not think of a hammer objectively (as an object of inquiry) while using it to hammer. That is, much of our interaction with the world is direct, such as sitting in a chair or catching ourselves as we trip over something. Abstract thought does not come into play in such operations unless the hammer or chair breaks. Only then is the object viewed as something foreign or alien to us, whereas before the hammer was an extension of us for doing a certain type of thing, and the chair a means for us to extend ourselves in a certain way. That is, the hammer is not some object which we first consider abstractly as weighing so much and having such a shape, which then gives it the property of being a hammer. Objects don't have usability or equipmentality added to them, since we engage with items of gear prior to or without considering them as objects of study. The opposite is not so: we cannot view things objectively without any reference to use. Every objective quality is a quality in reference to its function, its place in the world. There is no purely objective object of contemplation; even if there were, let's say the Good, its singular value (at least to us) would still place it in our world even if we admit that it is beyond being, beyond our world.

Thus we learn two things from Heidegger's insight: (1) zuhanden equipmentality is more originary ontology that (2) grounds the vorhanden ontology of things as objects. The third insight—the real upshot, perhaps, of this line of thought—is that meaning (or a part of meaning), the more originary kind of meaning, is a meaning of *doing*, of use. The word “screwdriver” doesn't just mean some vorhanden definition found in a dictionary; on a deeper level, “screwdriver” means this: the grasping of something in your hand while twisting it. A hammer is

a thing meant for hammering, that is, a thing for banging another thing with, especially if that other thing is a nail. A forth derivative point is that there is a network of *Zuhandenheit*. We are well aware of the network of signs and symbols made famous by the poststructuralists, but Heidegger reveals a more originary web of *zuhanden* things: hammering implies nails and wood, which implies building, which implies buildings, dwellings, where we dwell, live, living, life, the world, etc.

### **Brandom's Appropriation of Zu- and Vorhandenheit**

Now it should be obvious, even if unwelcome to the orthodox Heideggerian, why Brandom is so fond of *Zu-* and *Vorhandenheit*: he sees a pragmatic *doing x* as grounding the meaning of *that x*, and he sees the implicit inferences as grounding the explicit inferences (the pragmatic as grounding the abstract inferences). As Brandom puts it,

our practical nonconceptual dealings with things that form the necessary background for understanding how it is possible for us to achieve the disinterested representational perspective from which we judge or state how things are... *Vorhandensein* is precipitated out of *Zuhandensein*—...the capacity to *say* or *think* anything depends on our practical capacities to *do* things correctly or incorrectly.<sup>86</sup>

So far so good, but here Brandom departs from Heidegger in a way that prevents the possibility of animal minds. *Vorhandenheit*, as Brandom notes, is the realm of language, of giving and asking for reasons. Animals lack this ability to operate in a public space of linguistic rationality, and so, if they are to have any kind of mind or world, it must be confined to the realm

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

of *Zuhandenheit* (if that term can be transferred to whatever animals do). I contest that minimally we may infer that animals make implicit inferences, which is to say that they operate according to *Zuhandenheit* (though not in the rich sense of *Dasein* whose *Zuhandenheit* is informed by *Vorhandenheit*, as in the learning to drive stick shift); that is, I contest that if Brandom didn't go beyond Heidegger on this point, he would have a place for animal minds in his philosophy. But Brandom explicitly rejects any *Zuhandenheit* apart from *Vorhandenheit*, and thus any space for animal minds:

At this point it is tempting to see the world of equipment as *autonomous*, as something that could be in place before, or otherwise in the absence of the particular linguistic practices.... If that is right, then Heidegger is putting forward a 'layer cake' picture of the relation between the two sorts of intentionality. ...But the layer cake picture cannot be right.<sup>87</sup>

Brandom believes that, contra Heidegger, *Zuhandenheit* is reciprocally dependent on

*Vorhandenheit*:

one might take it as a lesson of natural science that *Zuhandensein* is also *reference* dependent on *Vorhandensein*: unless there were objective facts stateable in assertions, there could not be any social practices at all. Since assertions...*are* a special kind of equipment, it is obvious that nothing can show up to us as *vorhanden* unless we are worlded.<sup>88</sup>

Brandom is asserting that social practice, a kind of *Zuhandensein*, is only possible if there are things to be social about, namely a world in which to practice. But this is not a valid dismissal of the primacy of *Zuhandensein*—as Brandom pointed out on the previous page: “We will not say

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-81.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

that before we had the concepts there was no mass, no electrons, and so on.”<sup>89</sup> What then is Brandom getting at? In Chapter 11, he explicitly says that *Vorhandenheit* is necessary, because otherwise “this account can be told about pre- or nonlinguistic creatures [animals], as exemplifying an autonomous level of functioning on which the capacity for linguistic practice is causally and conceptually parasitic.”<sup>90</sup> Brandom recognizes that Heidegger’s prioritizing of *Zuhandenheit* allows for animals to similarly engage the world in a fundamental way; for Brandom, this is parasitic—no pun intended, I’m sure. Because Brandom refuses to allow for animals to have rich, *zuhanden* engagement with the world, he makes *Zu-* and *Vorhandenheit* reciprocally dependent, though *Zuhandenheit* remains the “first among equals” since *Zuhandensein* links up with *Mitdasein*, another constitutive aspect of *Dasein*.<sup>91</sup>

Brandom argues that Heidegger must be committed to the reciprocal structure of, as he puts it, implicit and explicit inferences, and indeed, at least in *Being and Time*, it appears that Heidegger is very much committed to this reciprocal structure. Heidegger interprets the Greek *λόγος* as “*Rede*,” which is translated by Macquarrie and Robinson as “discourse” or “talk,” as distinct from “*Sprache*” (“language”) and from “*Gerede*” (“idle talk”). Thus “*Dasein*, man’s Being, is ‘defined’ as the *ζῶον λόγον ἔχον*—as that living thing whose Being is essentially determined by the potentiality for discourse.”<sup>92</sup> Heidegger is able to make this connection

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>90</sup> Brandom, *Tales*, 330.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-82.

<sup>92</sup> *Being and Time*, 25.

because *λόγος*, which refers to the man's distinctive faculty of reason (*Vernunft*), shares the same root as *λέγειν*, which means "to hold discourse," or more generally, "laying out, exhibiting, setting forth, recounting, telling a tale, making a statement."<sup>93</sup> *Λογος*, Heidegger notes, is also tied to *λεγόμενον*:

Moreover, *λόγος* can signify the *reason* [*Vernunft*]. And because, moreover, *λόγος* is used not only with the signification of *λέγειν* but also with that of *λεγόμενον* (that which is exhibited, as such), and because the latter is nothing else than the *'υποκείμενον* which, as present-at-hand, already lies at the *bottom* [zum *Grunde*] of any procedure of addressing oneself to it or discussing it, *λόγος qua λεγόμενον* means the ground, the *ratio*... visible in its relation to something in its 'relatedness', *λόγος* acquires the signification of *relation* and *relationship*.<sup>94</sup>

Heidegger thus weds discourse and present-at-hand etymologically as a relationship unified in reason. The present-at-hand *grounds* discourse but not, apparently, in the sensing of founding, but in the sense of grounding, of Grund; the relationship between present-at-hand and discourse isn't causal or temporal but coeval. As Brandom would put it, reason is the relationship between the implicit and the explicit, the ability to make explicit implicit truth.

Lest we miss the connection of language (discourse) to mind in Heidegger, which is so troubling in Brandom, we must remember that "*Discourse is existentially equiprimordial with state-of-mind and understanding.*"<sup>95</sup> However, Heidegger follows this sentence with a stronger claim, something seemingly opposite of what I am arguing in my thesis as a whole. Heidegger seems to make "expliciting" (Brandom's word) prior to any implicit truth (e.g. that math only

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., n. 3, p. 25; n. 1, p. 58.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 161.

has meaning or truth once Dasein makes it explicit): “The intelligibility of something has always been articulated, even before there is any appropriative interpretation of it. Discourse is the Articulation of intelligibility.”<sup>96</sup> This is made clearer in the lecture course that culminated in *Being and Time*. Heidegger says that

It is also a matter of fact that our simplest perception and constitutive states are already *expressed*, even more, are *interpreted* in a certain way. What is primary and original here? It is not so much that we see the objects and things but rather that we first talk about them. To put it more precisely: we do not say what we see, but rather the reverse, we see what *one says* about the matter.<sup>97</sup>

This characterization in *The History of the Concept of Time* shows that *in perception*, discourse precedes perception *for Dasein*. Of course *Being and Time* is famously only an investigation of the being that asks about Being; it is not an investigation of Being itself, but only inasmuch it's related to Dasein. This existential aspect of *Being and Time* seems to be lost on Brandom who universalizes the relationship between discourse and present-at-hand truth. What a more careful reading of Paragraph 34 shows is that it is only (as far as we know) true of Dasein that the explicit and the implicit are reciprocally related. If we don't take a superficial reading of Heidegger, we see that Dasein shares with animals an originary connection to the world, which we'll discuss in the next chapter.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Heidegger, Martin. *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 56.

### CHAPTER THREE: HEIDEGGER'S SNAIL AND OTHER (WORLD-)POOR ANIMALS

*Because plants and animals are lodged in their respective environments but are never placed freely in the clearing of being which alone is "world," they lack language. But in being denied language they are not thereby suspended wordlessly in their environment.*

Martin Heidegger<sup>98</sup>

Some philosophers like Descartes and, more recently Robert Brandom, brilliant as they may be, seem entirely indifferent towards animals, as if animals in their own right are nothing but our playthings or nature's wild machines. On the other extreme, of course, are those from Pythagoras to Peter Singer who insist that the way we humans view each other, namely our ethical obligations towards one another, applies also to animals. Traditionally, the proper view of animals lies in the middle: we don't have moral obligations of the same kind towards animals (and it's certainly not reciprocal), but that does not make us indifferent towards them. The moral mean, then, does not underestimate what distinguishes man from beast, nor does it underestimate their commonalities. The early Heidegger's topology of beings follows this traditional schema.

Even within the traditional centrist position, however, people tend to gravitate towards the extremes of similarity and difference. What one takes as an example of "animal" usually betrays this bias. David Farrell Krell, for instance, is fond of discussing horses vis-à-vis Dasein—horses, those enlightened creatures that make us look like yahoos, are a domesticated

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<sup>98</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings of Martin Heidegger* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008 [1977]), 248.

animal, and their features are inevitably cast in the shadow of man (be it through evolutionary history, cultural history, military history, etc.).<sup>99</sup> Krell doesn't talk about the whiteness of the whale or of the tyger tyger, burning bright. Of course, poets have their own aesthetic reasons for choosing the animals they do in their works. Philosophers, however, must choose their examples for—shall we say—metaphysical reasons. Indeed, Heidegger's most explicit examples of animals as animals are the lizard and the bee in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.

