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LCC 4100: Senior Seminar
For: Prof. Ron Broglio
March 16, 2007

“*Mt. Carmel: Humility or Oblivion, or The Difference Between Deliverance and Escape*”

It is my contention that human philosophy has been the attempt to acquire an autonomous knowledge and being. This autonomy has manifested itself in many forms, but it began with a desire for autonomy from God and has become an attempted autonomy from all authority. There are two means by which historical philosophical movements have attempted to achieve autonomy; I will refer to them as the becoming-god and becoming-animal schools of thought. The Enlightenment and the Modernists were part of the becoming-god project, and the Romantics and Postmodernists can be designated as part of the becoming-animal or becoming-natural school. Both desire autonomy from an absolute God and from authorities, but they have chosen different pathways to achieve this end. The becoming-god school holds out hope that they can construct the world in their own image, and thus escape accountability to authorities or God by becoming the authority and god of their world. The becoming-animal or becoming-natural school extends hope that all gods and authorities are arbitrary, and therefore they desire to escape them by destroying their forms and ridiculing their statutes. The oscillation between these two views which can so clearly be seen in the history of philosophical movements can be summed up for our time by Nietzsche: “But that I may reveal my heart entirely to you, my friends: if there were Gods, how could I endure it to be no God! *Therefore* there are no Gods.”¹ This then summarizes the movement of autonomous philosophy—first, man desires to be as God; second, man, seeing he cannot be God, denies God and authority.

This is an almost inevitable transition. Having denied absolutes, man is unable to enforce his own authority. It is important to summarize why all becoming-god movements in philosophy ultimately degenerate into becoming-natural movements because it will lay the groundwork for the philosophy that has recently gained prominence—animal philosophy.² The issue, ultimately, is the concept of aseity. *A se* comes from the Latin for self-containment or self-sufficiency. The becoming-god attempt to create the world as he sees it in his mind is futile because man does not know what he is, and his inability to know himself precludes his understanding the world in his image. Sartre said, “There is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it. Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also what he wills himself to be after this thrust toward existence.”³ The problem is clear. Humanity is a constantly changing concept when defined by humanity because one must know what it is like to be a man before you can explain humanity, but one must explain humanity to know what it is like to be a man. No men are then “allowed” to dictate their vision of humanity on anyone else, and attempts to force one vision of humanity on the rest of men has introduced certain and constant conflict between irreconcilable visions. Against this failure in modernist thought, the animal philosophers offer another alternative: rather than form the world in the image of man, man should rather *escape* humanity.

Deleuze and Guattari, perhaps the most influential contemporary animal philosophers, emphasize this shift from Heideggerean “world-builders” to becomings-animal when they say, “There is the answer of a becoming-animal... ‘head over heels and away’, rather than lowering one’s head and remaining a bureaucrat, inspector, judge, or judged.” (Baker, 118) The reason they suggest abandoning the modernist becoming-god concept is because it did not deliver what becoming-animal can deliver. And what is that? Escape. Notice the last state of man they mention is “judged”. Eric Newton explains a main component of becoming-natural art by saying “the factor common to most romantic art is a rebellion against law, but what distinguishes the romantic pursuit of the abnormal is a desire to escape rather than to rebel.”⁴ How does becoming-animal offer an escape from judgment?

It is obvious how becoming-animal frees the world-builder from the responsibility of *being* an authority, but how does it free men from *having* an authority over them? Though Newton was concerned with art, his statement could just as readily apply to “romantic philosophy”, or becoming-natural philosophy. Deleuze and Guattari are not careful to distinguish these or many other things categorically. One could replace “abnormal” from the quote with “monstrous”, “animal”, “primitive”, “abject”, or “other” and retain the meaning in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms. So we see that becoming-animal is the “flight” from, not the “fight” against, humanity. The animal philosophers refuse to play the game the way the modernists have constructed it, and the modernists cannot enforce the rules of the game. But again, how does the animal philosopher escape accountability? He escapes *through* the animal, or *by way of* the animal.

