THE VALUE OF BEING WILD:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

By

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Abstract

Given that one-million species are currently threatened with extinction and that humans are undermining the entire natural infrastructure on which our modern world depends (IPBES, 2019), this dissertation will show that there is a need to provide an alternative approach to wildlife conservation, one that avoids anthropocentrism and wildlife valuation on an instrumental basis to provide meaningful and tangible success for both wildlife conservation *and* human well-being in an inclusive way. In this sense, *The Value of Being Wild* will showcase the concept of eco-phenomenology as an important non-anthropocentric alternative to the current approach to wildlife conservation, namely sustainable development.

The problem with this dominant paradigm, as *Chapter Two* will reveal, is that sustainable development has not only failed to provide humans and future generations of humans with their own needs but, as per the latest IPBES report, failed in arresting the freefall decline of wild species. The situation currently requires a radical overhaul of the current system.

As emerged from the later work of French phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), eco-phenomenology is particularly well-suited as a practical alternative to sustainable development. The core reason is that eco-phenomenology moves away from a human-centred framework toward a far more inclusive approach that embraces the conservation of wild animals as well the wild environment they dwell in, beyond any human needs (although humans are embraced within the approach too). Merleau-Ponty helps us to move away from anthropocentrism to a more inclusive approach in conserving wildlife, since his phenomenology does not consider the human animal's relationship in the world as exclusive (to use and exploit wild animals solely for their benefit), but inclusive (as an interconnected biological component in a broad ecological system). The strength of Merleau-Ponty's concept of phenomenology is that it facilitates an understanding of all living and even non-living entities, such as air, water and soil, as interconnected and interrelated within a broad biosphere. While Merleau-Ponty did not address the concept of wild animals or the biosphere directly, his later work points to the fact that human animals cannot exist outside a world that provides life-giving force to all living beings.

Phenomenology, as developed by Merleau-Ponty, is a concept that recognises the axiological qualities of the natural world are inherent and ineliminable from the discipline of traditional phenomenology, hence the term 'eco-phenomenology', developed in one reception of his thinking. Eco-phenomenology offers a return to a world that humans have tried hard to alienate themselves from, in that it approaches the natural environment and wild animals, not as a complex set of objects and objective processes, but rather as they are experienced and *lived from within* by the attentive animal who is entirely a part of the world that he or she experiences. Merleau-Pontian eco-phenomenology thus emphasises a holistic dialogue within a more-than-human world (Abram, 1996: 65).

Eco-phenomenology is a concept that *points toward* an applied strategy but so far this has not been attempted in earnest. This is specifically true when it comes to wildlife conservation. *The Value of Being Wild*, therefore, sets out to employ the concept of eco-phenomenology in order to provide a new practical wildlife conservation approach that challenges, and potentially replaces, the current prevailing policies as employed by global governmental and inter-governmental agencies. In particular, this alternative frame is posed as a replacement for the failing anthropocentric conservation practices currently in place in South Africa. This dissertation will therefore conclude by exploring strategies where conservation of wildlife is not taken as instrumentally-valued, or even intrinsically-valued, but rather as *wild-valued* in that the existence of wild animals as wild is conserved within a broader, more inclusive overall ecology that supports the survival and flourishing of all living beings that include plants, wild animals and human beings.

Abstrak

Een miljoen spesies staar tans uitwissing in die gesig en mense ondermyn die totale natuurlike infrastruktuur waarvan ons moderne wêreld afhanklik is (IPBES, 2019). In die lig hiervan, sal hierdie proefskrif aantoon dat daar 'n behoefte is aan 'n alternatiewe benadering tot die bewaring van wildlewe, naamlik 'n benadering wat antroposentrisme vermy, sowel as die waardering van wildlewe op 'n instrumentele basis, ten einde betekenisvolle en tasbare sukses te verseker vir beide wildbewaring *en* menslike welsyn op 'n inklusiewe manier. *The Value of Being Wild* bespreek die konsep van eko-fenomenologie as 'n belangrike nie-antroposentriese alternatief tot volhoubare ontwikkeling.

Die probleem met hierdie dominante paradigm, soos wat in Hoofstuk Twee aangetoon word, is dat volhoubare ontwikkeling nie net gefaal het om in die behoeftes van mense en toekomstige menslike geslagte te voorsien nie, maar soos vervat in die jongste IPBES-verslag, ook gefaal het om die vryval van wildspesies te voorkom. Die situasie benodig 'n radikale transformasie van die bestaande stelsel.

Soos wat in die latere werk van die Franse fenomenoloog Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) na vore kom, is eko-fenomenologie besonder geskik as 'n praktiese alternatief tot bestaande wildbewaringspraktyke. Merleau-Ponty beweeg weg van 'n mensgesentreerde na 'n veel meer inklusiewe benadering tot wildbewaring. Dit is omdat sy fenomenologie nie die menslike dier se verhouding met die wêreld beskou as eksklusief nie (om wilde diere te gebruik en uit te buit tot sy voordeel), maar eerder as inklusief (as 'n interverweefde biologiese komponent in 'n breë ekologiese stelsel). Die krag van Merleau-Ponty se konsepsie van fenomenologie lê daarin dat dit 'n siening bemiddel van alle lewende dinge en nie-lewende dinge, soos lug, water, en grond, as interafhanklik en verweef binne 'n breë biosfeer. Alhoewel Merleau-Ponty nie die konsep van wilde diere of die biosfeer direk aangespreek het nie, dui sy latere werk op die feit dat menslike diere nie kan bestaan buite 'n wêreld wat lewegewende krag aan alle lewende dinge verskaf nie.

Die fenomenologie wat Merleau-Ponty ontwikkel, erken dat die natuurlike wêreld aksiologiese kwaliteite besit en dat hierdie insig gewortel is in die dissipline van tradisionele fenomenologie; vandaar die term eko-fenomenologie wat deur een resepsie van sy denke ontwikkel is. Weens die onontkombare en inherente ekologiese aspek van fenomenologie, bied eko-fenomenologie 'n terugkeer tot 'n wêreld waarvan mense hard probeer het om hulleself te vervreem. Merleau-Ponty se fenomenologie beskou die natuurlike omgewing en wilde diere, nie as 'n komplekse stel objekte en objektiewe prosesse nie, maar fokus eerder op hoe dit ervaar en geleef word van binne uit deur die aandagtige dier wat heeltemal deel is van die wêreld wat sy of hy ervaar. Merleau-Ponty se eko-fenomenologie beklemtoon dus 'n holistiese dialoog binne 'n meer-as-menslike wêreld (Abram, 1996: 65).

Eko-fenomenologie is 'n konsep wat vra om 'n toepassingstrategie, maar dit is tot dusver nog nie in erns aangepak nie. Dít is veral waar ten opsigte van wildbewaring. *The Value of Being Wild* is dus daarop gemik om die konsep van eko-fenomenologie te gebruik om 'n nuwe praktiese wildbewarings-benadering voor te stel. Hierdie benadering daag die heersende

beleide uit wat tans wêreldwyd deur regerings- en inter-regeringsagentskappe gebruik word en mag hulle selfs uiteindelik vervang. In die besonder word hierdie alternatiewe raamwerk voorgestel as 'n plaasvervanging vir die mislukkende antroposentriese bewaringspraktyke wat tans in Suid-Afrika gebruik word. Hierdie proefskrif kulmineer daarom in 'n verkenning van strategieë waar wildbewaring nie onderneem word aan die hand van óf 'n instrumentele óf 'n intrinsieke waardering van wildlewe nie, maar eerder aan die hand van *wild-waardering*. Hiermee word bedoel dat die wilde bestaan van wilde diere as sodanig beskerm word binne 'n breër, meer inklusiewe en omvattende ekologie wat die oorlewing van alle lewende wesens ten doel het, insluitend plante, wilde diere en mense.

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To my parents, Drs John and Wilma, who inspired me to be the third Dr Cruise in the family.

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For the cats throughout my life: Eve, Octo, Hyena, Gambit and Bollies.

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INTRODUCTION

Only within the moment of time represented by the present century has one species – man –
acquired significant power to alter the nature of the world.

(Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*)

1. Rationale

It is the grim reality that wild places and animals are being destroyed at catastrophic levels by human action. A recent report, *The Living Planet Index* (2018) prepared by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Zoological Society of London, found that global wild animal populations have dropped by 60% (almost two-thirds) between 1970 and 2014 (World Wildlife Fund, 2018: 7). This has occurred largely as a result of unregulated and unsustainable anthropogenic (human-generated) activities like over-harvesting of natural resources, over-exploitation of wildlife due to trading, hunting, poaching; or from human-induced climate change, natural habitat loss and widespread pollution (World Wildlife Fund, 2018). A year later, an even more dire warning was issued. In May 2019, a global assessment by the *Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (IPBES, 2019) found that one-million species are currently threatened with extinction and that humans are undermining the entire natural infrastructure on which our modern world depends.

Based on these reports (and others), it is common knowledge that human population expansion and human behaviour have triggered what scientists and commentators refer to as the Sixth Great Extinction event in the history of Earth (Kolbert, 2014).

Earth's five previous mass extinctions were:

The First Mass Extinction at the End-Ordovician was 443 million years ago. This was a severe ice age that led to sea levels falling by 100m. It wiped out 60-70% of all species which were predominantly ocean dwellers at the time. Then soon after, the ice melted leaving the oceans starved of oxygen.

The Second Mass Extinction was the Late Devonian around c 360 million years ago. This was a messy prolonged climate change event, again hitting life in shallow seas hard, killing 70% of

species including almost all corals. The Third Mass Extinction during the Permian-Triassic was c 250 million years ago. This was a big one – more than 95% of species perished, including trilobites and giant insects – strongly linked to massive volcanic eruptions in Siberia that caused a savage episode of global warming. The Fourth Mass Extinction occurred during Triassic-Jurassic at c 200 million years ago. Three-quarters of species were lost, again most likely due to another huge outburst of volcanism. It left the Earth clear for dinosaurs to flourish. The Fifth Mass Extinction was during the Cretaceous-Tertiary around 65 million years ago. A giant asteroid impact on Mexico, just after large volcanic eruptions in what is now India, saw the end of the dinosaurs and ammonites. Mammals, and eventually humans, took advantage (Carrington, 10 May 2017).

The Sixth Mass Extinction is the only one created solely by an earth-dwelling species – humans. It is also referred to as the Anthropocene epoch[1]. It is a term that defines earth's most recent geologic time period as being human-influenced, or anthropogenic. The definition of the Anthropocene is based on overwhelming global evidence that the atmospheric, geological, hydrologic, biospheric and other earth system processes are now altered by humans (Carrington, 29 August 2016). The word combines the root word 'anthropos' (human) with the root word '-cene' (the suffix for 'epoch in geologic time').

Until recently, human awareness of their destructive actions was limited. The slow realisation that humans may be doing irreparable damage to the planet and other species only really began in the 1960s when Rachel Carson published her rousing exposé *The Silent Spring* (1962). Carson had focused her attention on environmental problems and the destruction of wildlife that were caused by pesticides and widespread use of chemicals. It was the first time someone had brought environmental concerns to the global public and helped to inspire the environmental movement (Paull, 2013: 1-12).

