

## Preface: Animals

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On September 6, 2019, five days after wreaking unprecedented havoc on the Bahamas, Hurricane Dorian struck the archipelago of the North Carolina shore in the eastern United States. In Dorian's wake, a mini-tsunami swept away to the sea dozens of wild horses and wild cows that had lived in herds in the nature reserve on Cedar Island. In the ensuing two weeks, three of the cows that had been washed away and were believed dead were discovered in the Cape Lookout National Seashore park, having survived the waves and the winds and having succeeded in swimming at least two miles. A park spokesman told reporters that ever since they found each other, the cows "have been hanging around together" and that although they were eventually identified as belonging to the Cedar Island herd, their "owner" had not yet been notified. "If the cows could talk, imagine the story they can tell you of enduring that rush of water," the spokesman noted: "It's a tremendous story" (Diaz and Ortiz 2019).

Beyond the astonishment at the survival at sea of three land animals, this incident and its framing in the press evoke a long and varied list of intricate questions regarding animals – that is, regarding life and its owners:<sup>1</sup> In the United States there are still herds of wild horses, but what exactly are wild cows? Are these cows that were born in nature following the mating of their parents, or are they cows born in captivity, as the result of artificial insemination in agricultural barns, and subsequently released? Is there a place in the world where real "wild cows" live freely, in nature, without any dependence on

1 Here, and throughout this preface, my formulations often hinge on the Hebrew term for animals (בעלי חיים) – which means, literally, "owners of life". See my detailed discussion below.

human beings? In what sense can one call animals living in nature reserves, operated and supervised by humans, “wild animals”? Who is the “owner” of the cows that the spokesman mentions, and whose lives are these whose owners have owners? What became of the remaining horses and cows, and why where no searches attempted to rescue them or locate their carcasses, as would have happened if the victims were human? Why do we tend to agree with the spokesman’s assumption that cows cannot speak, even though it is clear that their ability to find each other and “hang around together” requires some kind of communication? What is the practical or moral responsibility of human beings toward animals that are hurt directly or indirectly by the intensification of tropical storms and other destructive outcomes of the climate crisis, which derives from the activities and failures of humankind? And finally, in light of what these questions suggest, explicitly or implicitly: if cows could indeed speak to us in our language (or if we could speak to them in theirs), and could tell us about their lives and the way in which we understand their lives and treat them – would their narrative be so “tremendous”?

Such questions and others that lead to them, touch upon them, or derive from them are at the heart of a field of thought and research that has coalesced in the last two decades under the rubric of critical animal studies (Best *et al.* 2007; Taylor and Twine 2014). The term “critical” here stands for two distinct but complementary meanings. First, it expresses a critical stance toward older and more established research areas – animal studies and human-animal studies – which emerged in the wake of the “animal turn” in the humanities and social sciences starting in the 1970s (Ritvo 2007). Just as the theorists of the second wave of feminism critiqued the theorists of the first wave, so the activists of the critical stream of animal studies have been striving to expose the ways in which their predecessors reproduced, either intentionally or unintentionally, power structures and discourses that were contrary to their declared positions – perpetuating, as a result, topical and disciplinary distinctions and divisions that maintain a biased and discriminatory view of the world (a patriarchal view in the feminist context; an anthropocentric view in the animal context) and therefore make it impossible to translate thought into action and change.

Second, the term “critical” captures the way in which this new discipline of thought, study, and research employs the analytical tools, conceptualizations, and discourses of critical thought and of critical theory in order to examine questions regarding nonhuman animals and the power-relations between them and humans. Consequently, critical thinking about animalism embodies, simultaneously, both great promise and great danger.

The promise is inherent in the fact that nonhuman animals do not play an active role in our world of thought and discourse, not even potentially: paraphrasing Gayatri Spivak, we could say that these nonhuman animals constitute, for us, subaltern creatures that

truly cannot speak (Spivak 1988). These animals can thus exemplify a deep and essential meaning of otherness, which critical theory can use to deconstruct the human subject much more sharply and distinctly than it could in any other critical discourse of “others” – including Marxism, poststructuralism, feminism, postcolonialism, disability studies, environmental thought, cybernetics, speculative realism, the new object philosophy in continental philosophy, and so forth.<sup>2</sup>

The danger inherent in this mute subordination derives from the fact that our fundamental inability to understand correctly—and in their original context—nonhuman animals’ communication and behavior produces an unavoidable structural impediment that undermines, from the outset, any attempt of ours, critical and informed as it may be, to say something definite about nonhuman lives.