The Odysseus that poked the Cyclops in the eye and jeered arrogantly from his escaping boat was a becoming-god, but the Odysseus that went between the Cyclops’ legs holding to the belly of a sheep was a becoming-animal. The point of becoming-animal is eventually to ‘become-imperceptible’. The point is to become, as Bataille said, “in the world like water in water.” In this way, the man becomes beyond shame, in Skinner’s terms, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. But what place does the animal really have in this scenario? My contention is that the animal is the god of the animal philosopher, just as the man is god to the humanist. The purpose of a god in human terms seems to revolve around two ideas: fear/reverence and shame/guilt. In other words, who should one fear and how should one deal with his shame?

What work does the becoming-god do to rid its followers from fear and shame? The becoming-god learns to kill, cage, and control all things having the power-to-change—in this way he copes with his fear. And the becoming-god makes his own law according to his desires—in this way he removes his shame. But what the animal philosophers realize is that only a few individuals may enjoy god status. Ultimately only one man may be absolute God, and in the meantime only a few have the will to become-gods. Everyone else is constantly afraid of and shamed by them. The “self” was always at war with other “selves”—always “red in tooth and claw.” It is easy to see that the becoming-god is also an animal derivative like the becoming-animal, but the becoming-god chooses “fight” rather than “flight”, he chooses rebellion rather than escape. The assumption of the becoming-god is that man is superior to animals, and because of this man has a right to kill, cage, and control other animals as well as inferior men. Opposed to this humanist perspective, the becoming-animal responds, “It is evident that nature cares very little whether a man has a mind or not. The real man is the savage; he is in

accord with nature as she is. As soon as man sharpens his intelligence, increases his ideas and the way of expressing them, and acquires needs, nature runs counter to him in everything. He has to do violence to her continually.”⁵ Under the unrelenting burden of this conflict, the becoming-animal chooses to stop fighting. They choose to fly away instead.

The god of the becoming-animal is clearly the animal “other”. The animal as a god and other is revered and feared by the becomings-animal. The animal as a god and familiar does away with our shame as we become more like it. This dual capacity of the animal to be both beyond and inside the human is unsurprisingly similar to the Christian view of God as both transcendent and immanent. Steve Baker illustrates the reverence of the animal as other when he says,

In each print [by Britta Jaschinski], the animal’s looming presence bludgeons the viewer but holds something back, keeping its identity to and for itself. By means of that very reserve it offers something close to what Luce Irigaray calls *wonder*. This is the wonder experienced by individuals when faced with an unbridgeable distance between themselves and another (any other): ‘Wonder being the moment of illumination...between the subject and the world.’ (Baker, 96)

This wonder is the wonder of worship. In this sense the animal as “other” becomes the source of a transcendent truth— “the animal proposes to the human by indicating ways-out or means of escape that the human would never have thought of by himself.” (Baker, 102) This idea of a truth man would “never have thought of by himself” is also unsurprisingly similar to the Biblical concept of *mystery*, a truth unknowable by man except for by Divine revelation.

But the animal is not merely an “other”. The animal is also indwelling in the human. The human is a becoming-animal. In this sense, losing one’s humanity de-Oedipalizes the human being. It removes the human being from the realm of shame and guilt. But with a sacrifice—the human must give up his prized “self” and give up meaning. There are problems involved in this transition, however. In the words of Merleau-Ponty,

...everything comes to pass as though he [the philosopher] wished to put into words a certain silence he hearkens to within himself. His entire “work” is this absurd effort. He wrote in order to state his contact with Being; he did not state it, and could not state it, since it is silence. Then he recommences. (Steeves, 279)

In other words, if the animal philosopher has truly escaped through the animal, he cannot transmit anything back to the rest of us. Whether Deleuze and Guattari know how to become-imperceptible, they are clearly not yet imperceptible or we would not hear or see their words. The dilemma of the animal philosopher is that the natural process toward freedom or autonomy ends in oblivion. It ultimately leads to an absolute death.