It was in the late sixties and early seventies, also as a direct reaction to the publication of *Silent Spring*, when philosophy began to seriously address environmental and non-human animal issues in what is now the discipline of 'Environmental Ethics' (Brennan & Lo, Winter 2016). Essays were produced by the pioneering thinkers like Richard Routley, Holmes Rolston III, J.

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[1] In January 2015, 26 of the 38 members of the International Anthropocene Working Group published a paper suggesting that 1945, when the first nuclear test was conducted on July 16, was the starting point of the proposed new epoch.

Baird Callicott, Joel Fineberg, Arne Naess, Clare Palmer and Peter Singer who raised awareness on the ethics of environmental and species destruction and the possibility of affording rights to non-human animals and even plants (Callicott & Palmer, 2005). Driven by a growing groundswell with both the voting public and in academia, especially in the sciences and philosophy (Brennan & Lo, Winter 2016), the 1960s saw global governments and inter-governmental organisations realise that something urgent needed to be done to reverse the extinction of plants and animals (CITES a.).

However, the desire to conserve species at government and inter-government level was and still is a human-centred one in that the preservation of wild species was predominantly seen in terms of sustaining human economic benefits of utilising rather than conserving wildlife simply for the sake of wildlife. In other words, the thinking of policymakers always centres on the importance of *instrumental value* over *intrinsic value*. The former is the value of things as a *means* to further the ends of some external telos or goal, in this case human well-being as something external to the wild species themselves. Whereas the latter is the value of wild animals and plants (animals and plants in the natural environment, as opposed to domesticated animals) as *ends in themselves* regardless of whether they are also useful as a means to human well-being (Brennan & Lo, Winter 2016). This is a point I address in detail in the opening chapter of this dissertation where I show that where wild animals are conserved, this is mostly with the singular aim and rationale to further the economic benefits of humans. Wild animals are in our current era, in fact always and solely regarded and treated as resources and commodities for human consumption and utility. And it is therefore also only in relation to human (extrinsic) benefit that their conservation is contemplated.

Driven by this framework of instrumental value, in 1963 a resolution was drafted by eighty countries in Washington D.C. for the establishment of the future Convention on International Trade in Endangered Wild Fauna and Flora or CITES, an organization under the umbrella of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) that came into effect a decade later (CITES a.). The very title of the Convention revealed its instrumental nature, that is: the continuation and sustainability of the human *trade* in endangered wildlife.

Ostensibly, CITES was the organization to safeguard species of plants and animals from human over-exploitation at an international level (CITES a.). I say 'ostensibly' because given the chilling findings in the latest reports, in the four and half decades since its inception, CITES

has failed in its mandate to do so. The main reason for this failure, as I will demonstrate, is the fact that instrumental value is founded entirely on anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism can be defined as follows:

> Anthropocentrism refers to a human-centered, or 'anthropocentric,' point of view. In philosophy, anthropocentrism can refer to the point of view that humans are the only, or primary, holders of moral standing. Anthropocentric value systems thus see nature in terms of its value to humans (Padwe, 6 May 2016).

Anthropocentrism in its *strong sense* favours human existence and well-being over and often at the expense of the survival of wild species. In this sense, anthropocentrism is also implied in a purely instrumental valuation of wild species. This type of anthropocentrism declares the human animal to be exceptional because it is the only source of valuation. This is why the stance is also sometimes called 'human exceptionalism'.

Back in the 1960s and 1970s, anthropocentrism had already been identified as the overriding problem in the destruction of the natural environment and extinction of species by the aforementioned pioneering philosophers (Callicott & Palmer, 2005: vol I, i-ix). These early thinkers immediately posed a challenge to the dominant anthropocentric paradigm by questioning the assumed superiority of human beings to members of all the other species on earth and investigated the possibility of rational arguments for assigning intrinsic value to the natural environment and its non-human inhabitants (Brennan & Lo, Winter 2016). Yet despite serious reservations raised decades ago by these thinkers, anthropocentrism as a dominant paradigm is a problem that still persists today, albeit in a *weaker sense*. By 'weak anthropocentrism' I mean that conservation of wildlife is still seen in purely instrumental terms (thus exclusively in terms of serving human interests), but instead of over-exploitation, wildlife is treated as a *sustainable resource* where species are conserved up to the point where they can provide *continued* benefit of humans and well-being into the foreseeable future.[2] In other

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[2] As will be discussed in the first chapter, Bryan Norton distinguishes between a 'felt' and a 'considered preference'. A *considered* preference "is any desire or need that a human individual would express after careful deliberation, including a judgement that the desire or need is consistent with a rationally adopted worldview – a worldview which includes fully supported scientific theories and a metaphysical framework interpreting those theories as well as a set of rationally supported aesthetic and moral ideals" (Norton, 2005: 229). Thus, instead of simply reacting to a subjectively felt desire, careful investigation of one's felt preferences enables human individuals to adopt a more considered approach, which for Norton amounts to weak anthropocentrism in the case of environmental concerns.

words, while the purely instrumental valuation from a purely human perspective remains in place, the anthropocentrism is somewhat tempered in this weaker version of the theory. Immediate human benefit is limited for the sake of longer-term human benefit.

Among today's government, non-government and inter-governmental circles, weak anthropocentric conservation of wildlife is euphemistically referred to as 'sustainable utilisation' (the prolonged use of wildlife for sustaining human economic well-being) or, more broadly, 'sustainable development' (the prolonged use of wildlife for *improving* human economic well-being). The United Nations Brundtland Report, the result of a commission set up by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987, regards 'sustainable development' as the best mechanism for conserving wild species from over-exploitation and destruction. The broad definition of the term 'sustainable development', as per the report, is to:

> …balance local and global efforts to meet basic *human* needs through the use of wild animals and natural resources without destroying or degrading the natural environment so that future generations [of humans] can meet their own needs (UN General Assembly, 1987).

The notion of sustainable development with its implied instrumentalism has subsequently become the endorsed system for policy makers at both an international and national level. It is central to all United Nations environmental organisations such as UNEP and CITES and other inter-governmental environmental organisations like the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the world's largest nature conservation organization, as well as global non-governmental environmental organisations like the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Almost all national governments have followed UN international policy in adopting these weak anthropocentric policies. This is evident in the fact that 183 out of 193 of the world's nations are members of and participate in CITES. In this dissertation, I will specifically focus on South Africa as one such member government. Among multiple reasons for focusing on South Africa, is the fact that sustainable development is officially enshrined in the Bill of Rights of the South Africa and the Constitution (1996) and therefore makes a useful case-study when it comes to a critique of the current practice of wildlife conservation. Other reasons include the way in which South Africa is held up as an exemplar for wildlife conservation across the globe (Cruise, 1 September 2016: personal interview a.).

Given that anthropocentrism and its reliance on instrumental value conserves wildlife population numbers simply to sustain human trade and consumption, the major problem that my study wishes to raise is the fact that there is no regard that wildlife is an integral and interconnected combination of vital organisms in a broader ecological system. This failure follows from a purely instrumental view on wildlife, which, as I will show, includes a failure to appreciate what the wildness of wild animals contributes to the flourishing of the broader natural system. In other words, preserving numbers is usually achieved *at the expense* of the broader natural environment in that wild animals are bred and stocked on ranches that are more akin to domestic livestock farms than wilderness areas.[3] *The Value of Being Wild: A Phenomenological Approach to Wildlife Conservation* will show that the destruction of wildness, is not only detrimental to the survival and continued flourishing of the targeted species, but to all species, including humans. This then is the key to my dissertation since conservation has to include not just the individual animal or species but the environment or natural habitat as a whole.

My study will show that the need therefore is to provide an alternative approach to wildlife conservation, one that avoids anthropocentrism and wildlife valuation on an instrumental basis in order to provide meaningful and tangible success for both wildlife *and* human well-being in an inclusive way. In this sense, *The Value of Being Wild* will showcase the concept of eco-phenomenology as an important non-anthropocentric alternative to sustainable development and a framework for radically redefining our undertaking of what it means to be wild. As emerged from the later work of French phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), eco-phenomenology is particularly well-suited as a practical alternative to sustainable development and the resultant rider of instrumentalism.

Phenomenology, in a traditional sense, takes its starting point in the world as we experience it – literally the study of 'phenomena': appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings that things have in our direct experience of them. "Traditional phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced

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3 33 wild species including lions, cheetah, rhinos and zebras, have been reclassified as farm animals as of May 2019 when the South African Government approved a brief amendment to the Animal Improvement Act (AIA) which governs livestock breeding.

from the subjective or first-person point of view" (Smith, 2018: online). However, Merleau-Ponty moves phenomenology away from the first-person to something more interchangeable and reversible. He shows that our embodied subjectivity is never located purely in our bodily presence in and experience of the world, but in the intertwining between ourselves and the world in a non-subjective way (a point I'll describe in detail shortly).

At the same time, Merleau-Ponty helps us to move away from anthropocentrism to a far more inclusive approach in conserving wildlife. This is because his phenomenology deals with the interconnected relationship between humans and wild animals in a broad ecological system. The strength of Merleau-Ponty's concept of phenomenology is that it regards all living and even non-living entities, such as air, water and soil, as interconnected and interrelated within a broad biosphere.

Phenomenology, as developed by Merleau-Ponty, is a concept that recognises that the axiological qualities of the natural world are inherent and ineliminable from the discipline of traditional phenomenology, hence the term 'eco-phenomenology' that was developed in response to his thinking. Due to the inherent ecological aspect of the human involvement with the world within traditional phenomenology, eco-phenomenology offers a return to a world that humans have tried hard to alienate themselves from. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology directs us toward the natural environment and other living bodies, not as a complex set of objects and objective processes, but rather as they are experienced and *lived from within* by the attentive animal who is entirely a part of the living, material world that he or she experiences. It also directs our attention to the perceptions and agency of other living bodies for whom we are part of their experience. Merleau-Ponty's eco-phenomenology thus emphasises a holistic dialogue with and within a more-than-human world (Abram, 1996: 65).

Eco-phenomenology is a term that has become fashionable in environmental philosophy in recent years, as is evident by the current analyses of Merleau-Ponty's later works combined with environmental ethics, notably by American philosophers David Abram, Ted Toadvine and David Wood. Each has produced books, papers and collections of essays expounding on Merleau-Pontian based eco-phenomenology (see Bibliography). However, eco-phenomenology is yet to be considered in an applied sense (Brown & Toadvine, 2003). The concept *points toward* an applied strategy but so far this has not been achieved, or at least, not attempted in earnest. This is specifically true when it comes to wildlife conservation. *The Value*

of Being Wild, therefore, sets out to investigate the concept of eco-phenomenology in order to provide a new practical wildlife conservation approach that challenges, and potentially replaces, the current prevailing policies as employed by global governmental and inter-governmental agencies. In particular, this alternative frame is proposed as a replacement for the failing instrumental and anthropocentric conservation practices currently in place in South Africa. This dissertation will therefore conclude by exploring strategies where conservation of wildlife is not taken as instrumentally-valued, or even intrinsically-valued, but rather as *wild-valued* in that the existence of wild animals as wild is conserved within a broader, more inclusive overall wild ecology that supports the survival and flourishing of all living beings, including plants, animals and human beings.