The tension between the promise and the danger is reinforced when one overcomes the Western monotheistic traditions of denial and repression and recognizes that despite human beings’ aspiration to the divine, they too are but animals. No matter how distant and mysterious it seems, the animal other is actually an internal other. Consequently, the great challenge for critical thought regarding nonhuman animals is how to recognize the necessary epistemological anthropocentrism of every human argument concerning animality without translating it to ontological, moral, and political anthropocentrism.

This challenge marks the point of departure of the current issue; each of the texts published here offers some attempt to contend with it. The texts differ from each other in format, in their topical and disciplinary context, and in the type of argument they seek to advance; but they all focus on the nonhuman animals themselves, mostly on the specific details of a particular species, and analyze the mutual relations between them and the human environment in which, or alongside which, they live, but only to the extent that this environment is relevant to their animal lives, rather than the opposite. These attempts to avoid the anthropocentric evolutionary hierarchy that is inherent in almost every human thought about animals receive substantial verbal support from the fact that the journal is

2 See, for example, the preceding issue of this journal (*Theory and Criticism* 50, Winter 2018) which was devoted in part to the future of critical theory. Three of its articles pinpointed the role played by critical thought regarding life and nonhuman animals in three major streams of contemporary critical theory: posthumanism, the Anthropocene and environmental studies, and bio-politics (Lebovic 2018; Tamir 2018; Vaisman 2018). It is interesting, in this context, to note that throughout the journal’s twenty-eight years of existence, only two articles gave explicit attention and devoted considerable space to nonhuman animals (Ben-Yehoyada 2008; Randeria 2010).

published in Hebrew, which affords us a unique genitive phrase, *ba'alei hayim* (literally, the owners of life), which was chosen as the title of this entire issue.

Jacques Derrida has dealt with the question of the animal on numerous occasions, including the celebrated interview with Jean-Luc Nancy (translated into Hebrew for the first time and included in this issue). One of Derrida's famous arguments is that almost all the epistemological difficulties, moral dilemmas, and political injustices concerning relations between human beings and the other zoological species are inherent in the tendency of most human languages, and certainly Western languages, to relate to the wealth and incredible variety of animal species – from the amoeba to the blue whale and from the fruit fly to the gorilla – by means of one collective noun, “general singular,” that does not distinguish one species from another. Derrida claims that such a “flattening generalization” extends beyond the linguistic and zoological realms and has a fundamental influence on the levels at which we understand nonhuman animals and relate to them in legal, moral, and political spheres of action (Derrida 2008, 32, 34, 84). In fact, Derrida contends that the reduction and flattening inherent in this act of naming constitute real violence, and that every human attempt to conceptualize The Animal already assumes a binary distinction between the human and the bestial – also due to the mechanisms of violence, control, and exploitation that use this distinction to justify themselves (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004).

The Hebrew combination of *hayim* (life) and *ba'alut* (ownership) is a simple but effective solution that succeeds in expressing and reflecting the dynamic multiplicity and variety required both on the zoological-ontological realm and on the ethical-political realm to overcome the inherent anthropocentrism of human language and to relate, equally and simultaneously, to the animality of the human and to the infinite heterogeneity inherent in the innumerable differences between the nonhuman animals.<sup>3</sup>

The Hebrew noun *hayim* (life) does not exist in the singular, and therefore already at this most basic level its use invites flexibility and a multiplicity of meanings that by their very nature resist reduction and flattening. Moreover, the word *hayim* expresses two meanings simultaneously. First, it denotes the general and almost abstract object that is suited to the understanding of life as a physical platform for existence that is common to all beings that are alive. Second, it expresses detailed recognition of the innumerable forms of life that differ from each other both zoologically (the life of a human, the life of a dog, and so on) and in terms of the objects and topical contexts (a life of study, political life, spiritual life, sex life, love life, and so on).

3 For an expansion and to trace the genealogy and etymology of this phrase see Kenny 2019.

Like the double meaning of *hayim*, the meaning of *ba'al* (owner) is twofold. It can refer to property or personal possessions (car owner, homeowner, and so on) but also denote a belonging to something shared or to a general partnership (interested parties, celebrants, allies, litigants, and so on). In light of the combination of the tremendous biological-zoological variety and the infinite number of senses, denotations, associations, connotations, and uses that the word “life” makes available in all human languages, it seems that it is impossible to speak about the ownership of life without using, at the same time and in equal measure, both meanings of ownership that the Hebrew makes possible simply and naturally. Thus, the combination *ba'al hayim* (animal; literally – owner of life) becomes a kind of doubled doubling that makes it possible to express and reflect the dynamic multiplicity and variety that are required both on the zoological-ontological plane and on the ethical-political plane; to overcome the inherent anthropocentrism of human language; and to relate equally to the animalism of the human and to the infinite heterogeneity inherent in the innumerable differences among the animalistic nonhuman beings. The twofold, open, and multivalent doubling that is inherent in the genitive combination of *ba'alei hayim* serves, therefore, as a title, point of departure, and guideline for all the texts in this issue.