The piece *Mt. Carmel: Humility or Oblivion* informs the discussion on the becoming-god and becoming-animal projects by depicting the three options available to

the truth-seeker. In the prophets of Baal are represented both the becoming-god and the becoming-animal projects having played out their tension in a day rather than over the course of history. In Elijah you have another alternative altogether, and it is helpful to consider how the Biblical God differs from the becoming-god and the animal gods.

The Biblical God actually is *a se*. According to John Frame,

...God is incomprehensible. This term does not mean that God is incomprehensible to himself. On the contrary, man's inability to comprehend God is founded on the very fact that God is completely self-determinative. A self-contained God is necessarily beyond our complete understanding: If God does actually exist as a self-contained and eternally self-conscious being, it is natural that we, his creatures, should not be able to comprehend, that is understand Him exhaustively.⁶

We can see in this a similarity to the "otherness" of the animal. God is "ineffable" in this sense. But God is also familiar to us in that according to the Genesis account, we were made in His image. (Gen. 1:26) As such we have our being in Him. Just as both the becoming-god and the becoming-animal consider themselves as animal derivatives because they believe humans evolved from animals, so we Christians consider ourselves "like God" because of our Biblically informed cosmology.

One can see in Baal and other forms of animal worship the attempt to gain the "limiting concept" belief in God offers without having to bow to God's authority or laws. Becoming-animals replace God's aseity with animal "haecceity" or "this-ness"; they replace God's transcendence with animal's unknowability and God's immanence with the indwelling animal connected to our animal origins. In the words of the Apostle Paul, "Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." (Rom. 1:23) Becoming-gods "exchanged" God for their own image, whereas becoming-animals "exchanged" God for animals. The problem is that these "replacements" are not adequate to deal with the fear and shame that comes from our accountability to God and His Law.

Fear of God precludes the need for any other fear. Fear of man or beast replicates itself and is constantly being made obvious in our futile attempts to check it through control mechanisms. God removes our shame by substituting His Son in our place so that, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1) Notice the preposition "in", meaning within Christ or members of Christ. The becoming-animal tries to escape *in* the animal. We are delivered *in* Christ.

In I Kings 18, we can read the account of the challenge on Mt. Carmel. As well as being a historical event, the account may also be seen as the history of human philosophy from after the Fall of Man to the Final Judgment. Notice that man's attempts at philosophy are given most of the day, and by analogy most of history, which becomes the process of men in rebellion against God being shown foolish. The 450 prophets of Baal start in the morning calling to their god. Baal was made in the image of a bull, and the Baal-worshippers offer a bull on their altar. The altar would probably have been highly symbolic and abstracted in its geometrical rigidity and beauty. After calling on their god

all day long to no avail, they begin to cut themselves and scream out while Elijah mocks them. As the day is setting, it is Elijah's turn to call on his God. This God answers by fire from heaven.

The differences between the approaches should be obvious. On the one side, Baal-worshippers, whose god is in the image of an animal, offer an animal on their altar. They begin as becoming-gods. The first works are an attempt to control the environment by the force of will. They have offered a good bull on a beautiful altar they have created in order to manipulate their god into vindicating their virtue. Their god is one they can cage, kill, and control, or so they think. When Baal does not heed the voice of the becoming-gods, they begin to do something different entirely. They start to *sacrifice themselves* to Baal in order to win his favor, cutting their arms and crying out rabidly. Within the painting, the Baal-worshippers are left with the two things they sought to remove from their sight by becoming-gods or becoming-natural. The death they fear, and the guilt and shame of death are prominently displayed. No fire has consumed it and it rots all day in plain sight collecting flies.

The main point of the work is to ask, can man actually escape accountability? If he attempts to escape through the animal, he is doomed to oblivion and annihilation. If he attempts again to become-god he is doomed to the inescapability of conflict leading to a need for escape leading to oblivion. The only possibility that does not lead to destruction is the way that passes through humility. This is the difference between escape and deliverance. The becoming-animal thinks that he can escape God in the animal? If God is who He says He is in the Bible, man cannot escape being man. No matter how "debased" or insane a man tries to make himself to escape responsibility, God judges all with justice according to His Law. The only hope to escape from God's judgment is to go to God in submission and repentance.