2. Methodology

Since this is a dissertation in philosophy, the critique on instrumental value will focus primarily on the theoretical substratum of prevailing policies that govern our anthropocentric treatment and uses of wildlife. *The Value of Being Wild* is a quest for an alternative paradigm that will occur through a combined analysis of evaluative philosophical critique with actual in-field experiences. The discussion of lived experiences is necessary to reinforce the philosophical analysis since phenomenology originates in action, observation and documentation before it migrates into, and enhances, the theoretical analysis.

At this point, I will lay out the methodology in sub-headings to illustrate the process as it progresses through the different chapters of the dissertation. This will begin with a critique of the dominant paradigm of instrumental valuation of wildlife conservation, then an exposition and critique of the counter-argument of moral consideration will be given followed by the introduction, relevance and application of the alternative paradigm of eco-phenomenology.

2.1. The problem with instrumental value

The Value of Being Wild will begin by dismantling the purely instrumental and thus economic-centred foundation of sustainable development first by using a theoretical economic critique and then a pragmatic economic critique. The purpose is to show that even from an economic (non-philosophical) perspective, anthropocentrism is foundationally and functionally incapable of conserving wildlife.

This will be followed by a philosophical deconstruction4 of the notion of sustainable development and in particular its adherence to anthropocentrism. The deconstruction will show how the infamous seventeenth century French philosopher, René Descartes' theoretical separation of the 'Subject' from the object; or mind from body, underscores the totality of our anthropocentric endeavours in terms of instrumental valuations of dealing with (other)5 animals. He does this by firmly establishing human exceptionalism: we are an exception to all other species on earth, because we are in possession of a rational mind, which has a completely distinct nature from 'dead' or inert matter.

Descartes' line of questioning begins when he takes over Aristotle's original definition of the human as a rational animal, the *zōon logon eschon*. By eliminating all that is not indubitable, the philosopher embarks on a reductive ontology that ultimately separates the rational (mind) from the animal (body). The philosopher then sets about rejecting everything that he does not consider indubitable, which is almost everything, including all sense perception, until he arrives at the epicenter – *dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum*: the existence of the mental act of the doubting doubter. This is the full presence of the 'Subject' – the lone, reduced, purely cerebral, doubting entity that has been detached from the world of objects and stripped of the ebullience of corporeal life. The detached, autonomous mind of the 'Subject' is the core of Descartes' reductionist thesis and has since become the kernel of modern Western philosophical methodology and epistemology, and of the current anthropocentric approach to all that is not a human 'Subject'. The enquiry into Descartes as the origin of our strong and pervasive, anthropocentric bias toward (other) animals will be conducted as a means to provide philosophical clarity about the root problem of our current conservation practices, and overall attitude toward (other) animals and resultant failure to conserve them. It is with Descartes that the charge is squarely laid for our current crisis of the Sixth Extinction in the Anthropocene.

2.2. The problem with moral consideration

With anthropocentrism duly discredited as an adequate conservation paradigm, I will move

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4 A deconstruction will take the concept of anthropocentrism apart along its philosophical 'fault lines' that are created by the ambiguities inherent in Descartes' key arguments in order to reveal the equivocations and contradictions in anthropocentrism.

5 The use of the word 'other' in brackets ( ) will be used from now on to emphasise humans are animals too.

toward an analysis of the prevailing alternative paradigm (although it must be said that phenomenology does not reject anthropocentric thought outright, but finds ways in which anthropocentric approaches to conservation can be reconfigured and included as allies.). Before I do, it must be said that this dissertation is not about shutting out anthropocentric ethicists, but rather, in true phenomenological discourse, about reconfiguring their projects so as to avoid the pitfalls inherent in anthropocentric conservation. The aim is to provide rigour rather than rejection.

The most prominent alternative to instrumentally-valued anthropocentrism is the obvious counter-argument that rejects instrumental value for moral consideration, specifically as it relates to the sentience and interests of (other) animals. One could argue that the moral consideration argument is one among more attempts to overcome the dominant instrumental paradigm. In other words, it is one attempt at granting to (other) animals some form of intrinsic value. For practical reasons, I focus only on this one version of 'intrinsic value' reasoning. With the moral consideration approach, the utilitarian view championed by many of the earlier environmental thinkers, was thoroughly challenged. Animal rights philosopher Peter Singer (1946-), professor of bioethics and one of the intellectual founders of the modern animal rights movement, is prominent in this school of thought. He argues against commodification and exploitation, and instead for moral consideration for individual non-human animals based on their ability to feel pain and suffering (Singer, 2005: 75-90).

On the surface, equal moral consideration appears to be the solution to protect wildlife, since it elevates the status of (other) animals above merely instrumental value, by taking into account their subjective experiences of pain and suffering. However, I will show that the concept of equal moral consideration of suffering remains shackled to anthropocentrism as it only considers *some* members of the non-human community as worthy of moral consideration. Higher-order mammals, like dolphins, elephants, lions and, to a lesser degree, buffalo, pangolins and impala, are considered more 'human-like' than lower-order animals like bats, puff-adders, mosquitoes and crocodiles. This is because the assumption is founded on the degrees of capability of non-human animals to suffer like humans. The problem with applying Singer's notion of moral consideration as a conservation tool, as will be demonstrated, is that it is difficult to define precisely what suffering is. Furthermore, even with a limited definition, suffering can only be measured against *human* suffering. This is why moral consideration while moving away from instrumentality, remains anthropocentric since all non-human life is

measured against the benchmark of human life. Thus, any non-human life deemed incapable of human-like suffering is *not* morally considered and therefore excluded from the Club of Consideranda[6] and as it happens, this goes for the vast majority of non-human life forms. As a result, their existence and well-being are all but ignored, or worse, endangered, because of the insistence on preserving 'higher-order' animals at the expense of 'lower-order' animals. This latter point will be addressed in detail in the dissertation.

2.3. The possibility of phenomenology as the alternative paradigm

With moral consideration as an alternative to sustainable development (instrumental anthropocentrism) now also discarded, the next step in this dissertation is to find an approach that does in fact treat wildlife from an unreservedly non-anthropocentric perspective.

The philosophical discipline of phenomenology is one that looks most likely to achieve this.[7] In its traditional sense, phenomenology as introduced by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and then developed inter alia by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), attempts to dismantle the hierarchical and dichotomous nature of Cartesian dualism, which views the disembodied mind as the superior opposite of the mindless body, for example. Overall, traditional phenomenology opposes Cartesian dualism (and the resultant manifestation of anthropocentrism) in that it takes everything in the world, including the human 'Subject'[8], as entities equally acting and reacting to and with one another. Phenomenology, in this traditional sense, is primarily concerned with the systematic reflection on and study of the structures of consciousness and the phenomena that appear in acts of

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[6] This is phrase coined by Thomas Birch in his thought-provoking essay *Moral Considerability and Universal Consideration* (1993) where he distinguishes between non-human animals deemed capable of human-like suffering and those deemed incapable. It is a point I will explore in more detail in this dissertation.

[7] Phenomenologists are not the only philosophers to reject anthropocentrism. Renowned animal and environmental ethicists like Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Clare Palmer, J. Baird Callicott, Arne Naess, Richard Sylvan (Routley), Val Plumwood (Routley), Holmes Rolston III, James E. Lovelock and many others have, since the emergence of formal animal and environmental philosophical enquiry in the early 1970s, begun to question the pervading anthropocentric dominance in Western traditional thought. Editors J. Baird Callicott and Clare Palmer have claimed in the general introduction to their voluminous five-volume work entitled *Environmental Philosophy: Critical Concepts* (2005) that "in the finest tradition of Western Philosophy" most environmental philosophers have taken "a non-anthropocentric turn" (Callicott & Palmer, 2005: Vol 1, xxxvi). That said, as this dissertation will show, eco-phenomenology tends to go the farthest in terms of rejecting anthropocentrism since it considers the interconnectedness between human existence and being with the existence and being of wild animals and the natural environment as a whole. The current ecological crisis is not just about the extinction of wildlife but of human societies too.

[8] The power of phenomenology is that it de-centres the Cartesian subject for something less egotistic and more inclusive.

consciousness such as perception. The discipline can be clearly differentiated from the Cartesian method of analysis where the human 'Subject' regards everything else in the world as objects, sets of objects, and objects acting and reacting upon one another.

However, I will show that while the overriding concern was to confront and dismantle the dominant Cartesian paradigm, the various and distinct versions of phenomenology of Husserl *et al* were still unable to completely untangle from the anthropocentric web. For all these traditional philosophers, the world of phenomena remains experienced from the first-person perspective, and does not fully detach from the philosophical and Cartesian 'Subject'. This is anthropocentric in that the 'Subject' remains as the human 'experiencer' of the world, endowing it with the meanings that it has. It is therefore not surprising that, because of this entanglement with the foundations of the Cartesian subject, for Husserl, and to a lesser degree Heidegger, Sartre and Levinas, (other) animals still remained in their minds at least part of that outside world while humans, although no longer quite as transcendental and disembodied as Descartes would have them, remained at the epicentre of such an ontological worldview. It is important to note that while these philosophers adequately broke down the Cartesian Subject in human terms, (other) animals, as we shall see in *Chapter Three*, were still regarded as Other.

2.4. Merleau-Ponty's break-through

It is only with Maurice Merleau-Ponty that we find a complete albeit gradual break from the anthropocentric contagion of Western thought and practice. It is also only in his later works, specifically the unfinished *The Visible and the Invisible* published posthumously in 1968 that Merleau-Ponty successfully, managed to escape the grip of anthropocentrism and point the way towards the radical insights of eco-phenomenology.

Merleau-Ponty maintains that living beings are shaped primarily by their perceptual (and more broadly sensory) experience of their surrounding environment, or their 'embeddedness' in the world. The key to Merleau-Ponty's break-through was the focus on *the primacy of the living body*, rather than the consciousness of the transcendental mind. In brief, as Merleau-Ponty's analysis shows, the corporeal, living, breathing, tactile body is in fact the solution to the anthropocentric distortion. It is the material body alone, standing open towards its surroundings, that enables one to enter into relations with other beings, for without the body's eyes, voice, hands, paws, snout or skin, a being would be unable to see, to hear, smell and touch

things; or be seen, heard, smelled and touched by them. In other words, without the body, the part that Descartes dismissed as a part of the merely material, objective world, there would be no possibility of experience, consciousness, agency or knowledge. For Merleau-Ponty, it is the insight that the body (initially called the 'body-subject') and not the transcendental mind or the first-person experiencer, founds all human knowledge and consciousness, that starts to dismantle the bedrock of anthropocentrism.