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Like the anecdote with which this preface began, this special issue also opens with the suggestive story of a cow. Tamar Novick's article traces the unique life of Stavit, an exceptionally fecund cow in Kibbutz Kfar Giladi, who, during the two decades of her life, produced an exceptionally copious amount of milk and gave birth to an unusually large number of calves. In the heyday of Labor-Zionist settlement, Stavit achieved broad public recognition, became a media star, was immortalized in poems and on postage stamps, and in 1950 even had the title Champion of Champions bestowed upon her in a ceremony attended by many. Stavit's story serves two main purposes. First, it allows Novick to trace the environmental, cultural, technological, and political factors that shaped the European intervention in the Middle East in the first half of the 20th century, and especially the Jewish agricultural settlement in Palestine, that ultimately led to a hybrid cow from Holland being crowned as a champion in a tiny village near the border between the British and French Mandatory areas. Second, Novick lays a foundation for understanding nonhuman animals as historic creatures. This foundation, in turn, serves as the basis for considering the possibility of writing a biography of a specific animal and proposing a renewed examination of some fundamental methodological and historiographical questions.

In 1934, two years after Stavit was born, Ria, Gift, and Mayer, three Doberman pinschers, were brought to British-ruled Palestine from South Africa to serve in the first canine unit of the Mandatory police. **Binyamin Blum**'s article describes the establishment of the unit and examines the legal, historical, and sociological aspects of the use of tracker dogs during in Mandatory Palestine. Blum argues that the difficulty of estimating the reliability of evidence based on dogs' sense of smell makes the transition from human trackers to canine trackers an important chapter in the history of the British Mandate in Palestine, whose significance extends well beyond the legal-forensic sphere in three important ways. First, reliance on the sense of smell of four-legged witnesses, who could not be subjected to cross-examination, enabled the British authorities to relax the norms of law enforcement and to reestablish their power during the period of anticolonial insurgency. Second, in light of dogs' negative and threatening associations in both Jews' and Arabs' religious taboo and superstitions, their use as a means of policing instilled fear of the government among the locals, even outside the courtroom. And third, the replacement of local human trackers by animals not only reduced the members of the indigenous Palestinian population to their animal senses and instincts, it also situated the migrant tracker dogs above them, thus symbolically establishing the superiority of the British over the local population.

Like Stavit, Ria, Gift, and Mayer, the animals that are the focus of **Liron Shani**'s article migrated to Israel, but they are not mammalian quadrupeds. Rather, they are flying insects: Mediterranean flies. In their natural form, the flies are an invasive species that threatens the ecological balance and endangers the agricultural yield of the Arava. But in their industrial form, after being bred in a laboratory and being exposed to ionizing radiation that has sterilized them, they serve as biological pest-control agents and have been accorded the title of "arthropod mercenaries." By examining the various ways in which this zoological split blurs the traditional boundaries between nature and culture, Shani surveys a list of ecological, social, economic, and political effects that shed a new, local, anthropological light on key issues in the study of the relations between the human and the nonhuman. In addition, on the basis of the findings of Shani's multiyear ethnographic study in a moshav in the northern Arava, he proposes a critical examination of the ways in which contemporary anthropological study of animals relies on vague concepts such as "multispecies ethnography" (can one ascribe ethnic affiliation to members of zoological species that are not human?) or concepts with an internal contradiction such as "anthropology of the nonhuman" (who, or what, can be a nonhuman *Anthropos* – that is, person?).

**Naama Harel**'s article, too, examines the blurring of boundaries between the natural and the cultural and between the human and the animalistic. Her research field is literature,

or to be more precise, two key stories of Franz Kafka: “Metamorphosis” and “A Report to an Academy.” Harel shows how, by means of Gregor Samsa (the human-bug) and Red Peter (the ape-man), Kafka’s zoopoetics radically deconstructs his understanding of the human-animal relationship as one of the most fundamental dichotomies in Western culture and exposes its essence as a cultural construct that is institutionalized and maintained through biopolitical practices of exclusion, incarceration, and violence. According to Harel, Kafka’s interspecies fluidity challenges the hegemonic status of the anthropocentrism in Western culture. Moreover, Kafka’s fictional space anticipated contemporary zoopolitical theories and created a postanthropocentric literary-political space that is simultaneously imaginary and real.