The lizard and the bee are a far cry from the horses of Krell or the popular examples of “my dog,”<sup>100</sup> much to Krell's chagrin. However, Heidegger's more exotic and yet more common example of an animal in his early work, is, I shall argue, more interesting and more insightful—he chooses that pest, that delicacy, that alien of an animal, the snail.<sup>101</sup> In this chapter we will also discuss Heidegger's (world-)poor animals, the lizard and the bee. Necessarily, we will at the same time clarify what it is to be Dasein. Both we and the animal interact and engage directly with the world, but just what this world is or means to us and the animal remains to be seen.

Let us begin with the concept of a world, and then progress to the lizards and the bees of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. The lynchpin of the discussion, however, will come

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<sup>99</sup> David Farrell Krell, *Daimon Life: Heidegger and Life-Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). See, for example, page 100, where Krell says: “It became clear [to me] that in questions of ethics horses had the edge over Heidegger.”

<sup>100</sup> For an excellent book on the interconnectedness of man and animal, especially of dog and dog trainer, see Vicki Hearne, *Adam's Task* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987). Though the book is philosophical (Wittgensteinian), it doesn't pretend to get to the metaphysical root of our interaction with domesticated and trained animals.

<sup>101</sup> Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 165-167.

at the end when we see the intimate connection between Dasein and the snail through a close reading of *The History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*.

### **The World (Not as Will or Representation—or Materialism)**

There are two extremes of world that Heidegger is explicitly working against which can be summed up as a parody of Schopenhauer's magnum opus (also very much opposed by Heidegger): the world is not a place of vitalism or mystical dynamism, either in the sense of romantics like Schopenhauer and the early Nietzsche, or in the sense of psychological or egoistic individualism in vogue during Heidegger's time, especially that of Husserl and Scheler; neither is the world a representation of our minds or of a mind, as diverse people have thought from Plato and Augustine to Descartes, Berkeley, and Kant. Neither does Heidegger think that a scientific materialism can get anywhere close to the truth of things. He thus refuses to play the game of idealism or realism (pick your poison), and calls the bluff: we are already beings-in-the-world (something idealism overlooks),<sup>102</sup> and we are beings who ask after being (something scientific realism can't account for). Instead of these flawed categories, Heidegger thinks of our interaction in the world in terms of *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit*, in terms of a direct, handy engagement with the world and in terms of an abstract, present-at-hand (dis)engagement with the world.

Such an analysis of our being-in-the-world, though profound, leaves unanswered the question of the world *as* world, the world in which we have our being, the world that worlds.

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<sup>102</sup> See, for example, *Prolegomena*, 166-167.

Heidegger attempts to understand world three times and in three different ways in his early work (and continues to try in his later work): first in *Being and Time*, then in “On the Essence of Grounds,” and then in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. For our purposes, it will suffice to discuss world as Heidegger presents it in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.

### **The World of Phusis through Logos**

One way of thinking about the world is as nature, as the natural world. By this we do not mean the world as described by the natural sciences, the material world, so to speak. Rather by world Heidegger means phusis in the rich sense of the ancient Greeks, of “growing, growth, that which has itself grown in such growth”; “Growing is all this taken together as one.”<sup>103</sup> Phusis is the “self-forming prevailing of beings as a whole.”<sup>104</sup> The world is thus an unfolding of being(s).

But there is a more specific form of world that is particular to Dasein, namely the world that he forms. Dasein is thus not merely a part of the world: Dasein has and makes a world; Dasein partitions and partakes in world-forming.

[M]an is not simply regarded as a part of the world within which he appears and which he makes up a part [as with animals]. Man also stands over against the world. This standing-over-against is a ‘*having*’ of world as that in which man moves, with which he engages, which he both masters and serves, and to which he is exposed. Thus man is, first, a part of the world, and second, as this part he is at once both master and servant of the world.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 25.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

The way that Dasein forms a world is tied to his having logos. Logos, generally translated as reason, is linked etymologically to logein, “speaking.” Thus for Heidegger, logos is primarily a speaking out, a making it explicit in discourse. The “it” here is phusis: “Man, insofar as he exists as man, has always already spoken out about phusis.”<sup>106</sup>

There is a close relationship between phusis and logos, between world and discursive world-forming, and thus a special relationship between Dasein and the world: “Phusis means this whole prevailing that prevails through man himself, a prevailing that he does not have power over, but which precisely prevails through and around him—him, man, who has always already spoken out about this.”<sup>107</sup> Dasein is the being that speaks the world, who uncovers the world. Thus we arrive at Heidegger’s definition of truth: a-letheia, un-concealing. Animals don’t have the ability to make the world explicit. Therefore animals do not have a world (as Dasein does), though this does not mean they are utterly worldless (like a stone); they have some kind of world, and so Heidegger settles on calling them “world-poor,” “Weltarmut.” We have the following formation, which we’ll discuss in the next section: “[T]he stone (material object) is *worldless*; the animal is *poor in world*; man is *world-forming*.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 177.

## **The Lizards and the Bees—(World-)Poor Animals!**

Animals are not simply world-less, as is the case with stones, for certainly animals engage the world in a way that rocks cannot (though some, like Descartes and Brandom, seem to miss the import of this phenomenological fact). There is a distinction between worldlessness of a stone and an animal's poverty of world: "the stone *cannot even be deprived* of something like a world."<sup>109</sup> A stone is not like a lizard on a stone, just as a lizard lying on a stone is not like a hand on a head.<sup>110</sup> That is, material things are as different from animals as animals are from Dasein. Stones simply don't have access to beings as beings, and this is how Heidegger wants us to understand the world in its minimal, "poor" sense, as "*the accessibility of beings.*"<sup>111</sup> Stones have no access to beings, let alone being; stones do not engage phusis, let alone make phusis known through logos.

Animals are more than stones in that that they engage other beings in the world. As we'll see in the next section, this engagement is a minimal kind of *Zuhandenheit*, but already we can see how animals relate to the world directly. The lizard, for instance, "has sought out this stone" in order to bask in the sun.<sup>112</sup> Though we must be careful how we go about this, we are not projecting anything when we recognize a kind of intentionality here, a directedness-towards, an in-order-to:

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 197.

Every animal as animal has a specific set of relationships to its sources of nourishment, its prey, its enemies, its sexual mates, and so on. These relationships, which are infinitely difficult for us to grasp and require a high degree of caution and methodological foresight on our part, have a peculiar fundamental character of their own, the metaphysical significance of which has never properly been perceived or understood before.<sup>113</sup>

Animals even have a kind of automatic engagement with the world, akin to *das Man*, in their (at times) unnoticing engagement with their world.<sup>114</sup>

Simpler animals like the bee also have a kind of (impoverished) world, full of intimate relationships with other beings. Indeed, even “A very primitive unicellular form of life... will already find itself, where this disposition can be the greatest and darkest dullness, but for all that it is in its structure of being essentially distinct from merely being on hand like a [strictly material] thing.”<sup>115</sup> Unlike most thinkers who discuss animals with a bias towards higher order animals, preferencing animals with high intelligence or the ability to feel pain, Heidegger bites the bullet and means by animal *all* animals. Indeed, his inclusion of unicellular life forms as animals indicates why he includes plants under the category of life and why he often mentions the two in the same sentence, seemingly indiscriminately. Thus, we may also include plants in the following sentence: “The animal’s *way of being*, which we call ‘*life*’, is *not without access* to what is around it and about it [noch neben ihm ist],” though this access may be severely limited,

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. This observation, though related, can’t be developed here; it remains the future topic of a separate paper.

<sup>115</sup> *Prolegomena*, 255.

especially for plants and unicellular organisms.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, this limited access, this confinement, as he calls it, indicates the poverty of world for animals. That we can liken animals to plants shows how poor their world is. But we can be more precise than this.

Although animals experience the world, they do not experience the world as world.

This is Heidegger's central point in his discussion of animals in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*:

The bee, for example, has its hive, its cells, the blossoms it seeks out, and the other bees of the swarm. The bee's world is limited to a specific domain and is strictly circumscribed....But it is not merely the world of each particular animal that is limited in range—the extent and manner in which an animal is able to penetrate whatever is accessible to it is also limited. The worker bee is familiar with the blossoms it frequents, along with their colour and scent, yet it does not know the stamens of these blossoms *as* stamens, it knows nothing of the roots of the plant.<sup>117</sup>

Poor in world means deprived of world. Animals are thus infinitely removed from humans, not just in the range of our possible experiences (the what), but, more essentially, in the very possibility of experiencing the world *as* world (the how).

As against this [animal poverty of world], the world of man is a rich one, ...constantly extendable not only in range...but also in respect to the manner in which we can penetrate ever more deeply in this penetrability. Consequently we can characterize the relation man possesses to the world by referring to the extendibility of everything that he relates to. This is why we speak of man as world-forming.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 198 (292).

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

We have now seen how Heidegger distinguishes the world-forming man, Dasein, from the world-poor animals. What remains for us is to look at animals from the other perspective, to see how much of the world and our way of relating to it is shared with animals.

### **The Shared Zuhanden World**

If Heidegger uses the bees and lizards to differentiate man from beast, then in the *Prolegomena* he uses the snail to showcase what links Dasein and other animals. Heidegger uses the snail as an example of how we are already in the world: just like the snail in its shell is already in the world, so too, even if we could crawl into our minds, our minds would still be in the world. (The world is not in our consciousness, as Husserl would put it; our consciousness is in the world.) The snail analogy, as we shall see, is no mere analogy, but a telling account of animal-being in the world.<sup>119</sup> But first a word on the vocabulary of *Prolegomena*.

### **The Vocabulary of the *Prolegomena***

In the lectures that would become *Being and Time*, Heidegger's approach is quite different: he begins with a long discussion and criticism of Husserl (and other phenomenologists) before getting to the material that would make up the bulk of *Being and Time*. While this phenomenological approach, rather than the more existentially oriented approach of *Being and*

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<sup>119</sup> The analogy “is not too far removed from the matter at issue, inasmuch as this analogy is concerned with an entity to which we must likewise attribute, in a formal way, the kind of being which belongs to Dasein—‘life,’” 165. Krell claims it is “not really an analogy at all, but something more like the unified field of φύσις,” 90.