Merleau-Ponty, therefore, argues for a radically inter-subjective, inter-corporeal or relational conception of consciousness where, instead of an aloof transcendental being analyzing the surroundings from an incorporeal distance, the body of the so-called 'Subject' or rather living self-engages physically with, and is indeed thoroughly shaped by, its material surroundings. Merleau-Ponty explains that the body is an entity at the point between the divergence of the experiencer and the experienced, between the 'Subject' and the object. Yet rather than a simple dualism, and this is the key to the later Merleau-Ponty's ontological thinking, this divergence (or rather 'dehiscence'9) between experiencing and the thing-being-experienced also allows for the possibility of overlapping and encroachment between the two 'divergent' terms (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 123). Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that experiencing and experienced are *reversible* entities, i.e. one can both experience and be experienced at the same time. For example, in the action of my hand touching the hand of another, one does more than merely represent the body's capacity to be both perceiving object and subject of perception. The hand of another person is not merely another 'object', but the same fleshy substance that is capable of reversing the situation back to my hand, capable of perceiving my hand. We cannot touch somebody else's hand without recognition of our own tangibility and capacity to be touched by others.

Importantly, it is not only about the touching of flesh on flesh in the literal sense. The generality of Merleau-Ponty's use of the term 'flesh', in his own words, also embraces the seer and the seen in the same vein. The 'flesh' as introduced in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1961: 139)

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9 "Dehiscence" is a name respectively used in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) and in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1961). It means a divergence without a separation, a split along a seam or small gap. To quote Merleau-Ponty: "dehiscence opens my body in two, and because between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things." (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 123) He refers to it as "the two leaves of my body" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 263).

"is not matter, is not mind" but a "general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 139) For Merleau-Ponty 'the flesh' is an "element of Being" in the sense of "the old term 'element'" of water, air earth and fire (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 139). Merleau-Ponty here refers to the chiasmic intertwining and interconnection between a being and that being's surroundings. Indeed, this is true of all the senses and all perception – hearing, tasting and smelling. Importantly, though, there is also an 'inter-corporeity' of the flesh (Toadvine, 2018: online). Sensible flesh — what Merleau-Ponty calls the 'visible' — is not all there is to flesh, since flesh transmutes itself into an 'invisible' dimension too, the *flesh of ideas*. This, however, is not a relapse into a transcendental ego. These are notions that cannot be 'seen' but in these cases the ideas "cannot be detached from the sensible appearance and be erected into a second positivity" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 149). The 'invisible' passions of love and distrust, destitution and suffering, as examples, are all grounded in and arise out of what we, our bodies, have first experienced sensibly in the world.

Merleau-Ponty's ontology establishes that in some sense the 'other' is always already intertwined with(in) the 'Subject' in a far more complex reciprocity than just two-halves exchanging with one another, and he explicitly suggests that self and non-self are always, at the same time, the obverse and reverse of each other. The Cartesian notion of 'Subject' completely disappears. Merleau-Ponty therefore affirms a dynamic interdependence of self and other that involves these categories crisscrossing and intertwining with one another, shaping and framing each other, but without ever being reduced or reducible to each other.

The generality of 'flesh' embraces an inter-corporeity, an anonymous sensibility shared out among distinct bodies: just as our two hands communicate across the lateral synergy of our bodies, I can touch the sensibility of another, even as I cannot do so without being touched in turn. Merleau-Ponty, therefore, expertly finds in this ontology a new departure for describing the relationship between the body and the world, self and other, facts and ideas, sensibility and language. He insists that the body is the seat of consciousness and that the living flesh of the body is always already in and of the world, in dynamic interaction with it, and never set apart from it. Merleau-Ponty's doctrine ultimately paves the way for a completely different relationship between humans and the natural environment, since it is one that is not constructed on hierarchical sovereignty or binary opposites that, in turn, are used to justify the instrumental exploitation of (other) animals. Even though Merleau-Ponty never addressed (other) animals directly, his phenomenological framework drawn up at the beginning of the Anthropocene can,

as I will show, be applied to rethinking the dimension of the relation between the living body and lived environment that we call wild(er)ness or being-wild.

2.5. From phenomenology to eco-phenomenology

It is no coincidence that Merleau-Ponty's ideas reflect those of an earlier ecologist named Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944). Uexküll's in-field studies of ticks and sea urchins (among others) gave Merleau-Ponty most of the foundational concepts for advancing his own ideas. Uexküll provides an alternative way of thinking about wildness and how it establishes an interconnection between humans, wild animals and the natural environment. Given that Merleau-Ponty based his doctrine on the human position in the world on the study of non-human animal mutual interrelatedness in the first place, it is an easy step to loop the doctrine from the human back to a phenomenological application of wild animals. The primacy of the body can be applied to *any* creature interacting with its world, something Uexküll demonstrated time and again in his seminal book *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (1934).

The strength of Uexküll's approach is that he speaks of so-called 'lesser' organisms that include animals such as ticks and sea urchins, which means the supposedly insuperable line[10] dividing those within and without the Club of Consideranda has for him never been tenable in the first place. For Uexküll, the being of *any* organism, from tick to tiger, is that of a continuously changing, interconnected, mutually responsive relationship with(in) its environment or meaningful world. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology follows directly on from this, only that he included human beings into the interwoven mix. In essence, this is what eco-phenomenology is about – the chiasmic interrelation of human and (other) animals living interdependently and interrelatedly with one another and within the natural (and humanly built) world they find themselves in.

To flesh out further the main tenets of eco-phenomenology (which is phenomenology applied to ecology or a phenomenological analysis of the natural environment) – given that Uexküll was no phenomenologist and did not directly include the human animal in his thinking; and given that Merleau-Ponty was no ecologist and did not directly include (other) animals in his

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10 This was a term first used by philosopher Jeremy Bentham in 1789 to emphasise the divide between humans and (other) animals.

thinking – it is necessary to introduce Aldo Leopold. He was the father of modern ecology and acknowledged pre-cursor to the discipline of environmental ethics in philosophy (Callicott & Palmer, 2005: vol I, iii), and I detect a kind of proto-eco-phenomenological stance in his writings. It is Leopold who unintentionally combined the approaches of Uexkull and Merleau-Ponty , in such a way that he opened up the path toward the future development of eco-phenomenology.

Leopold, as an American field ecologist, most likely did not read Merleau-Ponty or Uexküll. Yet his philosophical views on conservation and the human separation from nature were undoubtedly Merleau-Pontian and Uexküllian in spirit. Leopold wrote that "a thing has its origin in the tendency of interdependent individuals or groups to evolve modes of co-operation. The ecologist calls these 'symbioses'" (Leopold, 1970: 238). Merleau-Ponty calls it 'intertwining' or 'chiasm' (Merleau-Ponty, 1961), which amounts to the same thing. Chiasm, for Merleau-Ponty, is a crisscrossing or a bi-directional becoming or exchange between the body and things that justifies speaking of a 'flesh' of things, a kinship between the sensing body and sensed things. (Merleau-Ponty, 1961: 139) Leopold spoke of the importance that every living creature has in an ecosystem, from the grouse of the north woods, the wolf of the mountains, the blue jay of the hickory groves, and the whiskey jack of the muskegs, to the piñonero of juniper foothills (Leopold, 1970: 146-147). Take any one out of the ecosystem, and the whole thing dies, he said. This is precisely what Merleau-Ponty and Uexküll were getting at when they said that a being is inextricably mutually intertwined with, and co-constitutive of, his or her surroundings.

The interesting aspect to a Merleau-Pontian-based eco-phenomenology is that it was a similar understanding and ethos not only expressed in the prescient writings of Aldo Leopold but has been practiced by indigenous human communities since the dawn of time. In southern Africa, especially among the Shona traditions in Zimbabwe, there is an ancient world-view called *Ukama* that is still applicable to rural Shona communities today. *Ukama* means the 'interdependence of all that exists.' According to the ancient Shona tradition, *Ukama* is the reality that all things are closely related and depend on one another for existence (Murove, 2009). Humans exist in a community that depends, not only on other humans, but also on the natural world of animals, plants and other elements in the universe including the community of ancestors and future generations to come, which is basically everything. *Ukama* is concerned about the environment and human relationship within the biosphere as the concept affirms

human relatedness with the earth and all life (Murove, 2009: 316). Since all living beings are dependent on the biosphere – the air, soil, water, and (other) animals – for their survival, it stands to reason they ought not to destroy it. Being human and (other) animal, therefore, is intricately connected with participating within the biosphere, without which all species (including humans) are doomed. What's more, *Ukama* is not just a Shona concept, but one that supports a traditional African ontological worldview (Murove, 2009). In fact, some scholars have gone as far as to say that in fact all indigenous and ancient cultures across the globe support a concept of interdependence with the wild environment (Ikeke, 2015). In other words, humans are not only dependent on the wild environment, but the wild environment is affected by human action, which then calls for a moral response. This means humans are dependent on the wild environment as much as the wild environment is dependent on us. This becomes a moral issue since our actions affect the wild environment, which ultimately it affects us.

The solution as will be presented in more detail in *The Value of Being Wild* is to rediscover *Ukama* and begin an eco-phenomenological process of rediscovering the human interconnectedness with the natural environment.

2.6. Applied eco-phenomenology

An alternative conservation approach must clearly be a non-anthropocentric and non-instrumental valuation of wild animals, yet the intrinsic value and moral consideration theories we do have that move away from instrumentalism tend to remain tethered to an anthropocentric stance, as will show. The alternative to both these broad approaches to environmental ethics, as I will explain in more detail below, is offered by an eco-phenomenological framework which proposes the full immersion of animals, and humans, in wild nature itself. As I hope to demonstrate, a wild animal *ceases to be* in some key dimensions unless it is being-wild. Conservation therefore needs to focus on the ontological valuation and application of being-wild and one way to do this is by protecting biodiversity rather than commodifying and domesticating wild animals simply to maintain their numbers. This notion progresses to the intertwined and inextricable human setting within wild nature – the ecosystem in its variety and variability.

Since it centres on the world as we experience it in real-time, phenomenology naturally adapts to the pragmatic. Phenomenology is the study of experience, action, activity and physical acts,

not just cerebral musings. Eco-phenomenology follows this process too as we will see with Merleau-Ponty's foundational theory based on Uexküll's in-field studies of wild animals, as well as Leopold's descriptions of a functioning ecosystem and the human involvement and attachment to that ecosystem. Even our language structures, as described by Merleau-Ponty (and discussed in this dissertation) and traditional belief systems like *Ukama*, speak of a practical approach to the natural environment. What follows then are a number of key applied eco-phenomenological strategies that are specific to the conservation of wildlife in South Africa.

Critically, and given that an eco-phenomenological enquiry insists on the chiasmic – or variable and interconnected – nature of species within their natural environment, the successful conservation of wild species – and humans – comes down to just a single notion and task: recreating the space for biodiversity to thrive. Eco-phenomenology therefore is about the commitment toward and the protection of the interconnected and inseparable web of life that includes all living beings (plants, wild animals and humans) and even non-living entities (water, soil and air). Protection of the biodiversity or the wild environment as a whole, will in turn, protect wild animals and provide human well-being. Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth, in all its forms and all its interactions and is the most complex feature of our planet, and it is the most vital.