One will notice in *Mt. Carmel* that Elijah's death is consumed with fire. Elijah is obscured by the great light. His altar is one of artless piled stones; his dead and dismembered ox the consequences of his sin and rebellion. Elijah brings nothing to God but his sin and death. He lays down his life at God's feet in humility and is willing to take whatever God gives. God delivers him from the consequences of death and sin. He has not *escaped* because he has been captured. He has not done anything but *surrender*.

The desire for escape implies an escape *with something*. Escape with one's life, or one's self? What are the becomings-animal trying to escape with if they truly want to lose the self? Why do they write such sharp and meaning-laden texts if their purpose is to show how one can kill signification, how metaphor and meaning are hateful things? Escape still presupposes the high value they place on the self. The becomings-animal believe that no one is needed for deliverance from shame and guilt. You just have to find a place where there is no jurisdiction. But when you become the animal that you escape through, you do not become "un-selved" but merely "re-selved". Inherent in the becoming-animal rhetoric is a saving of this new self, and a desperate hope that one will be allowed to transfer everything over into his new self but shame and guilt and fear. It is not actually a relinquishing of control or a relinquishing of self, but an attempt to create another self that is beyond shame and guilt. It is still *self-centered*. It is not true surrender. According to Jesus, "whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matt. 16:25) Elijah surrendered his self, and God responded to this surrender by delivering him from death. The becomings-god and

becomings-animal of this world never surrender themselves. The becomings-animal know that the only true escape would be true death. By true death, I mean a death beyond suicide. Not a killing of the body, but an annihilation of the soul. This hope of annihilation is necessarily predicated on the non-existence of an absolute God. They never let God speak into their silence. They fill whole books with words about how inhuman they are becoming, and hope we will not detect the grasping desperateness of their hypocrisy. They are unable to surrender their self, and so the natural conclusion of their process is not escape, but judgment.

David the Psalmist declares in his second Psalm that it is impossible to rid oneself of shame or fear because one cannot overthrow God or His Law. The attempts of men are shown to end in futility or death. David ends his second Psalm by pleading with becoming-gods and becoming-animals to surrender to God and find "refuge in Him." This is not an escape into oblivion, but deliverance into meaningfulness and life.

Why are the nations in an uproar
and the peoples devising a vain thing?
The kings of the earth take their stand
And the rulers take counsel together
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,
"Let us tear their fetters apart
and cast away their cords from us!"
He who sits in the heavens laughs,
The Lord scoffs at them.
Then He will speak to them in His anger
and terrify them in His fury, saying,
"But as for Me, I have installed My King
Upon Zion, My holy mountain."
...Now therefore, O kings, show discernment;
Take warning, O judges of the earth.
Worship the LORD with reverence
And rejoice with trembling.
Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry,
And you perish in the way,
For His wrath may soon be kindled
How blessed are all who take refuge in Him! (Psalm 2:1-6; 10-12)

Citations

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Philosophy of Nietzsche* (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), pg. 98
2. Another description of the becoming-god versus becoming-animal tension can be found in Bruno Latour's designation of modernism as a "purifying" force and postmodernism as a "hybridizing" force. One can find this in *we have never been modern*.
3. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957) pg. 15
4. Eric Newton, *The Romantic Rebellion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962) pg. 125
5. John Gassner and Sidney Thomas, editors, *The Nature of Art* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1964) pg. 433
6. John Frame, *Divine Aseity and Apologetics*
(www.thirdmill.org/files/reformedperspectives/hall_of_frame/VT_Divine%20Aseity%20and%20Apologetics.doc)

Works Cited

1. Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2000)
2. H. Peter Steeves, *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology, and Animal Life* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999)
3. Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Death of Meaning* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2002)
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