*Time*, is helpful for realizing Heidegger's debt to Husserl, for our purposes it portrays the now familiar insights of *Being and Time* in a different light that enables us to see crucial Heideggerian concepts for what they are, that is, apart from any stale interpretations or understandings that may have become entrenched in our minds or even in the literature.

One striking divergence from Macquarrie and Robinson's translation is that Theodore Kisiel translates *zuhanden* as "handy" (not "ready-to-hand") and *vorhanden* primarily as "on hand" (not "present-at-hand"). *Vorhandenheit* as "on hand" reads remarkably different than "present-at-hand" would in the text—it sounds almost *zuhanden*, and this, it would seem, is intentional. Although the *Prolegomena* is the first place Heidegger clearly distinguishes *Zuhandenes* from *Vorhandenes*,<sup>120</sup> the distinction is still fluid enough that the use of *Vorhandenheit* often sounds handy in the text, and so Kisiel is probably trying to capture this more immediate *Vorhandenheit* with his translation of it as "on hand." (He also translates *dabei* as "on hand," as we shall see.) Here are Kisiel's comments on the use of *Vorhandenheit* leading up to *Being and Time*:

*Vorhandenheit* (prepresence, on-handness, presence at hand) – First used terminologically to describe the "already there in advance" in which the around-world is disclosed, and so not yet distinguished from the "handy" (GA 63:97; also November 1924). In fact, so unresolved is this term in November 1924 that even the facticity of the "I am," its "that it is," is described in terms of its "being on hand." The more subtle analysis in SS 1925 of the levels of immediate presence first yields the clear distinction in modes of encounter and disclosedness between the handy (*Zuhandenes*) and the on-hand things (*Vorhandenes*) against the background presence of the environing world.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Theodore Kisiel. *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 511.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 508.

Again, although the distinction is made “clear” in the *Prolegomena*, *Vorhandenheit* remains relatively originary, lacking the ontological separation and dependence on *Zuhandenheit* we see in *Being and Time*. It is *Erkennen*, “knowing,” that is “a *founded way of being-in-the-world*, a way that is always possible only on the basis of non-cognitive comportment.”<sup>122</sup> Though “knowing [*Erkennen*] is not on hand [*vorhanden*]” in the *Prolegomena*,<sup>123</sup> the role of *Erkennen* is usually what is meant by *Vorhandenheit* in *Being and Time* (or at least in traditional readings of *Being and Time*)<sup>124</sup>. In the *Prolegomena*, *vorhanden* has a more visceral ontology, it is *on hand*, rather than as a abstract ontology, say of chemistry or lexicography, that we see in *Being and Time*. Nonetheless, *Vorhandensein* does sometimes indicate beings in a being-in relationship, as water is in a glass.<sup>125</sup> Animals however, are not beings-in, as we shall see.

### **In-Being: The Snail in its Haus, in its World**

Heidegger stresses “a basic constitutive state” of *Dasein* is “being-in-the-world” in the sense of being “unified” and “originary.”<sup>126</sup> The first aspect of being in the world is not our focus here, though it is important to keep in mind that *Dasein* is wholly there in the world and

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<sup>122</sup> *Prolegomena*, 165.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 160 (216).

<sup>124</sup> David Weinberger, however, contends that *Vorhandenheit* is not univocal in *Being and Time*; only *Zuhandenheit* is properly developed. See David Weinberger, “Three Types of *Vorhandenheit*,” *Research in Phenomenology* 10, no. 1 (1980): 235-250.

<sup>125</sup> *Prolegomena*, 157.

<sup>126</sup> E.g., in *ibid.*, §19.

apprehends the world as a whole (there is no Cartesian separation from the world, no *sub specie aeternitatis*; the world is given as whole, and we are “in” that world as part of it holistically, not in terms of realism or idealism.) More to the topic at hand, Dasein’s originary position is in the world. This “in-being” involves being in relation to the world, to other beings in the world; we are “in” a space of reference.

This spatiality is not like a “spatial container,” like “being-in” something as water is in a glass; rather, it is a rich sense of space as world.

‘In’ comes from *innan*, which means to dwell, *habitare*; ‘ann’ means: I am accustomed, I am familiar with, I take care of something—the Latin *colo* in the sense of *habito* and *diligo*. Dwelling is also taken here as taking care of something in intimate familiarity, being-involved-with [*Sein-bei*].<sup>127</sup>

Theodore Kisiel extends the translation of *Sein-bei* to “in intimate familiarity, being-involved-with” for good reason, for this is precisely what Heidegger is getting at in this passage, and we lack a word like the French “chez” that can capture the German “bei.” And “bei” is crucial for our topic, as we’ll see as we continue with the text.

This same entity which we characterize as in-being we also define, as I have already said, as the entity that I *am* [*bin*]; and “*bin*” is connected with “*bei*.” “I am” thus amounts to saying, I dwell, I abide in the world as with something familiar.<sup>128</sup>

Here, interestingly enough, in-being is connected with dwelling in the world, in relation to other beings that are *da-bei*, beings for which we have *concern*. In-being is part of everydayness, it has

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 158 (213).

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

“the character of *concern*.”<sup>129</sup> As we may have guessed, Dasein is an in-being; in fact, “In-being is rather *the* constitution of the being of Dasein, in which every way of being of this entity is grounded.”<sup>130</sup>

Does this mean that Dasein is the only in-being? Initially it would seem so, since Heidegger next links up Erkennen (“knowing”) with Dasein’s in-being: “*knowing [Erkennen] the world is a mode of being of Dasein such that this mode is ontically founded in its basic constitution, in being-in the-world.*”<sup>131</sup> And in the larger context, Heidegger is attempting to show that any object-subject Erkennen is already grounded in being-in-the-world; if Erkennen is *in mente*, in some “Gehäuse” or “box,”<sup>132</sup> then that box itself in the world. But to show this, Heidegger introduces the snail and its shell—its Gehäuse, its Haus—which links up the animal in-being with Dasein in-being.<sup>133</sup>

Gehäuse is the German word for the shell of snails and the like, but also of radios, cameras and other such things in the sense of “casing” or “box” or even “housing.” This last sense makes clear the word’s connection with its root, *Haus*. Indeed, besides an archaic use of

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 159 (213-214).

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 161 (217).

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 161 (216); also 164 (215) as “housing.” N.B. that Heidegger puts the word in quotation marks both times, thus indicating its intentional use.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 166 (224).

Gehäuse to mean a shelter [Behausung],<sup>134</sup> Heidegger himself makes this connection explicit by using both Haus to mean shell and shell to mean Haus. As he begins the snail analogy, it is “[die] Schnecke in ihrem Haus” and then “Schneckengehäuse” in the next sentence; on the next page it is “Die Schnecke kriecht zuweilen aus ihrem Gehäuse,” “sie im Gehäuse ist,” “Sie ist in ihrem Haus,” “sie hat das Innen ihres Hauses als Welt,” and simply “im Haus.”<sup>135</sup> Clearly Heidegger is playing off of the Haus in Gehäuse. But what for? Heidegger is emphasizing that the snail dwells in the world. We can see this in many ways, as I shall try to make clear.

Heidegger connects the snail to Dasein by saying that when it stretches out of its shell to get something, it “at the same time keeps it on hand” (“behält es dabei zugleich”).<sup>136</sup> Just above in the section before (§19), Heidegger connects bei with bin, with dwelling, with in-being. The snail dwells in its Haus, it dwells in the world— da-bei, both there-by and here-by. The duality of da should recall that of da in Da-sein. Indeed, the snail, unlike the glass of water, “has the

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<sup>134</sup> “Gehäuse, das,” Duden Online, October 28, 2011 (version 1.8), Dudenverlag, <http://www.duden.de/zitieren/10076093/1.8> (accessed November 23, 2011). The Oxford English Dictionary confirms that the Old Germanic and Scandinavian cognates (basically *hus*) meant, as we’d expect, house or hut. It suggests that it may be related to the same Indo-European root as hide (as noun and verb), as in covering, and possibly the Germanic root of hose and hoard. See “house, n.1 and int,” OED Online, September 2011, Oxford University Press., <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/88886?rskey=ofr0M9&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed November 23, 2011).

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, (223), (224). Interestingly, Kisiel translates all these as “shell” (Schneckengehäuse as “snail-shell”), whereas Krell’s translation in his book distinguishes between Haus and Gehäuse: “house” for Haus, “a snail in its housing” (oddly) for Schneckengehäuse, and “lodgings” for Gehäuse. See Krell, 60.

<sup>136</sup> *Prolegomena*, 166 (224).

mode of being of Dasein, it is such that it has a world” (“es eine Welt hat”).<sup>137</sup> That we can be sure Heidegger means the snail here and not Dasein by analogy is made clear in the first sentence after this paragraph: “This [analogy] applies similarly to a subject to which knowing [Erkennen] is ascribed,” i.e. to an animal with knowing (properly speaking), i.e. Dasein, which means we have been talking about the snail specifically.<sup>138</sup> The snail therefore has “a” world, though not knowledge (and we will return to this later).<sup>139</sup>

We’ve already mentioned but passed over too quickly another way in which we are meant to understand the snail as connected to Dasein inasmuch as they both have a world, in-being, etc., namely that the snail “is not in its shell like water in the glass.”<sup>140</sup> Water in a glass is one of Heidegger’s examples from the previous section (§19) of “being-in” as opposed to the in-being of Dasein and (we may now add) the snail.<sup>141</sup> Indeed, just as the snail stands for the animal, so too the water in the glass stands for the stone, the material, lifeless thing, which has no world, no in-being, only being-in.

Thus we see the snail as in between the stone and Dasein, and more akin to Dasein. Its shell (Gehäuse), that material stone-like thing, that Körper, is kept dabei as a Haus, a dwelling with which it interacts. It also interacts directly with the world; indeed, is always “already-in-the-

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> That the snail “will prove to *have* a world *in not having it*,” as Krell puts it, seems to miss how much of a world Heidegger here concedes to animals, as I hope to show. See Krell, 90.