One pragmatic strategy in increasing space for biodiversity is the process of 'rewilding'. Rewilding, as the name implies, is about restoring ecosystems that have been under plow, or cement. Rewilding is also a "re-involvement", an "opportunity for people to engage with and delight in the natural world" (Monbiot, 2013: 11). The natural environment is not simply a collection of species but, in the spirit of *Ukama* and a Merleau-Pontian eco-phenomenology, "of their ever-shifting relationship with each other and the natural environment" (Monbiot, 2013: 9). Rewilding is an applied and tried approach that permits ecological processes to resume by themselves, like allowing trees to naturally repopulate deforested land; or mangroves, salt marshes and seagrass beds to grow back after being destroyed. Rewilding is a concept that fundamentally recognises that the ecosystem restores itself. It is not simply adding a collection of animals and plants to an area, as is often the case with private reserves and game ranches in South Africa, but rather of allowing their shifting relationships with each other and their surrounding environment to re-develop autonomously by themselves with little human 'management' and thereby re-construct themselves 'wildly'. So, instead of attempting to

manage wildlife – as is prevalent in South Africa (erecting fences, removing predators or elephants or vegetation) – conservation ought to think in terms of increasing the broad natural environment where every animal from dung beetle to elephant is allowed to naturally thrive in order to enhance the ecosystem. Examples of actual rewilding will be explored in this section of the dissertation.

It is important that rewilding does not exclude humans. Neither is it about conflict between humans and wild animals in an ecosystem. Anthropocene-era humans can still participate in a meaningful way with the natural environment while still enjoying the benefits of technology and civilization. As I hope to show in this dissertation, an eco-phenomenology recognises that *all* living beings are not stand-alone entities to be taken individually, but together as a great interconnected web of life that depends on each other for their existence. And since wildness is a valuable aspect of every living organism, it is something that humans must also reconnect with, for the sake of their own and others' flourishing on earth.

3. Chapter layout

Chapter One will introduce and define the current wildlife conservation paradigm adopted globally by governments and other policy makers. Notions of anthropocentrism and its reliance on instrumental value (otherwise known as sustainable development) will be defined and discussed. In particular, this chapter will explore why sustainable development has become the preferred model for global wildlife conservation.

Chapter Two will highlight the weaknesses and fundamental flaws of this anthropocentric model of wildlife conservation. These weaknesses will be presented both from an economic and philosophical perspective. The second part of this chapter is particularly relevant as a critique of the dominant Cartesian construct in Western thought that is the bedrock of anthropocentrism. There will also be a critique of the main alternative paradigm – namely the moral consideration theories for non-human animals, with a focus on animal rights movement associated with Peter Singer. The critique will show that instead of providing an alternative to anthropocentrism, these concepts are themselves anthropocentric.

Chapter Three is about providing a genuine non-anthropocentric alternative in wildlife conservation. The development of phenomenology is potentially best suited for this purpose.

The chapter will briefly introduce the main concepts of phenomenology as relevant to wildlife conservation. The main protagonists of phenomenology will be highlighted, showing just how effective phenomenology is in breaking down the Cartesian hierarchies and dichotomies that lie at the heart of the anthropocentric problem. However, the chapter will also show that as far as traditional phenomenology goes in being anti-Cartesian and thus non-anthropocentric, it doesn't go far enough.

Only in *Chapter Four* do we see the final break-through for a completely non-anthropocentric understanding. This chapter will explore the phenomenological development and evolution of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who in his final work *The Visible and the Invisible* (1962) provides the foundation for a radical approach to wildlife conservation. This chapter is important in that it lays the foundation for a completely new way of looking at the conservation of wildlife.

Chapter Five will apply Merleau-Ponty's later phenomenological concepts to a more natural setting. It will explore the works of Jakob von Uexküll, a biologist whose in-field studies and concept of the natural *Umwelt* had a major influence on Merleau-Ponty himself. Uexküll's work will be enhanced and highlighted by another early ecologist and founder of modern conservation, Aldo Leopold. Leopold's version of wildlife conservation was proto-phenomenological in nature and showed clear parallels with Merleau-Ponty's way of thinking. In Leopold we see an early development from phenomenology to eco-phenomenology – applying phenomenology to ecology. This chapter will also explore Merleau-Ponty's idea of how language is important in an eco-phenomenological development.

Chapter Six, the final chapter, will look at strategies that apply eco-phenomenology in a practical sense. This is where the new, eco-phenomenological wildlife conservation paradigm is explored. The dissertation will wrap up with a conclusion that I hope ties it all up and provides a summary of what this dissertation has set out to achieve – a meaningful, practical alternative through a philosophical development to provide a new conservation approach to wildlife.

CHAPTER ONE: THE DOMINANCE OF ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM IN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

What a piece of work is man,
How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty,
In form and moving how express and admirable,
In action how like an Angel,
In apprehension how like a god,
The beauty of the world,
The paragon of animals…

(William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*: Act II, Scene II)

In this first chapter, I discuss the prevailing and globally applied economic-centred policies of sustainable development in the conservation of wild animals in the Anthropocene era. This is a system that is grounded in human-crafted hegemony – anthropocentrism – since the conservation of wild animals is only maintained in order to sustain human existence, gratification and well-being. At the heart is the view that wild animals are valued purely instrumentally, that is, as a means to further the ends of an external goal, in this case, human well-being. This chapter, therefore, explores the dominance of economic pragmatism and the utlisation of instrumental value behind this widely accepted anthropocentric conservation approach.

For this purpose, and from a philosophical frame of reference, I distinguish between 'strong' anthropocentrism, which is an unbridled over-exploitation of wild animals and the natural environment, and a more pragmatic, long-term 'weaker' anthropocentric approach that supports a sustainable rather than an over-exploitative utilisation of wildlife and wildlife products. Weak anthropocentrism also promotes development and growth of wildlife population numbers for future utilisation. The concept as it relates to the natural environment is best described by Bryan Norton, Distinguished Professor Emeritus in Philosophy and Policy in the School of Public Policy at the Georgia Institute of Technology, who argues that a weak anthropocentric approach provides a more than adequate tool in preventing wild species from going extinct. For him, the best way to conserve wildlife is through this limited version of anthropocentrism. This is a method that is widely accepted by government and international policy makers because it is the easiest pragmatic response to a variety of situations in which

wildlife is under threat (Norton, 2005b). I will lay out Norton's arguments in full and integrate them with an evaluation as to why an economic-centred conservation strategy is so widely accepted and applied. Specifically, I shall examine in depth the apparent success South Africa has had with conserving (some) wild species, as well as concentrating on the perceived market-related benefits for South African humans flowing from an economically-centred policy of weak anthropocentrism.

This chapter will also focus on the perceived success of policies of sustainable development. While statistically positive in terms of preserving numbers, the weak anthropocentric model, as I will show in more detail in *Chapter Two*, is largely inadequate in providing real conservation benefits to wild animals in wild places and ignores the fundamental tenet of holistically sustaining the environment and overall biodiversity within it. Furthermore, weak anthropocentric sustainable development, as executed by the South African Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), falls far short of providing meaningful benefits for the livelihoods of humans that plays a central role in justifying this model.

In this chapter I shall:
- Provide a definition of sustainable development as laid out by the United Nations' Brundtland Commission as well as those of other global agencies and nationally as defined in the South African Bill of Rights.
- Introduce the philosophical perspective on sustainable development, namely the concept of methodological pragmatism as it relates to instrumental value and wildlife.
- Provide an overview of weak versus strong anthropocentrism as an example of methodological pragmatism.
- Provide governmental policy examples of weak anthropocentrism notably the notion of a green circular economy and global trade in endangered wildlife.
- Provide the South African-specific employment of weak anthropocentrism as it relates to wildlife conservation.

1. Sustainable development of wildlife: definition

As stated in the *Introduction* of this dissertation, the notion of 'sustainable development' is defined by the United Nations Brundtland Commission's findings in 1987. The definition has laid down guiding principles for environmental conservation that, by implication, includes wild

fauna and flora. As per the Brundtland Commission's report, the broad definition of the term 'sustainable development' is that it "strives to meet basic human needs without destroying or degrading the natural environment so that future generations of humans can meet their own needs" (United Nations General Assembly, 1987). Under 'natural environment' the report includes wild species of fauna and flora. This guiding principle is explicitly anthropocentric in that it places current and future needs of humankind at the epicentre. The natural environment, and wild species, are protected from destruction only insofar as they provide food, water, gratification and capital for the benefit of human well-being.

Following this anthropocentric guiding principle, the official position of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN: website), is almost the same. This is an organization that is involved in global environmental data gathering and analysis, research, field projects, advocacy, and education. The IUCN's mission is to "influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable" (IUCN: website). For wild species in particular, the IUCN Species Programme, in conjunction with the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC), states that they "are driving the fight to save species for people and nature" (IUCN Global Species Programme, 2016: website). Note the mention of 'people', and then 'nature'. Also note that saving species is not framed to target the species themselves but for humans and the broad environment that humans exist in. Ignoring the interests of wild species is an important omission as we shall see further on in this chapter when I deal with the question of moral consideration.

The IUCN statement continues to reinforce an anthropocentric model with this statement:

> Species are the building blocks of life, the natural resources that humans rely on every day. They provide us with food; fuel; clothes and medicine. They purify water and air; prevent soil erosion; regulate climate and pollinate crops. They also provide a vital resource for economic activities – such as tourism, fisheries and forestry (IUCN Global Species Programme, 2016).

Again, everything points to the central theme that a preserved environment is good for the benefit of human health and well-being through the use of sustainable utilization of wildlife.

Staying with international organizations, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), which incorporates the Convention on the Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) follows similar anthropocentric guidelines. CITES focuses its mandate on wild species of animals and plants rather than the broad environment. Endangered wild species, as per CITES definitions, are either those "threatened with extinction" or those that "are not necessarily now threatened with extinction but that may become so unless trade is closely controlled" (CITES b.). In form and structure, CITES functions within the United Nations treaty system, which is a non-binding agreement between nations. Because of its comprehensive international standing, CITES therefore serves as an authoritative advocate for global conservation policies but since the organization regulates the *trade* in endangered species, CITES likewise endorses an anthropocentric sustainable development approach.

Pursuant of the view of these global institutions, the notion of sustainable development has been adopted by South African policy makers and enshrined in the *Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution* (1996), which states:

> Everyone has the right— (a) to an environment that is not harmful to their health or wellbeing; and (b) to have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that — (i) prevent pollution and ecological degradation; (ii) promote conservation; and (iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996: Chapter 2, 24).

Again, this is an anthropocentric text in that the environment cannot be harmful to *human* health and wellbeing; the environment is protected for present and future *human* generations; and it aims to secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources for *human* economic and social development.

