
INTRODUCTION

Never mind that the astronomy of Nicolas Copernicus amounted, in Arthur Koestler's words (179), to no more than a ramshackle hodgepodge of epicycles, within fifty years of the 1543 publication of *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (*On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*), the transition to mechanical philosophy, and thus to modernity, was underway. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, "the entire episteme of Western culture found its fundamental arrangement modified," Michel Foucault writes in *The Order of Things*; "the seventeenth century marks the disappearance of the old superstitious and magical beliefs and the entry of nature, at long last, into the scientific order" (54). A world previously understood "as a complex of kinships, resemblances, and affinities, and in which language and things were endlessly interwoven," gradually gave way to a configuration for which *analysis*, division into the smallest constituent units, is the fundamental way of knowing, and for which the activity of the mind consists no longer "in *drawing things together*, in setting out on a quest for everything that might reveal some sort of kinship, attraction, or secretly shared nature within them, but, on the contrary, in *discriminating*," dividing, separating identities from differences (54–55). Under this new mode of analysis, the word *individual* lost the meaning it had in medieval argument—that which is *indivisible*, comprehensible only as a whole and indivisible from the whole to which it belongs (Raymond Williams 161–165)—in favor of its modern connotation: a single, detached, and soon-autonomous entity, itself divisible into lower and higher parts, animal body and animating mind. As will emerge in the following chapters, it is animals—countless and nameless animals—who

continue to bear the burden of this modern bifurcation of the living from the dead.

Even before *De revolutionibus* was put on the Papal Index in 1616, Galileo set the stage for the bifurcation when, peering through his telescope at the moon, he saw, not the heavenly bodies of the ancients, but a barren, *dead*, lunar landscape. In his 1610 *Sidereus nuncius* (*Starry Messenger*), Galileo provided the seventeenth century with what Timothy Reiss suggests is its “most eloquent metaphor”: *I/eye-instrument-world* or *mind-sign-world* (24). For one thing, the metaphor signals the birth of perspective, whereby the single, immobile I/eye that looks out upon the world (from the centric point of a visual pyramid or through a telescope) is both *disincarnated*, set apart from its body, and *detached*, set apart from what it sees (Jay *Downcast*, 70; “Scopic,” 8; Panofsky *Perspective*, 27–36). As soon as this disincarnated I/eye claimed “clear and distinct” certainty for its lone viewpoint, the linguistic sign no longer retained its participatory sense, becoming instead as transparent as a telescope, not involved in constituting “truth” but serving merely as an instrument of it. With this withdrawal of language into “transparency and neutrality” (Foucault *Order*, 56), the new regime established itself as at once *analytical* and *referential* (see Reiss 24)—even if the “truth” of its “reifying male look,” inevitably “turned its targets into stone” (Jay “Scopic,” 8).

Most, if not all, contributors to critical animal studies would agree that, particularly since the seventeenth century, modern Western ways of knowing nonhuman animals, inseparable from violent techniques practiced on them, have turned animals into “stone,” that is, into inert objects, useful and disposable things: *reproductive machines* is the term ethicist Peter Singer uses when discussing the fate of sows in today’s industrialized hog farming, where the goal is to use all available manufacturing techniques to “produce” as many as possible pigs per sow per year, and to fast-track those pigs, those “products,” to slaughter weight (Singer *Liberation*, 126). It is as if we have come full circle from the understanding and use of animals proposed in the seventeenth century by René Descartes (1596–1650), who, with his binary (two-term, either/or) mode of organizing all that exists, is often cast as the “father” of modern thought. Cartesian dualism, though it takes many forms, is rooted in a hierarchical intelligible/sensible, mind/body opposition: according to Descartes, the essence of the human lies in thought, the wholly immaterial mind, *res cogito*, which he declared to be entirely separate and detached from the material, bodily realm of *res extensa*. The latter he describes in his *Description of the*

Human Body and of all its Functions (all the while giving an account of the living body of the dog on which he is practicing vivisection) as nothing but a machine, the functions of which follow from the mere arrangement of its working parts (317). The line of division he introduces, it seems for all subsequent modernity, is between this *animal-automaton body*, as mere matter, extended substance, and *thought*, the incorporeal mind or soul, as pure interiority that, as he puts it in his *Discourse on the Method*, “does not require any place, or depend on any material thing” (27). Herein lies the difference, he says, between man and beast: while the human body, like the animal one, comprises nothing but a machine, the human alone also has a mind, is separable into *both* a rational, thinking being *and* an animal *bête-machine* (beast-machine).