<sup>140</sup> *Prolegomena*, 166.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 157.

world” (“Schon-seins-in-der-Welt”).<sup>142</sup> Thus we see why the analogy “is not too far removed from the matter at issue, inasmuch as this analogy is concerned with an entity to which we must likewise attribute, in a formal way, the kind of being which belongs to Dasein—‘life.’”<sup>143</sup>

What then is this life? It is the “primary...non-cognitive comportment” (“primäre...nicht erkennenden Verhattung”) towards the world.<sup>144</sup> This non-cognitive apprehension (Erfassen) is grounded by a “letting-something-be-encountered, and this is possible only on the basis of always already being-involved-with” (“immer schon Seins-bei”).<sup>145</sup> The connection between Dasein and the snail here, again, is that the snail in its shell is analogous to Dasein inside itself (*in mente*)—just as the snail crept out to get and bring back food but never really get out of itself, out of its shell (Gehäuse), so too Dasein doesn’t go outside itself and return with “booty” to the “‘housing’ [‘Gehäuse’] of consciousness.”<sup>146</sup> The Gehäuse of consciousness or of the snail is already-in-the-world. Even in the case of consciousness, of Dasein who knows, this knowing is “*a founded way of being-in-the-world.*”<sup>147</sup> “All knowing [Erkennen] is only an appropriation and a form of realization of something which is already discovered by other primary comportments,”

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 166 (224).

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 164 (222).

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 164 (222).

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

i.e. primary, non-cognitive comportments.<sup>148</sup> Showing Dasein's primary comportment as that of the animal's is Heidegger's motivation for the snail analogy: Dasein is an in-being, and Erkennen does not precede or explain its originary position in the world as an in-being; rather Erkennen is rooted in the primary, non-cognitive comportment to the world, the world of the snail.

Erkennen, however, cannot merely be added to in-being to go from animal to Dasein.<sup>149</sup> Instead, Heidegger advocates "a *phased structure*" of Erkennen in which the founded forms of knowledge—namely, Vernehmen (perception), Wissen (knowing/understanding), and Wissenschaft (science) and Forschung (research)—are grounded in the "primary" forms of knowledge, namely "*directing-itself-toward something*" ("das *Sichrichten-auf etwas*") and "*dwelling-with*" ("*Sichaufhalten-bei*").<sup>150</sup> Thus Dasein alone has Erkennen in the full sense, in the sense of Vernehmen, Wissen, and Forschung, but this only inasmuch as Dasein shares directedness-towards and dwelling-with—primary Erkennen—with the snail.

Heidegger's phased structure of knowledge—of animal minds—is underdeveloped in his work, but Mark Okrent takes up the task of fleshing out a Heideggerian structure of animal minds in his work, *Rational Animals*, to which we turn in the next chapter.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 163 (219).

## CHAPTER FOUR: THINKING ANIMALS, THOUGHT-FUL HUMANS

*[P]hilosophical theories about what it is that distinguishes members of our species from other animal species...may seem to provide grounds for the belief that our rationality as thinking beings is somehow independent of our animality. We become in consequence forgetful of our bodies and of how our thinking is the thinking of one species of animal.*

Alasdair MacIntyre<sup>151</sup>

In this final chapter I hope to walk a narrow line: I wish to show that we can understand animal rationality without ascribing to them any kind of linguistic mental states while assuming that it is precisely language that allows us to understand how animals think. The distinction, as Norman Malcolm explains, is that there is an important difference between thinking and having a thought. Since keeping straight thinking from having thoughts is central to this chapter, it's worth quoting Malcolm at length here:

In real life we commonly employ the verb “think” in respect to animals. We say, “Towser thinks he is going to be fed,” just as naturally as we say, “Towser wants to be fed.” Suppose our dog is chasing the neighbor's cat. The latter runs full tilt toward an oak tree, but suddenly swerves at the last moment and disappears up a nearby maple. The dog doesn't see this maneuver and on arriving at the oak tree he rears up on his hind legs, paws the trunk as if trying to scale it, and barks excitedly into the branches above. We who observe the whole episode from a window say, “He thinks that the cat went up that oak tree.” ... A million examples could be produced in which it would be a correct way of speaking to say of an animal, something of the form, “He thinks that p.” ... We should, in contrast, feel reluctant and embarrassed to say, “He had the thought that the cat went up the oak tree.” In referring to an animal, it is natural enough to say, “He thought that p,” but not, “He had the thought that p....

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<sup>151</sup> MacIntyre, 5.

One way of stating the interest of this distinction is to say that although we apply the word "think" to animals, using it as a transitive verb taking a propositional phrase as its object, we do not thereby imply that the animal formulated or thought of a proposition, or had a proposition "before its mind." In saying something about the animal, we employ a verb that, grammatically, takes a propositional expression as object, without meaning that as a matter of psychological fact the animal thought of a proposition. The next point to see is that we employ the verb "think" in the same way in regard to people. On the basis of circumstances and behavior we say that a man "thought that p," without implying that he thought of p or formulated p, or that p occurred to him or was in his thoughts. For example, suppose a friend of mine and I are engrossed in an exciting conversation. We are about to drive off in his car. While holding up his end of the conversation he fumbles in his pocket for the car keys. I, knowing that they are in the glove compartment, say to myself, "He thinks the keys are in his pocket." I do not imply that he said to himself, or thought to himself, "The keys are in my pocket." Grammatical form is no index of psychological reality.<sup>152</sup>

Malcolm agrees that animals can't have thoughts because they don't have language, but that doesn't mean that animals don't think. According to him, this kind of thinking needn't even be propositional—humans often think in non-propositional ways. Recognizing a friend across the street, for instance, is a kind of thinking that isn't propositional.<sup>153</sup> We don't think, "if that is in fact Kasper, then I have seen Kasper," we simply see Kasper. (This phenomenological reality is expressed by Heidegger as *Zuhandenheit*, prior to and not dependent upon *Vorhandenheit*; we must have this intuitive engagement with the world before we can abstract it into language and proposition, not the other way around.) Descartes' problem, according to Malcolm, was that all thought for him was propositional and all propositions were linguistic;<sup>154</sup> Macintyre says that this

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<sup>152</sup> Norman Malcolm, "Thoughtless Brutes," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 46 (1972 - 1973): 13-14.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

bias towards mental content in terms of language continues to be the problem for twentieth-century philosophers like Brandom.<sup>155</sup>

Brandom, however, unlike Descartes, separates (at least formally) language from propositions: language is the capacity of explicating (“expliciting”) the implicit, which we may understand as the unarticulated metaphysical or logical structure of things. In the previous chapters I’ve tried to show how animals have an implicit understanding of the world apart from language; in this chapter, by way of conclusion, I hope to show that we can explicate animals’ implicit understanding of the world through language without ascribing to them such forms of cogitation. First, I will show how Mark Okrent gives us the tools to understand higher-order animals in terms of goal-directedness, something shared with lower-order animals, even non-rational animals. This is better than thinking of higher-order animals as quasi-linguistic, since that position is defeasible and fuzzy, whereas we can clearly understand higher-order animals in terms of lower-ordered animals, even non-rational ones. Next I will show how Heidegger gives us this paradigm while insisting where Okrent equivocates that only humans have linguistic, self-conscious rationality. Lastly, I’ll show how, because of language, we can accurately describe what animals do, all the while without ascribing language to them.

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<sup>155</sup> MacIntyre, 12. Brandom isn’t mentioned explicitly, though he’s clearly in the camp of Wittgenstein, Austin, Quine, Davidson, Heidegger, and McDowell, all of whom are singled out by MacIntyre.

## Okrent's Teleological Understanding of Animal Behavior

The last thing we want to do when talking about animals is to anthropomorphize them. We don't want to be philosophical "bitees," people who, according to Vicki Hearne, "are contaminated by [their] epistemology...they cast about for some premise from which they can draw an inference that will give them certainty about the dog's behavior," certainty about their own assumptions. We need to be careful not to project our epistemology onto animals lest we be bitten by our own assumptions, begging the question.

The danger of projecting onto animals is easy to fall into if we take a commonsense view of epistemology and the problem of other minds—it would seem like this animal is contemplating, so it must have thoughts, because when I contemplate, I contemplate thoughts. While the argument from analogy and best explanation may hold for the problem of other *human* minds, we can't be sure the analogy holds for animals—it certainly doesn't for *all* animals; and the best explanation for animal minds would be based on what we do know—how evolution and circumstance determine and affect animal behavior—rather than what we don't know—the relationship between mind and body, between language and intentionality, between natural desire and will, etc. Okrent's solution doesn't depend on any questionable epistemological or phenomenological experience, it simply depends on scientifically observable facts of animal nature and behavior. Resting on biology and basic phenomenological observation, Okrent's philosophy of animal minds is no more suspect as a theory than the theory of evolution upon which he draws.

The argument for animal minds by analogy to that of humans is essentially the functionalist's argument; Mark Okrent heavily criticizes this view of animal minds, and instead

provides a layered-cake view of rationality, a hierarchy of more sophisticated kinds of rationality built upon less sophisticated kinds of rationality, ultimately founded on rudimentary, non-rational goal-directed behavior. He explains how a teleological account of intentionality can make sense of animal minds by way of what makes for *rational*, normative action without falling into a the hermeneutic circle of behaviorism. What we appeal to is not the behavior itself—any behavior—but normative behavior—what’s appropriate for that animal to do. At base, this normativity is a biological or evolutionary teleology.

Recall the Sphex wasp from earlier: the wasp has a series of goals by virtue of being a wasp, namely survival and reproduction, and the ability to achieve these goals. We can say that the wasp has *reasons* to do what it does: there is a reason why it checks the hole before putting the caterpillar in there—to make sure there’s no predator waiting for a free lunch. But the wasp is not cognizant of such reasons, and so Okrent claims they are nonrational: “The behavior of the wasp has a goal, even if it is not the result of any rational thought on the part of the wasp. So causation by the beliefs and desires of the agent can’t be part of what it is for the behavior to have a goal.”<sup>156</sup> Thus the behaviorist is wrong to assume beliefs and desires from behavior, because the wasp doesn’t have beliefs and desires though it has goals. Okrent is establishing the fact that goal-directedness does not depend on beliefs and desires, thus there is no circle of causality, but rather an objective standard or norm, against which we can evaluate behavior. Conformity to the teleological good for Okrent is the normative base by which we can evaluate animal behavior.

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<sup>156</sup> Okrent, 31.

## Rationality, Mental Content, and Okrent's Linguistic Bias

Intentionality—by which Okrent means (mental) beliefs and desires—is understood as fundamentally good-directed behavior, and what makes the behavior good or not is whether it is normatively appropriate in light of evolutionary (general) and circumstantial (specific) goals. Okrent sees himself as showing the instrumental roots of intentionality, just as Heidegger showed the more basic *Zuhandenheit* as foundational for *Vorhandenheit*. But while Heidegger is careful to reserve any kind of discursivity from animals, Okrent's emphasis on intentionality in higher-order animals betrays a linguistic bias towards rationality that both ostracizes lower-order animals and minimizes the difference between animal and human intentionality. Based on his own arguments for lower-order animals, however, we do not need to ascribe linguistic mental content to higher-order animals, even if they do display sophisticatedly rational intentionality.