The articles section of this issue concludes with a translation of a unique zoopoetic text by the American phenomenologist **Alphonso Lingis**. Lingis burrows into the innards of the symbiotic relations between many and varied kinds of animals in diverse environments and surveys the abundance of physical, behavioral, nutritional, and sexual contexts in which these relations are formed. His main aim in this is to expose the fundamental error underlying the existing anatomic and physiological view of the living body as a separate unit defined by means of a finite array of organs and biological functions. Lingis calls upon us to free ourselves from the short-sighted individuation approach, situated between the physical and conceptual boundaries of the body, and also from the view of the grammatical, legal, moral, and political approaches to the subject that derive from it. In their stead, he urges us to understand that because animals, including human ones, are not separate beings, but rather more like a coral reef swarming with bacteria, microorganisms, and single-cell organisms, there is no difference between being human and being animal. On the contrary, even the most exalted, refined, and complex human characteristics derive directly from animal behavior.

The “Essays and Criticism” section of this issue opens with translation of a text that uses unique poetic language to offer surprising answers to philosophical and historical questions touching on the relation between humans and nonhuman animals. **Elena Passerello**’s essay is actually a chapter of an entire book, *Animals Strike Curious Poses* (2017), devoted to specific animals that have had important and remarkable functions in the cultural and political history of the world. In this chapter, Passerello recounts the story of the long and deep connection between Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and a certain starling, in a way that resonates with some of the questions that arise in Novick’s article about the possibility of writing the biography of an animal. Passerello combines musical analyses of several of Mozart’s main works with zoological and ethological studies of the brains and lives of starlings, offering a brief and fascinating interspecies history that

begins with Mozart's purchase of the starling in spring 1784 and ends with the pompous funerary ceremony the composer conducted in his home following the starling's death in June 1787, just a week after the death of Mozart's father, which did not merit a parting gesture of any kind from Mozart junior.

The following three texts in this section examine animal existence and its relations to human existence through critical observations of the place of nonhuman animals in the visual arts. **Anat Pick**'s essay makes use of the radical ethical terminology of the philosopher and mystic Simone Weil in order to analyze several films by the artist Chen Sheinberg, at the heart of which lies the entomological and ontological uniqueness of the locust, with all the religious and cultural meanings associated with it – from the Hebrew Bible to the disaster films of our times. Pick shows how, by focusing on a single individual, isolated and vulnerable, rather than on the threatening and destructive swarm, Sheinberg removes the utilitarian and violent perspective through which we have become used to seeing nonhuman animals, and in practice responds to Weil's call to pay attention by means of a "vegan gaze", aimed at the animalistic other and recognizing its suffering without making use of it, without seeing it as a means for attaining goals or as an exploitable resource, and without exposing it to the invasiveness and pretentiousness of the classic empathic gaze.

The starting point of **Yanai Toister**'s essay is the famous case of the selfie taken by a crested black macaque who managed to get hold of the camera of a British nature photographer in the forests of Indonesia in 2011. The monkey's smiling self-portraits appeared in media around the world and sparked a legal and public debate over issues of copyright, royalties, and fair use of images. Toister argues that the very existence of a debate is evidence of the collapse of the traditional dichotomous division between the natural and the animalistic and between the human and the technological, and invites a reexamination of the photograph as a unique act that combines all these aspects. To this end, he draws on the unique philosophy of Vilém Flusser, especially the conceptual foundation of "image," "information," "apparatus," and "software" which he developed in his discussion of photography. Using that philosophical approach, Toister examines the ways in which the automation of photography changed the perceptions of our intention, memory, and actions, to the extent that in some ways we are all "simian photographers."

The portfolio curated by **Gilad Reich** offers another view of the blurring of boundaries between the animal and the human by focusing on three contemporary video works about the lives of the packs of stray dogs in artistic and ethological buffer zones that are also urban and political border zones: Annika Eriksson, from Sweden, becomes friendly with abandoned dogs on the outskirts of Istanbul during the great protests that were directed, inter alia, at the accelerated and corrupt development of the city; Wim Katriz,



from Belgium, documents wild dogs in the deserts of Kuwait, riven by wars and industrial exploitation; and Itai Marom, of Israel, observes dogs living in the borderless no man's land, steeped in violence, between Palestinian Hebron and Jewish Kiryat Arba. According to Reich, all three focus our gaze on "man's best friend" and on the dogs' own gazes at the human, to reveal our shared wild and violent past, which has never ceased to lie in wait for us under the sidewalks of the cities and behind the taming and domestication.