Paradoxically enough, even in the burgeoning discourse of animal studies, Cartesian dualism still holds sway, having only recently come under critique from relative newcomers to the field. Indeed, in much of what we might call *formative* animal studies, the assumptions comprising the seventeenth-century meta-text remain more or less intact, for example: faith in the certainty and referentiality of “factual” knowledge, that of science, and no less, of the “science of ethics”; reduction of language, including the language of animal ethics, to a vehicle of referential truth; preponderance of the analytic method and of a fundamental distinction between body and mind; demotion of the biological-animal body and association of the essentially human with mind or mental capacity; reinstatement of the “I” (the self, person, or subject) as *alive* by virtue of its rational capacity, as *author* of ethics, and as the *norm* against which the moral worth of other living creatures is measured.

With regard to the latter point, feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver writes that while debates over the status of animals “have exploded, making a survey of the literature overwhelming,” it remains the case that most of these debates “revolve around the ways in which animals are—or are not—like us, and therefore should—or should not—be treated like us” (Oliver *Lessons*, 25). This insidious “most like us” standard—which we will encounter often in the following pages, and which we will approach as speciesist, anthropocentric, subject-centered, and dualist at once—can also be traced to the seventeenth century and Descartes. In keeping with the analytic method, he broke down social groups into their composite building blocks, each unit or “single man” (*Discourse*, 116–119) a disembodied “I,” like all other individuals in being an essentially rational mind (127). It remains a curiosity of the emerging individualism that it robbed

this or that individual of specificity, reducing all to one and the same essential rationality, such that Descartes could point to *himself* as universal norm, representative of all rational men where it comes to distinguishing “the true from the false” (115). In animal studies, constitution of the ethicist as exemplum and ground of truth only repeats the Cartesian gesture, just as reducing animals, in all of their differences, to a single term, “the animal,” perpetuates Descartes’ representation of all animals as one and the same *bête-machine*, relegated to the other side of his fundamental mind/body divide.¹

One purpose of this book is to introduce the field called “critical animal studies,” which first emerged some forty years ago as a specialization within analytic philosophy, one that set out both to expose, and to offer ethical responses to, today’s unprecedented subjection and exploitation of animals. In recent years, analytic philosophy has been joined by, although it has not always welcomed, other philosophical traditions and critical animal studies has expanded enormously to encompass many diverse academic and activist pursuits. My purpose, however, is not only to outline and describe these developments as broadly as one small book will allow, but also, in line with some more recent contributions to animal studies, to engage the field in a critical way—as the label *critical* animal studies invites.

I interpret the word *critical* here in three senses that are relevant to my task, and to the task of critical animal studies today (see Partridge 130). First (as derived from the Greek *krisis*, a sifting, *krinein*, to sift, and the adjective *kritikos*, able to discern), the word suggests concerned questioning of inherited conceptual frameworks and modes of action they inform, the kind of judgment or discernment that belongs to interpretation of the history of human exploitation of nonhuman animals and that extends to the thinking and practice of ethics today. This task includes questioning not only of the West’s post-seventeenth-century legacy, but also of cultural and religious traditions that extend even into antiquity. Second, the word *critical* goes back to the Latin *criticus*, in grave condition, and *criticare*, to be extremely ill: given the side effects of today’s mass mistreatment of animals—loss of biodiversity; extinction of species; pollution of water, air, and soil; antibiotic resistant diseases; global warming, and so on—this sense of critical as crisis cannot be lost on “critical animal studies.” Nor are we likely to feel well, or to feel well about ourselves, under still-persisting Cartesian mind/body, man/animal dualities. But it is not too late, the sifting has begun, and this leads to a third meaning

of critical that relates to the crisis or turning point of a disease, a hinge, a pivot point where things might just turn around and go another, and better, way (see “hinge” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*). I am interested in foregrounding these and other historically aware and self-critical attempts by men and women to hinge critical animal studies; that is, to rethink its cardinal conceptual supports, and thereby, enable it to turn.