Okrent credits his thesis to the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, though he departs from Heidegger in two ways. Okrent agrees with Heidegger “that no agent could possess understanding unless it was capable of acting in order to achieve some end or goal,”<sup>157</sup> but Okrent argues that “Creatures that are not *Dasein* act in order to achieve ends.”<sup>158</sup> This, however, is not really in disagreement with Heidegger. According to Theodore Kisiel,

understanding [*Verstehen*] is first identified in KNS [Kriegsnotsemester] 1919 as a ‘hermeneutic intuition’ (ZBP [*Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie*, GA 56/57] 117) based on *nonreflective experiencing of experience*; this is regarded as a kind of ‘sympathy’ (ZBP 110) that *life* has of itself...understanding is more *an*

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<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

*accompanying familiarity that comes with life itself, giving access to its sense and context.*<sup>159</sup>

Not until Verstehen is linked with Seinverstehändnis in *Prolegomena* (SS 1925) do we get a kind of understanding as self-understanding that gives rise to the question of being.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, Kiesel points out that the “emphasis on the projection of possibility [in understanding] emerges only in BT [*Being and Time*] itself.”<sup>161</sup> *Being and Time*, of course, is primarily about the being of Dasein, and, as we discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, Heidegger’s conception of animal understanding and the distinctive aspects of Dasein’s understanding are perfectly consistent. The distinctive aspects of Dasein’s particular form of understanding, e.g. self-understanding and contemplation of counterfactuals, does not preclude nor ignore nondiscursive understanding; human understanding, however, is what allows us to understand understanding, to have world, to be world-forming.

Heidegger, therefore, would not take issue with Okrent on understanding in animals, but he would take issue with extending the distinctively human aspects of understanding, reflexive and futural mental content, to higher-order animals. Indeed, this is why, as we discussed last chapter, Heidegger chooses the most animal of animals as his examples, to show the “abysmal bodily kinship with the beast”: he wants to show how other the animal is *as animal*, so that when we see the similarities between us and dolphins or dogs, we don’t forget the “abyss” that

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<sup>159</sup> Kiesel, Appendix D, “*Verstehen, Seinverstehändnis*,” 507, my emphasis.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 507.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

separates us.<sup>162</sup> Okrent, in giving animals mental content, has built a bridge to nowhere across the abyss. (We'll discuss this below.)

Okrent's second divergence is similar: Dasein, he says, can only be understood as a "kind of rational animal," albeit a "distinctive" one, that is "intelligible only as modifications of simpler [life]forms; Heidegger explicitly says that "Dasein is never to be defined ontologically by regarding it as life...plus something else."<sup>163</sup> While Okrent's position sounds nice and current, it's actually much harder to defend. Heidegger doesn't have to give an account of how language and self-understanding arise evolutionarily since that's simply the mechanism to ask such metaphysical questions, and it's nonsensical to ask how that ability arose—we're simply thrown into such a position. Since Okrent is trying to build from the evolutionary bottom up, he must offer some account of how language and self-consciousness arise, and this is a much harder position to defend than the straightforward Heideggerian position. By implicitly insisting that animals have linguistic mental content, Okrent has committed himself to an inexplicable phenomenon; I hope to show why, by his own arguments about lower-order animals, we don't need to ascribe linguistic mental content in order to meaningfully ascribe intentionality to higher-order animals.

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<sup>162</sup> Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 248.

<sup>163</sup> Okrent xii; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 50.

## Problems with Okrent's Account of Animal Minds

Okrent argues that “the kind of highly definite intentional contents characteristic of human action and intentionality are related to and arise out of the merely instrumental rationality and vague mental contents characteristic of nonlinguistic animals,” and yet his view of animal intentionality closely resembles that of human intentionality.<sup>164</sup> Quasi-discursive mental states are unlikely and unfalsifiable for a number of reasons which I’ll discuss below; for now, let’s review his general hierarchy of animal minds and what he means by rationality.

There are four categories of mind in Okrent’s reckoning: nonrational, biological behavior (evolutionarily determined goals), intentionality (individually determined goals), social-reason (group-determined goals), and human (self-determining goals). As we move up this great chain of rationality, animals in the higher categories have all the more basic kinds of (non)rationality, but these are teleologically subservient to their dominant or characteristic type. For example, the goals of the social animal are not merely concerned with its own (or its children’s) welfare; the goals of survival, reproduction, etc. remain, but they are now secondary to the goals of the group.<sup>165</sup> Humans are unique in that our rationality is governed by goals that we ourselves (personally, but also in the context of a discursive, and we might add, already existing community) decide are the goals we wish to pursue. We are the authors, so to speak, of the

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<sup>164</sup> Okrent, xvi.

<sup>165</sup> So-called Machiavellian behavior in social animals is the exception that proves the rule.

normativity that governs rational human behavior; or to put it more precisely, the human teleology is to determine our own teleology.<sup>166</sup>

Barring such distinctly human exceptions, animals are rational if they normatively act towards individual and species-specific goals, and, for Okrent, such individual goals must be intentional—corresponding to beliefs and desires<sup>167</sup>—and they must be able to adapt to novel situations, revising both beliefs and desires. It's unclear, however, why these are necessary conditions for rationality. The problem with his account of intentionality is that it is implicitly discursive; adaptivity is a quantitative, not qualitative difference between wasps and birds; idiosyncratic goals (meaning goals actively determined by the agent),<sup>168</sup> similarly, are quantitatively,

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<sup>166</sup> Okrent remarks that only humans display altruism, acting on principle rather than in one's individual or collective good (188ff.). Such principles or *telē* are often “not rooted in [the human beings'] interests as organisms but actually are inimical to those interests. Ascetics who take a vow of chastity or zealots who welcome martyrdom for some cause cannot be seen as doing what they do in order to reproduce or survive, no matter how indirectly one traces out the connections. It also seems that, at least on occasion, human beings act rationally in a way that is not instrumental at all. Arguably, when the ascetic sacrifices her reproductive capacity in order to become a nun, she does so not in order to realize *any* concrete state of affairs, no matter how described. Instead, she does so for the sake of being a certain sort of person” (168).

<sup>167</sup> Okrent wants to avoid the problem of mental causation, and thinks that his pragmatic account doesn't have to address this murky topic. In short, “appeals to beliefs and desires explain rational behavior; but beliefs and desires don't cause that behavior” (164). Oddly, in stressing the noncausality of mental states, Okrent here says that “there is no ontological reason that some physical state could not also be an intentional state,” implying that, if we press the point, wasps—even Heidegger's amoeba—have intentionality (“an abstract relational property”), by which he means beliefs and desires; his further qualification of adaptive richness, however, still precludes pushing him on this point to extend rationality to all normatively teleological animals.

<sup>168</sup> He calls these idiosyncratic goals “rational” goals in contrast to “natural,” biological goals (149). I find such usage of the word rational to be careless and confusing, even if he is consistently denoting adaptive intentionality by it.

not qualitatively, different than more basic goals and behavior, especially individually-tailored ones like flight, feeding, and reproduction.

Okrent links rationality with “intentional contents, such as beliefs and desires...[and] versatile adaptive behavior that varies in response to changing circumstances, responds effectively to the source of the agent’s mistakes, and is novel in relation to the agent’s species-specific patterns of life.”<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, to be “rational,” an animal must have “unique, changing, and idiosyncratic goals and perceptions of the world, states that need not be shared with other members of its species.”<sup>170</sup> But don’t wasps fit this category in a very minimal sense? Okrent here echoes the Cartesian view of sensation and behavior: some behavior is merely the mechanical response to sensation, some behavior is guided by or determined by the will. The only difference is that Okrent has allowed all animals except those like wasps to be in both categories, whereas Descartes allowed only humans to have both kinds of behavior. Okrent now just grants that other animals besides humans have propositional content, beliefs and desires. Animal intentionality—if it’s idiosyncratic and sufficiently versatile—is now the requirement, not a human soul. But again, machines are not a sufficient analogy for animals like wasps. Let’s discuss this problem generally before showing how it betrays a discursive bias towards mental content.

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<sup>169</sup> Okrent, 104.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 105.

## **Rationality: Descriptive, not Ascriptive; Quantitative, not Qualitative**

The problem with Okrent's view of rationality as necessarily involving intentional content is that it is an implicitly discursive view of mind: our mental content is discursive, but it's indefensible to assume animals have similar mental content. Rationality is a category of ascription, not a state of mind. We can't know whether animals have mental content that "provide reasons for what they do" without again anthropomorphizing them, confusing thinking with thoughts.<sup>171</sup> Based on what Okrent has shown us about wasps and teleology, we are not anthropomorphizing when we ascribe to them goals of which they are (he supposes) unaware; but are we really to suppose that the other animals *are* aware of their goals—individual, social, or biological? Okrent oversteps here and is asserting something indefensible without needing to. We already have the mechanism by which to understand animal behavior as rational because of the SpheX wasp—if only we grant that the wasp can be described as rational.

Why not call the wasp's actions rational (without implying it has thoughts or even thinks) if we can describe it as goal-directed even though it has no concept of its goals? (Similarly, if animals don't need to express intentionality linguistically to have rationality, according to Okrent, why must we assume they have intentionality at all—isn't goal-directedness enough? I'll return to this later.) This logic is obvious to MacIntyre: "To ascribe goods to dolphins makes it natural to ascribe to them reasons for doing much that they do."<sup>172</sup> He goes on to quote Warren Quinn: "a reason to act in a certain way is nothing more than something good in itself that it [the

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>172</sup> MacIntyre, 24.

action] realizes or serves, or, short of that, something bad in itself that it avoids.”<sup>173</sup> Notice that neither MacIntyre nor Quinn makes any mention of beliefs and desires, let alone idiosyncratic and adaptive goals; *all animals act rationally if they act in accord with the normative teleology appropriate to the animal.*

Okrent grants that “all goal-directed organic behavior is reliably responsive to local differences in the environment of the agent,” but “Only...instrumentally rational agents, who alter the goals of their immediate acts and alter their acts so as to succeed in novel circumstances, can properly be said to have reasons for what they do.”<sup>174</sup> Why? Okrent says that

[instrumentally rational animals] act for proximate goals that are not fixed by their species-defined life processes. This difference allows instrumentally rational agents to respond successfully to alterations or details in their environments for which no routine response is programmed in the life pattern of the species to which they belong.<sup>175</sup>

What would make for a goal that’s not fixed by species-defined life processes? Okrent only explains this negatively: “as soon as something unique, unexpected, or simply incapable of sensible differentiation by wasps turns up in the environment, the individual wasp is at a loss.”<sup>176</sup> He gives the example of how moving the caterpillar while the wasp is in the burrow will make the wasp start chain of behavior over again, effectively getting stuck in a loop. But wouldn’t any animal be at a loss if it encountered something it couldn’t comprehend or deal with? Even if we

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Okrent, 112, 113.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. He continues to argue this negatively on the following pages.

grant that flexible, adaptive richness is a meaningful distinction between higher and lower animals, are we sure it's not a quantitative difference instead a qualitative difference?<sup>177</sup> Okrent insists it's a qualitative difference, though he often compares the wasp and the bird in quantitative terms (e.g., "a very small range of options" versus "numerous behavioral forks").<sup>178</sup> For instance, one easy way to test your dog's intelligence is to have him sit and swiftly throw a small blanket or large towel over his head: the faster the dog escapes, the more intelligent he is; but a dog that just lies there, while not particularly bright, doesn't cease to be rational, just like infant animals who can't yet account for various experiences aren't thus labeled nonrational; to affirm this would be to fall back into behaviorism.