It is clear and without any doubt that global and national legislative policy favours an anthropocentric approach to sustainable development. Wildlife conservation is simply a means to conserve and secure human benefits and therefore is a purely instrumentally valued construct.

2. Anthropocentrism as it relates to sustainable development

Anthropocentrism is not interested in preserving the survival of wild species per se but for meeting human needs using simple economic models based on instrumental value. The most basic of the economic models is Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA). This is highlighted by Bryan Norton, whose research concentrates on sustainability theory and on problems of scale in the formulation of environmental problems. Norton stresses that in terms of sustainable development: "A Cost-Benefit Analysis is made on the basis of calculations of costs and benefits based on benefits for human beings only." (Norton, 2005a: 87) Under CBA, wild animals are viewed to have value – but specifically instrumental value in that they are traded or utilised "to render human existence more materially comfortable" (Rolston III, 2005b: 324). Markets act impartially as they ignore individual preferences and values and form into a *collective preference* ordering of broad social states.

CBA is not bogged down by nebulous and complex notions like intrinsic value of wildlife. CBA completely circumvents any ethical enquiry into conserving wildlife yet is still able to conserve through a basic economic valuation of wildlife. It is an approachable and understandable construct that is also easy to implement in practice. Essentially, a government employs CBA to a particular wildlife situation, weighs up the economic cost versus the benefit and concludes the action to follow.

- African elephants

A concrete example – one that is common throughout many parts of Africa where they roam freely – is the calculation of cost versus benefits of preserving Africa's elephants. African elephant populations have declined by around a third of their population in the last decade. (Chase et al. 2016) Consequently, there is an urgent need to preserve them from going extinct, but elephants do not mix well with humans. They require a lot of space and plenty of food, which means that as human populations expand and develop deeper into Africa's remaining wild spaces, humans invariably come into conflict with them. In these areas, elephants destroy crops and water reservoirs, break huts and houses and in some cases kill humans who retaliate in kind. The IUCN *Red List of Threatened Species* states that while "poaching for ivory and meat has traditionally been the major cause of the species' decline, currently the most important perceived threat is the loss and fragmentation of habitat caused by ongoing human population

expansion and rapid land conversion. A specific manifestation of this trend is the reported increase in human-elephant conflict, which further aggravates the threat to elephant populations" (IUCN, *Red List of Threatened Species*, *Loxodonta africana*).

Therefore, as human interests require more land for development and agricultural use, the preservation of elephants becomes less important at a local grass-roots level. According to CBA, preserving elephants, or any endangered species for that matter, is an act of balance – between the *costs to humans only* (limiting agricultural and development space, loss of income, food and enduring the death of a family member by an elephant) and the *tangible benefits to humans only* (preserving elephants as an income from a regulated trade in ivory; or proceeds from sustainable trophy hunting; or proceeds from wildlife-watching tourism). Only if benefits of elephants to humans (higher financial income) continues to outweigh the costs (trampled crops), then it is more likely they would be preserved in terms of pure CBA approaches.

Thus, according to a decision-making process of methodological pragmatism, an anthropocentric economic-based conservation model of maintaining human benefits over human costs is a good one. In this pragmatic sense, the process produces a win-win solution because elephants could be prevented from extermination *if and only if* they continue to provide greater long-term benefits for humans against potential costs.

2.1. Weak versus strong anthropocentrism

2.1.1. Strong anthropocentrism

According to Norton's definition, strong anthropocentrism takes 'felt preferences' of human individuals as the determining value, as opposed to the 'considered preferences' characterizing his notion of 'weak anthropocentrism'. A felt preference "is any desire or need of a human individual that can at least be temporarily sated" (Norton, 2005b: 229). In its crude form, what makes a human decide to act is based on a sensory desire for transaction or exchange. Decision-making is simply a matter of responding to desired, subjective and immediate preferences and "public policy is determined by the extent to which it works toward the satisfaction of most – or the most urgent – preferences" (Holland, 2005: 371).

An example of this would be the current demand for rhino horn in Asia. The demand is fueled by a felt preference. It stems from the desire for an animal product that is perceived to have aesthetic, cultural and perceived powerful medicinal qualities.. The latter is mainly the case with consumers in Vietnam. In China it's a different felt preference. Rhino horns, like ivory, are desired as carved objects often in the form of jewelry or figurines. In Yemen, rhino horn is coveted for the handles of traditional daggers called *Janbiyas* worn as a clothing accessory by Yemeni men.

Whether for medicinal or other use, the widespread demand for rhino horn is driven by felt preferences without any consideration that the resource may be over-exploited and depleted and without any consideration for future use. This catering to a felt preference has now occurred to the point that the demand threatens the future survival of rhinos, and their value as a future resource for human generations yet to come. Already, all three species of Asian rhinos – the one-horned, Sumatran and Javan – are teetering on the brink of extinction in the wild (WWF website, *Asian Rhinos*), while Africa's last male northern white rhino died amid frenzied press coverage in March 2018 thus rendering the species functionally dead. Since 2008, as a direct result of rhino populations crashing in Asia, traders in rhino horn have begun to heavily target the two remaining African rhino species.

This over-exploitation as a result of collective unrestrained felt preferences is an excellent example of the strong version of anthropocentrism. This approach of letting the market decide is having a devastating impact on the future survival of most wildlife species from fish to elephants. Government policy in consumer countries, especially democratic ones, once tended to follow this collective felt-preference desire primarily because it satisfies most voter preferences and therefore bolsters government's approval ratings. However, with the future of the resource at stake, these governments have belatedly begun to dilute felt preferences for something more considered, as I shall demonstrate now:

Norton distinguishes between a 'felt' and a 'considered preference'. A *considered* preference "is any desire or need that a human individual would express after careful deliberation, including a judgement that the desire or need is consistent with a rationally adopted worldview – a worldview which includes fully supported scientific theories and a metaphysical framework interpreting those theories as well as a set of rationally supported aesthetic and moral ideals" (Norton, 2005: 229). Thus, as can be seen, instead of simply reacting to a subjectively felt

desire, careful investigation of one's felt preferences enables human individuals to adopt a more considered approach, which for Norton amounts to weak anthropocentrism in the case of environmental concerns. The notions of felt and considered preferences of course have much wider implications, e.g. one might have a felt preference for fatty foods, but upon careful deliberation of scientific theories (around nutrition) and metaphysical frameworks (such as the body is 'a temple of God'), one might decide to no longer consume fatty foods. One would then have a considered preference for healthy food which would trump the felt preference. But here we focus on the implications of the distinction for Norton's weak anthropocentrism in matters ecological.

2.1.2. Weak anthropocentrism

Weak anthropocentrism, therefore, finds that value, while still centred on humans, is not restricted to the raw satisfactions of immediate felt preferences of human individuals but adjudicates between preferences to be considered. According to Norton, stances of consideration for the environment "can be divided into ones concerning distributional fairness within generations and others concerning longer-term, cross-generational issues" (Norton, 2005b: 237). Most environmental concerns, claims Norton, can be resolved as issues of such fairness.

A typical example of this is if a landowner pollutes a river upstream. It raises a question of fairness between the landowner and her downstream neighbours. In other words, this is a moral issue, which, says Norton, is resolvable "using the categories and rules of standard, individualistic ethics" (Norton, 2005b: 237). It is obviously wrong for the upstream landowner to pollute a river that will negatively affect her downstream neighbours. She must, therefore, halt the activity and, if necessary, compensate for damage caused to her downstream neighbours. These standard rules are common in most non-environmental issues (Norton, 2005b: 237).

More difficult, are issues across time, but they are likewise effortlessly applied. If resources, such as the supply of rhino horn, are used up they no longer provide benefits. A considered preference would seek ways to maximise both the benefits for the greatest number (the utilitarian principle) and the longevity of those benefits. In the case of rhino horn, there are two possible scenarios under the weak anthropocentric model:

Firstly, given that most rhino species have become critically endangered, there is a realisation that there is a need to take drastic measures to secure their survival for future human use, through a more governed trade. CITES operates like this. In the case of rhinos, in 1977 the member countries voted to ban international trade on rhino horn (CITES d.). Using recommendations from a number of scientific conservation bodies, like the IUCN Species Survival Commission, the CITES Secretariat in 2016 has found that rhino numbers have yet to recover to a level where international trade is again permitted. This by no means implies that rhino horn may never again be traded. CITES' reasoning is that when rhino populations have recovered significantly enough as a result of a ban, a trade may once again be permitted (CITES d.). The moral concern here is not the well-being of the rhino, or their possible intrinsic value, but rather one of fairness towards future humans who might otherwise be deprived of rhino as a source of different kinds of instrumental value. This reversal on trade is what happened with African elephants, whose products, namely ivory, were banned from international trade in 1989. These were partially lifted in 1997 when their numbers were thought to be sufficient in some countries for a regulated trade. In this case, three African countries – Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe – were allowed to internationally trade in ivory again in what was then termed a 'once-off' sale (CITES, 16 July Press Release). The ivory – which weighed almost 50 tons and represented 5,446 tusks – was sold to Japan in 1999 and earned the countries some USD 5-million. The funds were recycled back into elephant conservation activities (CITES, 12th November 2002). As with elephants, the current rationale behind the total ban in rhino horn trade, therefore, is to safeguard a potential resource for future human utilisation.

The other scenario, instead of banning a trade in an animal product, ensures the product remains available to trade in order to produce a steady flow of benefits in the present as well as into the future. This is more about a regulation of trade. Relating to rhino horn, this is the thinking of many wildlife ranchers in South Africa as well as the South African government (International Rhino Foundation). Unlike elephants, rhinos do not need to be killed in order to extract their horn. Horns can be painlessly sawed off and then allowed to regrow therefore supplying a continued trade resource. One can also easily farm rhino, like cattle. Rhino ranchers are therefore intensively breeding rhino, stockpiling rhino horn and petitioning CITES to down-list rhino so that their horns can be traded, at least from South Africa where population numbers are still healthy (Rhinosalive.com, 2016). The ranchers hope they could eventually create a steady supply chain to Asia. Meanwhile, in the United States, there is a company that is

producing bio-fabricated synthetic rhino horn, also with an aim to maintain a flow of supply to meet the demand and to provide benefits to a larger human population (Pembient: website).

Thus, a weak anthropocentric approach has two scenarios: a distribution scenario about the fair treatment of human individuals with felt preferences living in the present as well as a considered resource allocation principle scenario that has reference to the long-term future of human generations. Using this approach, Norton believes there is a basis for favouring weak anthropocentrism "without the questionable ontological commitments made by non-anthropocentrists in attributing intrinsic value to nature" (Norton, 2005b: 227). Weak anthropocentrism, therefore, provides a basis for curtailing human consumptive needs in an effort to preserve, manage and regulate the use of wildlife resources across extended time.

2.2. Circular 'Green' Economy

As purported by Norton, for governments and legislators, when faced with whether to conserve wild animals, it is difficult to register and aggregate voter preferences over ostensibly subjective ethical notions of 'intrinsic value' of animals and equal consideration. Instead they make decisions "which are more systematic, more scientific, which often means more economic" (Rolston III, 2005b: 321). As a result, most of the world's governments and global organizations justify the existence of wild animals based on the tangible human utility of weak anthropocentric sustainability as discussed above – taking only human utility into consideration but with a combination of a long-term perspective.