The third translated text in this issue is of an interview by **Jean-Luck Nancy** with **Jacques Derrida** in 1988, which, as noted, is considered one of the pillars of Derrida's later concern with what he called "the question of the animals." In an attempt to answer Nancy's question of "Who comes after the subject?", the dialogue between two of the most thorough and critical readers of Martin Heidegger in France in their time, gave rise to several of Derrida's most original and radical formulations regarding the relation between the human and the animal and laid the conceptual and theoretical foundation for the books and seminars that Derrida devoted to the ethical and political aspects of thought about animality in his last years. Human violence toward nonhuman animals, especially the question of the "noncriminal killing" of them and the eating of their flesh, receive here, for the first time in Derrida's oeuvre, explicit formulation, which remains, to this day, at the heart of the philosophical discussions of the subject and also at the heart of the interpretive discussions of Derrida's works. The interview is preceded by an introduction that details the circumstances that led to its being edited and published, and locates it on the historical and philosophical axis of Derrida's writing.

**Yaniv Iczkovits'** personal essay also deals with the issue of eating nonhuman animals. However, instead of offering learned interpretations and formal arguments, Iczkovits examines the issue through its emotional and social aspects. He draws inspiration from his academic background, on the one hand, and from the process of his becoming vegetarian, on the other, in order to describe the ideational, emotional, social, and parental challenges involved in the attempt to juggle philosophical-academic education and a personal moral approach based on compassion. In Iczkovits' words, the essay does not deal with animal rights or with academic arguments for or against them "but rather with the very possibility of serving sausages at an academic conference dealing with animal rights."

In an enlightening review essay, **Mira Balberg** discusses two volumes recently published by the University of Pennsylvania Press. By exposing the role played by animal-related questions in pre-modern Jewish texts, the two books highlight the mutual relation between the study of Judaism and the study of animals, which in recent years has inspired both these fields of knowledge and research. The first book that Balberg reviews is devoted to the *Avoda Zara* (idolatry) tractate of the Babylonian Talmud, and the other is

devoted to the writings of the Ashkenazic hassidim in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Balberg argues that despite the distance in time and the differences in style and objects of investigation between the two books, both offer bold and creative ways of thinking about nonhuman animals – real rather than metaphorical. In doing so, they exemplify how seemingly rigid theological and ideological agendas can give rise to radical ideas regarding the “animal” as an epistemological and ontological category – and, consequently, also as a religious and moral category.

Ofri Ilani’s essay examines “the question of the animal” against a background of contemporary public and academic concern with climate change in the Anthropocene era. He argues that this era, in which humankind’s activities have become the most powerful influence over what happens on the planet, presents a special challenge to the humanist and critical traditions of human studies, which find it difficult, with their unique ways of thought and description, to think about the destruction of the planet and the mass zoological extinction we are witnessing. According to Ilani, human thought never experienced such a total transformation of the world. The fact that the post-nature technological situation is creating unprecedented threats and new forms of violence, whose victims are not only humans, requires us to find ways to introduce, into the conversation, the voices of nonhuman animals and of the plants, the soil, and the various natural phenomena.

Finally, Eitan Bar-Yosef returns to the work of Nahum Gutman, which fascinated him in the past, both as a child and as a young scholar. His essay examines Gutman’s complex encounters with animals – in the Israeli Jewish settlements, in the Paris zoo, and in the African jungle – and strives to understand when and under what circumstances Gutman is prepared to exchange his detached view of the animal for actual physical contact. One such rare moment is described in the chapter “Under the Tiger’s Paws” in the book *In the Land of Lobengulu, King of Zulu*: a hair-raising encounter between Gutman and a tiger lying upon him. Bar-Yosef, who had already analyzed this scene from a postcolonial perspective, seems to respond in his essay to Alphonso Lingis’s call by offering a new interpretation that emphasizes the intimate proximity “between these two mammals that are united here, in the illustration, almost becoming one flesh.”

Bar-Yosef’s essay concludes not only this issue but also the period of seven years in which he served as editor of *Theory and Criticism*. In addition to my personal thanks to Eitan for his great help in thinking together and in working on the current issue – always amicably – I would like to thank him in the name of the authors, the editors, the translators, and the reviewers who had the opportunity to work with him over the years, and above all,

in the name of the readers who enjoyed the fruits of his devoted labor. This is also the place to wish great success to Shaul Setter, the incoming editor of the journal.

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