What's at issue here is confusing success of an action with appropriateness of an action—a distinction Okrent made as early as Chapter 2. What makes teleological behavior normative is whether it's *appropriate* behavior, not whether the behavior in question itself is successful, though what makes it appropriate has to do with a tending towards or statistical likelihood of successful goal completion. Okrent therefore contradicts himself in saying that the wasp is not rational "because of her failure to respond appropriately to the scientist's intervention."<sup>179</sup> Appropriate upon what grounds? She is acting appropriately according to the goals and means to achieve those goals of wasps: (1) dig burrow—(2) sting caterpillar—(3) bring caterpillar to edge

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<sup>177</sup> Similarly, being unable to differentiate is not a mark against rationality as such, as Okrent insists, only against the degree or order of rationality. See below.

<sup>178</sup> Okrent, 119.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

of burrow—(4) check burrow—[(5a) deal with intruder]—(5b)put caterpillar outside in the hole—(6) lay eggs—(7) cover up hole; if the caterpillar isn't outside the hole at 5a, then obviously the wasp must perform 3 again, followed by 4, etc. This may be a “routine,” but it's unclear to me why the routine of the wasp “always acting according to a set species-defining behavioral pattern” precludes the behavior as rational.<sup>180</sup>

Let's suppose, for instance, that an otherwise normal person shares a house with an innocuous but rather annoying ghost who likes to turn off the lights he's using. Sometimes, in order to read at night, the man must sit by the light switch and flip it on again every so often in order to keep reading. Would Okrent consider the man to be acting nonrationally by turning the light back on repeatedly? Must the man find a novel means of illuminating the page to be considered rational? It would seem that such an action by the reader and the wasp are no less rational than any other proximate goal pursued in response to an unexpected (or at least undesired) interruption.

Granted, wasps don't have beliefs and desires; if birds do, then where's the break? What about toads? They're deceivable by scientists. Karen Neander discusses at length how toads see only “inter-aural disparities,” and thus anything shaped like prey and moving like prey will elicit the toad to get it with its tongue—no matter if it's actually a fly or a piece of lead.<sup>181</sup> And yet,

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Karen Neander, “Content for Cognitive Science,” in *Teleosemantics: New Philosophical Essays*, edited by Graham MacDonald and David Papineau, 167-194 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 192.

either way, the behavior is considered appropriate by neuroethologists.<sup>182</sup> Shouldn't we likewise consider the wasp as acting appropriately by continuing to behave according to its species-specific means of achieving its goals? Okrent has no problem saying that the mistakes of intentional animals are justified (because appropriate if not successful); why not with nonintentional animals?<sup>183</sup> Okrent here is less careful than he is later about confusing the success of the act with the appropriateness of the act. As Fodor puts it, "*Darwin cares how many flies you eat, not what descriptions you eat them under.*"<sup>184</sup> Okrent again is at fault for giving overblown, linguistic goals to lower-order animals: "The frog flicks its tongue in order to catch an insect so as to make it a meal so that it can be nourished."<sup>185</sup> Why Okrent thinks that a "nonrational" toad has such complex goals is beyond me. The frog or toad's goal is simply survival, and such animals survive by responding to visual stimuli of a certain shape and movement. This *tends towards* nourishment by eating flies, but we may assume that seeds or organic debris may occasionally look like flies to the animal without putting the appropriateness of the action into question. That a scientist can "trick" the frog doesn't make the frog's actions any less appropriate than they are for natural fly-like-moving objects—which is to say, the actions are perfectly appropriate.

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>183</sup> Okrent, 139.

<sup>184</sup> J. A. Fodor, „A Theory of Content, I: The Problem,” in *A Theory of Content and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

<sup>185</sup> Okrent, 171.

Okrent discusses the “case of the poor frog,” but, while he doesn’t blame the frog for being incapable of making such distinctions, this proves for him that such animals aren’t rational, since they “do not have reasons of their own for doing what they do.”<sup>186</sup> But we may easily imagine that over time—a lot of time perhaps—the frog may learn to differentiate lead balls from flies, just as the cat learned—very quickly—to differentiate shrews from mice. (See section 4.33 below.) The frog will not make this differentiation cognitively; evolution, however, might shape its goals and abilities to achieve those goals through natural selection. One possible story might go like this: A mutation develops whereby smells affect the accuracy of frogs, fly-smells stimulate the frog brain, increasing its accuracy, and/or lead-smells hamper the frog’s accuracy or generally disturb the frog. Over time, frogs with a strong sense of smell will be chosen for, adding the sense of smell to that of sight in its “eating” behavior, and thus will now “differentiate” between what was previously the same stimuli, millions of years prior. This doesn’t rely on mental states, and shows how success is actually related to appropriate behavior. What’s normative is biological and evolutionary, not what we think is normative for the frog. Of course we do understand it as normative—and rational—if we remember that appropriate behavior is species-relative (evolutionary/biological), not relative to the individual animal (intentional successes).

Okrent is overly focused on the individual animal and mental states, and he wants to think of rationality as a mental state instead of as a category. He says that frogs “are not rational and do not have reasons of their own for doing what they do, even though there are of course

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

good reasons for them to act in certain ways.”<sup>187</sup> Okrent undercuts his theory by making rationality depend on mental states; he has brilliantly shown how normativity is objectively teleological, grounding what we mean by rationality, but unnecessarily adds intentionality to teleology in his definition. A much simpler and powerful thesis would have been simply to define rationality as normatively good goal-directedness. Instead, we have an ambiguous category of nonrational animals, including wasps and frogs, and rational animals, but this distinction is problematically vague—no longer objective and simple.<sup>188</sup> What’s worse, Okrent conceives of intentionality as linguistic, raising further worries and doubts about the description’s viability, as I’ll show below. I think that it makes more sense to link rationality with teleology: rational actions are those that are in line with the normative teleology of the animal—for there are “good reasons for them to act in certain ways,” even if the animal doesn’t have such reasons. Thinking doesn’t require thoughts, and one doesn’t need reason to act reasonably.

### **Okrent’s Implicitly Discursive Bias in Mental Content**

Okrent’s insistence that rationality must be thought in terms of idiosyncratic and adaptive intentionality betrays that the mental content of beliefs for animals is inherently discursive for

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<sup>187</sup> Okrent, 171.

<sup>188</sup> Okrent seems content with this vagueness, since it reflects the vagueness of mental content resultant of the lack of mental states: “Frogs may lie somewhere between wasps and birds when it comes to rationality, but there is good reason to suspect that they are not especially rational” (172ff.).

him. When he gives putative beliefs to wasps, they're overblown to show how ridiculous such an assertion would be; this straw-man attack, however, just shows how difficult it is to defend rationality as intentionality, and how, implicitly, Okrent thinks of mental content as linguistic:

But if the wasp indeed acts on this desire, then the companion belief that motivates what the wasp does must be something like "This cricket will still be fresh if I sting it in this way but not in that." But how could the wasp come to believe that?"<sup>189</sup>

How indeed! How could Okrent really put such language into a wasp? And how could he do it twice?

But, in this case, the belief that would work with this desire to explain the behavior would have the content "I could find out whether there is something dangerous in the burrow if I check inside."<sup>190</sup>

By overplaying his hand (who's insisting that wasps have intentional mental states?), Okrent reveals that he views the intentional mental states of animals as implicitly discursive. Indeed, Okrent describes rationality as "an ability to infer beliefs from information available to [an agent] in the environment and an ability to establish new proximate goals in light of those beliefs."<sup>191</sup> This sounds like Brandom's description of human rationality: the giving and taking of reasons as reasons. But this would not please Brandom, not even my revised Brandom that allows for implicit inferences: the taking of reasons for reason is what Brandom means by

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 117.

“expliciting,” the making explicit of implicit inferences and the manipulation of those inferences in a web of meaning. This is discursive thought.

For Okrent, what distinguishes humans from animals is not language per se; humans simply have several degrees of beliefs and desires, and this allows us to have reflection, to act on abstract concepts, and even to generate our own normative goals.<sup>192</sup> He admits that such things are possible only because of language, but he emphasizes the connection between animals and humans based on shared intentionality, though of varying degrees: “The finely discriminated contents of human intentional states do depend on the existence of language, but this fact should never obscure the truth that language itself is possible only for a certain kind of instrumentally rational agent.”<sup>193</sup> He is trying to say that the philosophical tradition had erred in overemphasizing the discursive difference between humans and other animals, and Okrent has tried to correct the approach by showing how we can only understand the human mind fully if we understand our shared rationality with animals. This is the same motivation as Alasdair MacIntyre’s in *Dependent Rational Animals*, but MacIntyre is careful to preserve the discursive separation (and spends a whole chapter on why animals like dolphins, no matter the complexity of their communication, do not have language as such). Okrent is not as careful, and in emphasizing the connection of intentionality between humans and higher-order animals, he allows discursivity to bleed into the mental content of animals.

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<sup>192</sup> Okrent starts to discuss this around page 176, and continues through the end of the chapter and book on the subject.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

Ironically, Okrent repeats the traditional mistake of anthropomorphizing animal minds. When comparing humans and animals, Okrent is more careful, but when just discussing animals (especially the difference between higher- and lower-order animals) he often slips into describing intentional content in discursive terms. He claims that the behavior of the Plover bird gives a “convincing flavor of logic and thoughtfulness,” in contrast to the Spheg wasp that betrays, he thinks, a nonrational routine.<sup>194</sup> As we see in the passage quoted above, the putative mental content of the wasp is ridiculously discursive, especially for a bug.