Governments and inter-governmental organisations have no compunction about valuing wild animals instrumentally like this – highlighted by the fact there is no mention of intrinsic value of wild animals in any preamble, mission statement, bill of rights, charter, canon, code or constitution, anywhere in the world. With a focus on market (instrumental) value the issue centres on sustainability, i.e. future use. The question simply concerns 'how much can they take without destroying the resource?' In the Anthropocene, concerned about the ever-decreasing natural resources and resultant socio-economic problems, inter-governmental and governmental agencies are turning to what is referred to by the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) as circular 'green' strategies that create a cycle of renewable or sustainable natural resources, or at least rationing non-renewable ones, so that humans can enjoy long-term benefits. (UNEP: website)

As part of these strategies, UNEP launched the Green Economy Initiative (GEI) in 2008. UNEP has developed a working definition of a green economy as:

> …one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. In its simplest expression, a green economy can be thought of as one which is low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive. Practically speaking, a green economy is one whose growth in income and employment is driven by public and private investments that reduce carbon emissions and pollution, enhance energy and resource efficiency, and prevent the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. These investments need to be catalysed and supported by targeted public expenditure, policy reforms and regulation changes. This development path should maintain, enhance and, where necessary, rebuild natural capital as a critical economic asset and source of public benefits, especially for poor people whose livelihoods and security depend strongly on nature (UNEP: website).

In other words, the green economic model encourages economic growth through the sustainable and wider circulation of natural resources. It is weakly anthropocentric in that the livelihoods and security of people are always the central priority, yet, it functions as a conservation tool in that the system acknowledges that the prevention of the over-exploitation of the environment is essential to providing for those livelihoods and security into the future. Over the past decade, the concept of the Green Economy has emerged as a strategic priority for many governments and intergovernmental organizations. Sixty-five countries, including South Africa, have formally adopted UNEP's Inclusive Green Economy and related strategies (UNEP: website).

2.2.1. Saving Wildlife by Trading Them

More comprehensive in terms of endangered wildlife was the vision behind the creation of CITES. This organization is a prototypical and well-established version of current green economic management systems. CITES was drafted as a result of a resolution adopted in 1963 at a meeting of members of IUCN. The organisation eventually came into being at a gathering of representatives of 80 countries in Washington, D.C. on 3 March 1973, and on 1 July 1975 it

entered into force (CITES a.). Today, CITES is an international agreement between 183 governments called Parties. It has a slightly different version of UNEP's anthropocentric definition of the green economy in that wildlife *appears* to be given priority over human benefit: "to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival" (CITES a.). However, as the title suggests, CITES is foremost a trade convention rather than a wildlife conservation organization per se, so once again instrumental value for human benefit remains at the core of its function.

The international trade in endangered wild animals and plants is estimated to be worth billions of dollars. The trade is diverse, ranging from live animals and plants to a vast array of wildlife products derived from them, including food products, exotic leather goods, wooden musical instruments, timber, tourist curios and medicines (CITES a.). It was realized in 1963, a year after Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, that levels of exploitation of some animal and plant species were unsustainably high. The trade in them began to heavily deplete their populations and, in many cases, brought some species close to extinction. Since the trade in wild animals and plants crosses borders between countries, the effort to regulate it required international cooperation to safeguard certain species from over-exploitation. Hence, it is a treaty among governments under the United Nations system. In an effort to *continue benefitting* from the trade, the aim of CITES was to ensure the continued circulation of wildlife products in trade and simultaneously "safeguard resources for the future" (CITES a.).

In line with what Sagoff has suggested, the main attraction of the trade model that produced CITES, is its neutrality among competing values in a global society of diverse ethical, aesthetic, cultural and other values. The trade model depends entirely on efficiency, gratification and wealth maximisation, which is achieved through perpetual utility of species that indirectly preserves their numbers.

For policy-makers, the CITES trade model is easily applied: one can either trade or not; or one may trade up to a point. Through co-operation of its Parties, CITES accords varying degrees of trade regulation to more than 35,000 species of animals and plants. Of that number, 669 endangered species of wild animals may not be commercially traded. Over 5,000 can be traded but only under specific guidelines (CITES c.). Endangered wild animals are either placed under Appendix I, meaning no commercial trade; or Appendix II, meaning a regulated trade of

varying degrees depending on the species (CITES b.)11. This trade model, therefore, is the simplest and easiest model for governments to apply, especially when it comes to justifying the (human costs of the) continued existence of wild animals. Democratic governments, whose mandates are handed to them by human voters, must prioritize human interests above those of wild animals. If the human interests lie in preserving wild animals for socio-economic well-being, then governments can justify protecting them. If wild animals disappear, so do those human benefits.

The legal trade model under CITES seems to provide a buffer against illegal trafficking in wild animals and their products, but has been recognised as an important driver of biodiversity loss (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 3).

- Rhinoceroses

Let us return to the rhino scenario again. The impact of the demand for their horns on this endangered and threatened species has been well documented and the debate has been intensified by the accelerated growth in poaching rates of rhinos since the poaching crisis began in 2009, when the demand for rhino horn spiked in South-east Asia. This occurred as a result of Asian rhino species being pushed to unsustainable numbers causing traders and illegal traffickers to turn to Africa to continue to supply the market (Cruise, 2017). In the debate that has ensued in order to put a brake on poaching, the idea of legalising markets began to gain traction as a key policy option in saving the species (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 4). This scheme sprang from the idea that trade bans have become ineffectual in the struggle to ensure the long-term survivability of rhinos. Banning the trade in rhinos, which has been in force since 1977 (CITES d.), has been portrayed as the main cause behind the existence of large-scale underground markets with high prices and profitability. This led to the development of a suite of literature that supported the notion that legalising wildlife markets would be a better option in saving the species from rampant poaching (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 4).

The basic argument in favour of a legal market solution to the rhino poaching crisis has been developed in full or in parts in Biggs et al. (2013), Conrad (2012), Eustace (2012), Lockwood

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11 There is an Appendix III listing but this serves for bilateral agreements between countries to regulate trade and does not require the cooperation of other CITES Parties. (CITES b.)

(2011), Martin (2011), Moyle (2007, 2013), 't Sas-Rolfes (2012) and Loon (2012). Their overarching justification for a pro-trade solution to the poaching crisis begins with the premise that poaching and trafficking are a consequence of high prices for rhino horn, estimated to be worth up to USD 60,000 per kilogram on the Black Market (Al Jazeera, 21st August 2017). Demand is assumed to be large and stable, rooted in modern medicinal, aesthetic and cultural patterns. Given that demand for wildlife products is persistent and relatively insensitive to price movements, the supply reduction provoked by the trade ban inevitably stimulates the black market and drives prices up. The high prices in the illegal markets constitute powerful incentives that compensate for the costs and risks of wildlife trafficking (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 6).

High prices of rhino horn are assumed to be the outcome of an insufficient supply derived from the international trade ban on rhino horn currently enforced by CITES (CITES d.). Various estimates have been presented showing that de-horning, confiscated horns and other sources of horn can adequately supply quantities large enough to meet the current demand and bring prices down. Suspending the trade ban would increase and stabilise the supply of horn and again, bring prices down, thus reducing the incentives to poaching and trafficking and providing an additional revenue source for private owners and public parks (Biggs et al., 2013, Conrad 2012, Eustace, 2012, Lockwood, 2011, Martin, 2011, Moyle, 2007, 2013, 't Sas-Rolfes, 2012 and Loon, 2012).

A legal trade mechanism, according to all the aforementioned pro-trade justifications, would thus contribute to the conservation of rhinos by both reducing poaching and increasing revenues for continued conservation efforts.

3. Weak anthropocentric sustainable development in South Africa

In line with these market-centred, pro-trade policies, the South African government has endorsed a weak anthropocentric view of sustainable 'green' development. It is embedded in official national policy (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996) as a means that "can be tapped into to contribute to radical socio-economic transformation in South Africa" (Department of Environmental Affairs, 8 March 2018). The country is a particularly good example, perhaps the type, of how the economically sustainable development of wildlife utilisation can be portrayed as a successful conservation model not only in preserving wild

animal numbers but in increasing them. On statistics alone, it seems South Africa may have discovered the most effective remedy against rampant decline in its wild species that has plagued much of the continent during the Anthropocene – wildlife ranching.

3.1. Wildlife ranching

The wildlife economy in South Africa centers largely on private ranching activities that relate to the stocking, trading, breeding, and hunting of wildlife, and all the services and goods required to support its economic value chain.

In South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s, there was a realisation that the sustainable use of wildlife could be more financially viable than unregulated harvesting from the wild (Taylor et al., 2015: 1).[12] It was followed by the Game Theft Act of 1991, which provided certain ownership rights to landowners over wild animals held in adequately enclosed areas. The Act provided the incentive for a major shift in farming activities across South Africa and has led to the huge growth of wildlife ranching as a land use (Taylor et al., 2015: 1). Today, the South African Department of Environment (DEA) states that wildlife ranching in South Africa encompasses more than 9,000 commercial wildlife ranches that cover 16.8 % of the country's landmass (Department of Environmental Affairs, 8 March 2018). The DEA has also stated that "to date the Wildlife Economy has secured R138-million in private sector investment, whilst government has invested a further R66,6-million in the wildlife economy sector, through the Expanded Public Works Programme [sic] funding streams" (Department of Environmental Affairs, 8 March 2018). The DEA believes that the wildlife economy will contribute R5,7-billion to the economy in the form of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and create 125,000 jobs with an expansion of 10-million hectares by 2030 (Department of Environmental Affairs, 8 March 2018).

According to a study by Taylor et al. for the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) entitled *An Assessment of the Economic, Social and Conservation Value of the Wildlife Ranching Industry and its Potential to Support the Green Economy in South Africa* (2015) there are 5,987-million

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[12] Taylor et al are the only recent comprehensive study on this subject in South Africa. Consequently, I have relied heavily on this document in this section of the chapter.

large herbivores in the country.13 This number excludes small obscure difficult-to-count species, namely grysbok, klipspringer, oribi and suni, as well as warthogs and bushpigs. The figure represents a ten-fold increase since the boom in private wildlife ranching started in South Africa in the 1960s (Taylor et al., 2015: 2). Carnivores in South Africa were also found to be abundant. The most common species are jackals (occurring on 97% of properties), mongooses (96%), caracal (94%) and genets (90%). Leopards and brown hyaenas occurred on 62% and 50% of properties respectively, while cheetahs, spotted hyaenas and African lions occurred on <20% of properties. Wild dogs were least common, occurring on only 4% of farms (Taylor et al., 2015: 4).