Okrent’s view of mental intentionality is tainted with projections of discourse into the minds of animals. This anthropomorphism of the higher-order animals becomes obvious when applied to the lower-order animals. Rather than recognize his projection of discursivity onto animals, he simply rejects animals like wasps as nonrational.

By making mental content overly discursive, Okrent shows his bias towards discursive intentionality in animals; what he’s trying to do is show how wasps can’t have beliefs, therefore they can’t have rationality. But animals don’t need to have thoughts to think; they don’t even have to think to be described as rational if they are acting according to their appropriate teleological norms. Initially, Okrent tied intentionality with goal-directedness, not rationality.<sup>195</sup> Okrent’s watershed insight has nothing to do with rationality *per se*, but with teleology, that we can evaluate behavior based on goal-directedness.

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 9.

For some reason, Okrent gets sidetracked with rationality as teleology, rather than preserving the genius of the teleological project as it's presented early in the book. In the next section I will show how we can properly understand intentionality in terms of instrumentality, thus showing why we don't need animal instrumentalism to be discursive at all.

### **Mental States Aren't Necessary to Understand Animals as Rational**

I've just shown how easy it is to make mistakes about mental content; let me now show how biological teleology can explain how intentionality works without appealing to discursive mental states. Okrent features two animals in his book, the Spheg wasp and the plover bird, as paradigm cases of biological and intentional teleology. He focuses on them, in part, because his argument for teleology in simple animals like wasps and his anti-behaviorist account of intentionality in animals like birds is the bulk and genius of his project, providing an objective way to understand normativity in a noncircular, nonreductive way.

Okrent begins with the account of the Plover bird, and it is in terms of the intentionality of the bird that he believes we can make sense of the goal-directedness of the wasp:

The ethologist can present the versatile adaptability of the plover's behavior as a datum because that addictiveness is a characteristic of the *behavior* itself, not the plover. The *behavior* displays the pattern of tending to change so as to bring about a result that varies as a function of the actual environment and the prior state of the plover and serves to continue the existence of the plover's young.<sup>196</sup>

Okrent argues against Fred Dretske that it is possible for behavior to be normative apart from normative beliefs and desires. Okrent says that Dretske's worries stem from the recognition that

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 4

logical behaviorism, which sought to understand mental states in terms of behavior, “failed because it is inevitably circular.”<sup>197</sup> Okrent argues that it isn’t circular because we can evaluate behavior according to norms that don’t circle back to beliefs and desires, and to do this he introduces the Sphex wasp, his example of biologically motivated animals, showing how behavior is teleologically normative apart from mental states. He does this to free mental states from the logical behaviorist’s circular reasoning; that is, Okrent believes higher-order animals do have intentionality because he thinks it’s the best explanation for what they do, and so he wants to show that normativity is outside the cyclical normative causal structure of intentions and behavior. He introduces biological teleology via the Sphex wasp to show normativity that doesn’t depend on beliefs and desires, thus freeing him to attribute beliefs and desires to animals. If we can explain behavior without appealing to intentionality, then we don’t fall into a hermeneutical circle of understanding normativity based on their relation. I’m arguing, however, that if we can already understand appropriate animal action based on teleological norms, we don’t need to worry about mental content.

I concede that intentionality *may seem* to be an easier explanation, but in fact it merely raises more and harder questions. I wish to remain agnostic on the topic: since we don’t need to explain mental content to explain behavioral rationality, let’s not invoke it. By way of analogy, I believe that positing God is the simplest explanation for why the world is the way it is, but that doesn’t mean we should invoke God when we are describing the way the world works. Though we may believe in God’s immanence and sustenance of the world, to invoke him in explaining

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 6.

the motions of the planets raises more questions or is simply unnecessary. Just so with animal minds: whether they don't have mental states (like the SpheX wasp), or they may (like the Plover bird), doesn't bear on their normative behavior. Only with humans does normativity of beliefs and desires matter apart from behavior, since our distinct teleology is the self-creation of our own beliefs and desires for normativity.<sup>198</sup>

Okrent insists on intentionality in animals, reasonably enough, because it fits his hierarchy of teleological rationality quite nicely. Simple animals like wasps have a kind of biological, evolutionary programming that determines their goals. Complex animals display versatile and idiosyncratic goals based on their beliefs and desires. Social animals have goals created by and shared with a community. Humans act for our own goals and have self-conscious, linguistic rationality that informs the lower kinds of rationality. These divisions seem right, but we don't need to talk about beliefs and desires in the second group as what motivates the more novel goals any more than we need to talk about what motivates the community's goals and actions. Indeed, the impossibility of defending any explanation of mental content in animals is apparent when we try to do the same with lower or higher animals: the wasp's motivations are

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<sup>198</sup> Our self-generative teleology occupies the last chapter of Okrent's book, though it remains relatively undeveloped. As Brandom puts it in *Making It Explicit* (14), "To be one of us... is to be the subject of normative *attitudes*." For a non-Brandomian, mature account of human normativity apart from behavior, see Christine M. Korsgaard, "The Sources of Normativity," The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Clare Hall, Cambridge, November 16 and 17, 1992, e.g., "ethical standards are *normative*. They do not merely describe a way in which we in fact regulate our conduct. They make *claims* on us: ... when we invoke them, we make claims on one another. When I say that an action is right I am saying that you ought to *do* it; when I say that something is good I am recommending it as worthy of your choice. The same is true of the other concepts for which we seek philosophical foundations." See also her *Self-Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

intuitive; the group's motivations are also intuitive. Even if the group uses communication (though this in itself would be hard to defend), it's unreasonable to assume that the group communicates its group goals and the means, e.g., that the female penguins should go hunt, and the male penguins should care for their eggs, and if it gets cold, the whole group will be warmer if we huddle together. No! Even if the penguins can and do communicate—*it's cold—huddle together*—that does not bear on the normative good of the group huddling together when it gets cold, just like the wasp doesn't have to have any conception of what it's doing for it to be normatively appropriate. Why then does Okrent insist that mental states are important for understanding intentional action? Just as the wasp and the penguin flock don't have to have any awareness of appropriate action for their action to be right, so too intentional animals don't need to have awareness of their intentionality. Beliefs and desires needn't be explicit mental states or content for animals to act in a way that we can call intentional or rational.

My contention is that Okrent need not insist on explicit mental states for intentional animals; it is not necessary or simpler, and so the burden of proof falls on Okrent. The Plover bird may seem to be making judgments, and this may seem to imply mental states, or we may just be anthropomorphizing its rationality. If the plover bird has beliefs about how to misdirect the predator, and it changes its behavior based on the success of or failure of its plans, then the bird would seem to be making judgments and have ideas, so to speak. But couldn't we just be reading into its actions like so many pet owners tend to do?<sup>199</sup> It seems to me, however, that the

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<sup>199</sup> A near perfect satire of anthropomorphizing pet owners can be seen in the Christopher Guest mockumentary, *Best in Show* (2000; Burbank, CA: Castle Rock Entertainment, 2001), DVD.

bird can be making judgments without explicit mental states. Okrent does not give us any reason to think that the plover bird acts otherwise than in a series of intuitive, richly diverse directedness towards a goal—like a master chess player.

### **If Animals Could Play Chess: Mental Content and Automatic Agency**

The plover bird seems to be doing something like playing chess: it knows possible moves it can do, possible moves the other can do, and knows how its moves may affect the moves of the other and vice versa. However, as even an amateur chess player knows, sometimes when you are planning moves several steps removed, you all of a sudden get an aha! moment, and move without any planning: you simply see a great move. Indeed, good chess players play speed chess games this way—they just see the right moves and execute them. Are we in a position to say that the plover bird doesn't just act intuitively this way? The burden of proof for mental states thus falls on Okrent, since we can explain animal behavior in general (e.g. the wasp) as normative without reference to mental states, and rich, adaptive behavior (e.g. the bird) can be explained as the intuitive grasp of the world.

That higher-order animals have an intuitive grasp of the world is a more conservative statement than Okrent's attribution of mental states. Mental states, at least for Okrent, implies representation and explicit counterfactuals—in short, human reason. In Heidegger's view of the world, the intuitive grasp of the world is primary for Dasein, and an objective grasp of the world

is secondary.<sup>200</sup> Yet the fact that this secondary account is not primary does not render it trivial—this is the domain of everydayness, and moreover, of science (no small matter). Yet we only arrive at this stage, he claims, when the hammer breaks, when our intuitive grasp of the world is shattered. The question Okrent must answer is whether or not animals experience un-readiness-to-hand (Unzuhandenheit), as Dasein does; that is, when the intuitive grasp of the world breaks down for the plover, does it really consider things in an objective, vorhanden way, or does it just move on intuitively?

Heidegger gives three instances of Unzuhandenheit: unusability, lacking, and obstruction.<sup>201</sup> Unzuhandenheit has “the function of bringing to the fore the characteristic of presence-at-hand in what is ready-to-hand,” although “the presence-at-hand which makes itself known is still bound up in the readiness-to-hand of equipment” and this vorhanden understanding is “not thematic.”<sup>202</sup> That is, Unzuhandenheit is still a mode—however “deficient”<sup>203</sup>—of Zuhandenheit, and this deficiency makes the zuhanden conspicuous, thus leading, possibly for Dasein, to Vorhandenheit. Since the conspicuousness is not thematic, however, it is not necessarily vorhanden. Thus animals, if they experience some kind of Zuhandenheit, can also experience Unzuhandenheit without necessarily leading them to

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<sup>200</sup> Cf. Dreyfus’ account of “knowing-how” and “knowing-that” in Dreyfus, Hubert L. and Stuart E. Dreyfus, *Mind Over Machine: The Power of Human Intuition and Expertise in the Era of the Computer* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

<sup>201</sup> See *Being and Time*, 73ff. The technical terms he prefers are Auffälligkeit, Aufdringlichkeit, and Aufsässigkeit (conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and obstinacy).

<sup>202</sup> *Being and Time*, 74.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

Vorhandenheit. The plover bird, for instance, seems to experience Unzuhandenheit when its broken wing display fails; that does not mean, however, that the bird begins then to think in a vorhanden way, thematically or linguistically revising its beliefs and desires—the burden of proof falls on Okrent, for even in our human engagement with the world, Unzuhandenheit does not necessarily catapult us into Vorhandenheit; we may fix the tool, find the missing thing, or remove the obstruction all in a zuhanden way.

In fact, we have every reason to believe that animals don't experience a breakdown in their engagement of the world that leads to Vorhandenheit, because for that to happen, animals would have to have a profound self-awareness and reflective ability to comprehend counterfactuals—discourse and all that entails—and this is not something that Okrent (let alone Brandom and Heidegger) is ready to grant to any other animal besides the human.

There is a vast difference between apprehending and comprehending, as Anthony Esolen points out in the introduction to his translation of Dante's *Paradise*. Concerning heavenly things, we are “dealing with mysteries that the human mind can apprehend but not comprehend, can glimpse but not fathom”;<sup>204</sup> similarly, animal minds can only apprehend what we can comprehend, glimpse what we can fathom. MacIntyre rightly says that “only language enables us to reflect on the truth or falsity of our beliefs, and so to consider reflectively about any particular belief, as to whether it is true or false. But we do not need language to mark the most elementary distinction between truth and falsity.”<sup>205</sup> Okrent seems to think that an animal can only act

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<sup>204</sup> Anthony Esolen, Introduction to *Paradise* (New York: Modern Library, 2007 [2004]), xiii.

<sup>205</sup> MacIntyre, 36.

intentionally or propositionally if that animal has intentional mental content that can serve as reasons for acting, and the animal must be able to reflect on such beliefs and desires for its actions to be considered rational. The problem is in the last part: animals don't need reflection to have mental states or beliefs and desires: the dog simply believes the squirrel is up this tree because he saw it go up there; if he sees it cross the phone lines to another tree, his beliefs about the location of the squirrel will change, but that doesn't require reflection. Instead, higher-order animals simply live in a normatively rich, intuitive, modal world. Modality does not necessitate contemplation of possibility, only real possibilities for action (what the wasp lacks).

Intentionality lies between the nonintentionality of wasps and the linguistic rationality of humans; Okrent believes that higher-order animals have beliefs and desires like humans, and that allows them to have idiosyncratic and adaptive goals; this, however, seems to imply an analogy to the human mind, namely discursive reflection, which is misleading, since animals don't have discourse. So what might nondiscursive beliefs look like?

MacIntyre gives the example of cats eating shrews: a cat will treat a shrew like a mouse until it eats the shrew and becomes violently ill, after which it leaves shrews alone.<sup>206</sup> The cat now has beliefs about shrews, so to speak, that it didn't have before; in fact, the cat now makes a distinction between the two that it didn't make before. The cat may now have the belief that such-living-things [shrews] are different-from-[mice] and are not-to-be-eaten, but what this might be doesn't matter. The mental content does not affect the appropriateness of initially treating a mouse-like animal as a mouse, of sharpening distinctions of mice and non-mice, and of

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<sup>206</sup> MacIntyre, 37-38.

avoiding non-mice. It doesn't matter what the beliefs are like, or if there even are any; what matters is the behavior, the appropriate execution of action towards novel, nonreflexive goals.

**CONCLUSION:  
EXPLICATION ON BEHALF OF ANIMALS**

*Life, in its own right, is a kind of Being; but  
essentially it is accessible only in Dasein.*  
Heidegger<sup>207</sup>

I've now shown why we don't need to make the argument as strong as Okrent believes. Just as we can understand instrumental behavior of wasps by way of goal-directed behavior of higher-order animals, so too can we explicate goal-directed behavior of higher-order animals in terms of intentionality without attributing mental states to such animals. That is, we can explicate the implicit inferences of animals on their behalf.

Softening Okrent's broad conception of rationality thus makes Okrent's teleological intentionality more plausible, since we can remain skeptical about the mental states of animals. At the same time, this mitigated teleological intentionality enhances the Brandomian account of intentionality by reserving explicit inferences for humans while at the same time extending rationality as implicit inferences to animals. This is of course my central thesis, but as an added bonus, by assimilating Okrent into Brandom's framework we no longer need to depart from Heidegger in the two ways mentioned in the last chapter. Understanding now may remain discursive and exclusively proper to Dasein while at the same time conceding goal-directed behavior to animals, since what counts as goal-directedness remains only explicated discursively by Dasein even though the animals indeed do act in such a way.

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<sup>207</sup> *Being and Time*, 50.

Similarly, though we keep the overarching normative structure of Okrent's teleological rationality, we now understand that structure from the perspective of Dasein. Thus we are not merely adding discourse on top of evolutionary, instrumental, and social rationality; we can only understand instrumental, behavioral, and social rationality by way of discourse, through the world of Dasein.

Mightn't we begin, as Heidegger does, with the human understanding of the worlds and rationality in terms of Dasein? I believe this is what Okrent is implicitly doing: though he insists that rationality springs from the ground up, I warrant, à la Heidegger, that discursive rationality is that ground, that Grund, from which we can understand other rationalities, including those that are "nonrational" or nonintentional, derivatively.

Okrent argues that we can make sense of instrumentality by way of behavioral or goal-directed behavior, though such goals are not mental in lower-order animals. Animals like wasps respond predictably to various stimuli, and thus lack the flexible, adaptive richness of higher-order animals. Nonetheless, Okrent argues that we can make sense of this seemingly programmed behavior in terms of goals. More specifically, Okrent believes "that there are very good reasons to believe that the behavior of some animals *is explicable* by appealing to the goals of the behavior even though those animals do not act rationally [intentionally]."<sup>208</sup> Indeed, much of Okrent's project consists of showing how we can normatively explicate animal rationality based on their specific teleologies. A—or perhaps *the*—human-specific goal is to understand the world, including animals; why-asking, be it metaphysics or science or whatever you want to call

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<sup>208</sup> Okrent, xvii, my emphasis.

it, is an essential aspect being human, and philosophy (let's call it) is only possible because of— or at least in—language.

Animals, no matter how rich their engagement in and understanding of the world and other things, do not ask why there is something and not nothing. Indeed, we may be suspect of their wondering why of anything.<sup>209</sup> It is the human who wonders, leading her to do philosophy, and it is language that allows us to do both.

I contend that we can't understand animals without discourse. Indeed, for this reason Okrent insists that animals have mental states, for this is, in some ways, a vulgar kind of discursiveness. But we need not bastardize our notion of discourse and insist animals have it. The better explanation is to remain skeptical about whether they do or don't, instead of attributing to them some putative nondiscursive "vague mental contents."<sup>210</sup> Indeed, Okrent admits in Chapter 7 that language makes possible the complex mental states of humans, but he doesn't appreciate the profundity of human discourse and the dangers of (over)extending it towards animals.

How humans explicate on behalf of animals is rather simple; indeed, we've been doing it this whole time—even in Brandom's chauvinistic examples. Regarding Brandom's parrot, Wanderer explains how easy this is:

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<sup>209</sup> While animals may inquire "why" in the sense of "what" (*why that noise? why that sensation? etc.*), this is really inquiring after something (*what's that noise? what's that sensation? etc.*), not wonder. Animals may inquire, but can't marvel.

<sup>210</sup> Okrent, xvi.

[even assuming parrots don't have normative attitudes,] I...can nonetheless treat the reliably trained parrot's uttering "Raawk, that's red", as having the normative status of being appropriate. ...The significance of the vocal performance is derived from the acknowledgement of the norms governing the performance by other interpreting practitioners.<sup>211</sup>

That is, even if the bird isn't aware of the norms, we can evaluate it according to those norms. We need only point out that besides such arbitrary norms, we are also in a position to evaluate the natural behavior of animals according to the normative teleology that Okrent outlined. We don't need to postulate whether the bird is aware of norms (beliefs and desires) to evaluate it according to norms. As Okrent says, "Natural agents [animals] act as they do because by their natures. Reflective agents act as they do because they accept reasons from which they can infer actions that are appropriate given those reasons."<sup>212</sup> As Brandom rightly explains, humans live in a realm of giving and taking for reasons, and part of that realm involves understanding the reasons animals act; even if they don't know their implicit reasons for acting, we can make those reasons explicit for them.

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<sup>211</sup> Wanderer, 20.

<sup>212</sup> Okrent, 180.

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## APPENDIX A: LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION FOR CHAPTER

4/25/12

Gmail - your article



Joel David Musser <joel.david.musser@gmail.com>

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### your article

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**Joel David Musser** <joel.david.musser@gmail.com>  
To: Joseph Lynch <jlynch@calpoly.edu>

Tue, Apr 24, 2012 at 8:39 PM

Dear Joe,

My article, "Articulating Animals: Animals and Implicit Inferences in Brandom's Work" (14:1), fits into my master's thesis which I'm currently finishing. Could I get permission to use it as a chapter in my thesis? Please let me know.

Thanks,

Joel  
[Quoted text hidden]

## APPENDIX B: LETTER GRANTING PERMISSION FOR CHAPTER ONE

4/25/12

Gmail - your article



Joel David Musser <joel.david.musser@gmail.com>

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### your article

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**Joseph Lynch** <jlynch@calpoly.edu>

Tue, Apr 24, 2012 at 11:52 PM

To: Joel David Musser <joel.david.musser@gmail.com>

Hi Joel,

As Chief Editor of *Between the Species*, I am happy to authorize Joel Musser's article from our 2011 issue 14:1 to be used as a chapter in his thesis.

Sincerely,

Joe Lynch

Professor Joseph J. Lynch, Ph.D.  
Editor, *Between the Species* <http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/bts/>  
Philosophy Department  
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[Quoted text hidden]

## VITA

Joel David Musser was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in 1986. He attended Mechanicsburg Area High School where he did advanced study in music composition, mathematics, and literature. Joel went to Grove City College, where from 2006-2009 he studied English literature, French literature, and philosophy. He earned a Bachelor of Arts with two majors, English and philosophy, focusing on nineteenth-century arts and letters. Joel's junior honors thesis was entitled *A Parallax View of Tom Stoppard and Slavoj Žižek*, which analyzed the humor in Stoppard's plays via Žižek's philosophy. Joel also did intensive German studies during the summers of 2006 and 2007 at Middlebury College.

After Grove City College, Joel worked for Seth Maurer Landscaping, LLC, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Joel married Mallory Austin Wilhelm in 2010, an alumna of Grove City College (Bachelor of Arts in English and French) and of the Pennsylvania State University (Master of Arts in English). Mallory teaches online literature and composition classes for the Potter's School.

Joel will complete his Master of Arts in philosophy at the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in May 2012. Besides his thesis work on Brandom and Heidegger's philosophy of mind and language, Joel also developed an interest in the philosophy of logic, medieval philosophy, aesthetics, and the philosophy of religion. In the fall of 2012, Joel will begin a Master of Theological Studies program at Duke Divinity School.