The EWT study uses Kenya as a counter-example. In contrast to South Africa, Kenya, in 1977, banned the consumptive commercialisation of wildlife such as ranching and trophy hunting for fear the practices were unsustainable. Even though there has been no formal research into the effects, Taylor et al. (citing Norton-Griffiths) state: "…it's no mere coincidence the East African country has experienced a precipitous decline in wildlife populations, both on private land and state protected areas, with this decrease possibly being as high as 70%" (Norton-Griffiths, 2000, 2007; Ogutu et al., 2011 in Taylor et al., 2015: 73). Norton-Griffiths ascribed this "fundamental institutional failure" to the lack of property rights and use rights of landowners over wildlife and stated that the resulting market failure reflected the absence of financial incentives for landowners to conserve their wildlife resource (Norton-Griffiths, 2000 in Taylor et al., 2015: 73).

The terms 'wildlife ranching' and 'game farming', according to Taylor et al.:

> …both refer to the management of wildlife on private land for commercial purposes. They are often used interchangeably, although game farming generally (and subjectively) refers to smaller properties (<5,000 ha) where some form of constant management is necessary, while wildlife ranching generally refers to larger properties (>5,000ha) where management interventions are less necessary and frequent (and may be considered extensive) (Taylor et al., 2015: 10).

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13 This is a very different figure to that presented by the Department of Environmental Affairs (as mentioned above) of 20-million head of game (Department of Environmental Affairs, 8th June 2018) Taylor et al state this is due to different methods of calculation (Taylor et al., 2015: 4) but do not provide further explanation.

The criteria Taylor et al used to decide the definition of a wildlife ranch are as follows:

- It had to be privately owned (which could mean owned by an individual, company or consortium). They excluded any state-owned areas such as national parks.
- It had to derive commercial benefit from wildlife. The extent of commercialisation was not important in the study (i.e. they did not have to be profitable), and they included a range of possibilities from full-time profit-making wildlife ranchers at one end of the spectrum, to part-time, mixed farming ranchers possibly making a loss from wildlife at the other (Taylor et al., 2015: 10).

In addition to properties that would generally be referred to as ranches or farms, Taylor et al. also included private game/nature reserves, as long as they fulfilled the two criteria above (Taylor et al., 2015: 10).

Apart from the non-consumptive role of wildlife-watching (or photographic) tourism, the wildlife ranching industry in South Africa is supported by these broad consumptive economic sectors:

- Trophy hunting, biltong hunting and wing shooting
- Live sales and breeding of high value species and colour variants
- Game meat sales

    (Taylor et al., 2015: 10).

Some 29,000 wild animals were sold at auctions countrywide during 2014. Live wild animal sales generated R4.3-billion the same year, hunting generated R2.6-billion (this figure only represents the value of the animals and excludes money spent by hunters on lodging, food and professional hunting fees); and game meat production generated around R610-million. Trophy hunting provided the highest average income out of these categories (with a mean of R43,000 per property per year), while game meat production and biltong hunting provided R7,000 per property per year and R11,000 per property per year on average respectively. Overall, 65,170 permanent jobs were supported during 2014. This figure excludes temporary employees and people working in wildlife ranching who were not employed by the ranchers themselves. Such industries include wildlife translocators, fencing businesses, and taxidermists (Taylor et al., 2015: 5).

As one can see from these figures, weak anthropocentric sustainable development of wildlife ranching seems to have generated an increase of wild animal populations but is providing significant financial revenue for humans – not just for landowners but also for the labourers, who are normally regarded as those subject to rural poverty and destitution. There also seem to be potential benefits for the livelihoods of those that were previously disadvantaged in terms of landownership and property rights during the Apartheid era.

3.1.1. Trophy hunting

One of the key areas identified for contributing to economic growth and social transformation is the trophy hunting industry. The DEA has recognised this sector as: "One of the major contributors to wildlife tourism and the South African economy." (Department of Environmental Affairs, 8 March 2018) According to Taylor et al., "the total revenue generated from these animals on all wildlife ranches across South Africa was estimated to be R1.96-billion" (Taylor et al., 2015: 3).

Trophy hunting can be defined as the selective hunting of individual non-domesticated animals (primarily mammals), picked for specific traits such as large horns, tusks or body size and is performed by paying clients using a rifle or bow in the presence of a professional hunter (Lindsey et al., 2007; Van der Merwe, Saayman & Rossouw, 2014 in Taylor et al., 2015: 10). The primary products obtained from this activity are skins, horns and tusks, and these are often retained by the clients to be displayed as mounted trophies.

Trophy hunting as a conservation tool seems to be a particularly good example of Norton's weak anthropocentric model. The foundational premise behind hunting-as-conservation is that in order for trophy hunters to continue to enjoy the 'sport' of shooting wild, often iconic 'Big-Five'[14] animals like elephants, leopards, lions, rhinos and buffalo, hunting needs to be regulated and managed. These animals that are favoured by trophy hunters are therefore conserved, and in some cases, their numbers deliberately increased in order to 'cash in' on greater numbers of wealthy foreign trophy hunters. Thus, by governing the consumptive gratification ('felt

[14] A term originally used to describe the five most difficult African mammals to hunt on foot. Now also used to describe the large charismatic species most sought after by ecotourists.

preference') of trophy-hunters, the practice is in fact conserving selected wildlife populations into the future.

To this point, most of the world conservation bodies, such as CITES and IUCN, and governments endorse well-managed trophy hunting as a viable conservation tool. The IUCN Species Survival Commission's (SSC) *Guiding Principles on Trophy Hunting as a Tool for Creating Conservation Incentives* states: "Trophy hunting is a form of wildlife use that, when well-managed, may assist in furthering conservation objectives by creating the revenue and economic incentives for the management and conservation of the target species and its habitat, as well as supporting local livelihoods" (IUCN SSC, 2012: 4). The CITES document on *The Trade in Hunting Trophies of Species Listed in Appendix I or II* likewise states:

> RECOGNIZING that well-managed and sustainable trophy hunting is consistent with and contributes to species conservation, as it provides both livelihood opportunities for rural communities and incentives for habitat conservation, and generates benefits which can be invested for conservation purposes…RECALLING that Resolution Conf. 16.6 (Rev. CoP17) on CITES and livelihoods recognizes that poor rural communities may attach economic, social, cultural and ceremonial importance to some CITES listed species, and RECOGNIZING the resources that trophy hunting provides to certain local communities (CITES: Res. Conf. 17.9).

- Trophy hunting leopards

The perceived economic benefits of trophy hunting can potentially reverse negative traditional perceptions toward wildlife in South Africa. Traditionally, leopards are seen by South African stock farmers as vermin as they pose a threat to livestock numbers. Leopards therefore have no value, market or otherwise. If anything, they have a negative market value as they impact negatively on the profits of cattle ranching or goat and sheep farming. Consequently, leopards are indiscriminately trapped and killed to the extent that their numbers in South Africa have declined (Department of Environment of the Republic of South Africa, 16th January 2017).

As a result, the DEA issued a two year-moratorium between 2016 and 2018 on any further killing of leopards. This was a blanket moratorium that also included banning the trophy

hunting of leopards (Department of Environment of the Republic of South Africa, 16th January 2017). The moratorium caused an outcry among trophy hunting associations who argued that far from contributing to their demise, trophy hunters were in fact protecting leopard populations. The Professional Hunting Association of South Africa (PHASA) counter-argued the DEA's decision stating that rather than saving leopards, the moratorium on hunting the animals as trophies was instead contributing to their demise (Professional Hunting Association of South Africa, 2017).

Leopards are a Big-Five species, meaning they, along with lion, buffalo, rhino and elephants, are a primary draw-card for wealthy international trophy hunters who are willing to pay between USD15,000-USD35,000 to shoot an individual leopard (Democratic staff of the House Committee on Natural Resources, 2016: 10). PHASA believes that by placing such high market value on a leopard is helping preserve the species. (Professional Hunting Association of South Africa, 2017) Their point is if a stock farmer can earn good money to have overseas clients come shoot a leopard on his property, he will be less inclined to exterminate them and more inclined to preserve their numbers in the expectation of further financial accruement from trophy hunters. At the very least, the profit made from leopard hunting will offset the costs of allowing them to stay on the property (including stock losses).

In this sense, with leopards having a net financial value, their overall population numbers are paradoxically maintained by killing the odd individual. Indeed, there is widespread evidence that farmers have even begun turning away from domestic livestock farming and reconfiguring their land into wildlife ranches in an effort to benefit from the greater profits of trophy hunting (Brandt & Spierenburg, 2014).

National governments also benefit financially from the trophy hunting of leopards. In 2016, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the department that permits the import of hunted trophies from South Africa, charged USD100 for a permit to import a trophy of a leopard, or any other species listed under their Endangered Species Act. The fees raised approximately USD400,000 per year for the department (Democratic staff of the House Committee on Natural Resources, 2016: 24). Likewise, the South African provincial departments who authorise permits to hunt a leopard, were charging around R2,000 to R2,100 per leopard hunting permit (Moneybags, 2015). That is until the moratorium was put in place in 2016.

3.1.2. Live sales and breeding

Breeding of high market value game species generally takes place in confined or semi-confined areas (Taylor et al., 2015: 48) and are similar to livestock farms where animals are bred either to be slaughtered (trophy-hunted or for game meat) or sold live to other game farms. In South Africa, wild animals are either intensively bred – confinement of wild species in small to medium sized camps or enclosures, where they are fenced in, protected from predators and provided with most of, or all their food, water and veterinary requirements - or allowed to roam naturally in more open larger confined habitats in private or public reserves. Consequently, wildlife population, especially among herbivores, has increased. The main species supporting the breeding and live sales industry over the last thirty years in South Africa have been sable, roan, African buffalo, blesbok, gemsbok, impala, springbok, and blue wildebeest (Taylor et al., 2015: 48). Breeding is often conducted in fenced camps or enclosures of varying size. Live wildlife species may be bought from auctions (Taylor et al., 2015: 48). According to Taylor et al., "the total revenue generated by live sales on all wildlife ranches across South Africa was estimated to be R4.328-billion" (Taylor et al., 2015: 3).

- Breeding lions

Herbivores are not the only species whose numbers have benefitted from intensive breeding. Intensive breeding of lions for trophy hunting and international export in lion bones in South Africa is currently endorsed, supported and even encouraged by the DEA. The African lion is the only big cat in the world listed on CITES Appendix II (CITES: e.), and therefore the only one for which international commercial trade is permitted under CITES (CITES: b.).

When she gazetted the *Biodiversity Management Plan for African Lion* (Funston & Levendal, 2014), the late Environment Minister, Edna Molewa, outlined one of the key objectives, which was to "Encourage the development of opportunities for economic and social benefit from responsibly managed captive lion populations" (Department of Environmental Affairs of the Republic of South Africa, 4 December 2015). While the total figure is unknown, estimates suggest that upwards of 200 breeding facilities exist in the country, with one recent paper citing a figure of 297 (Van der Merwe et al., 2017). A total of 146 are registered with the South African Predator Association (SAPA), which funded the research. The same paper estimates

that the industry contributes R500-million annually to the South African economy and sustains 1,162 jobs if multiplier effects of associated employment opportunities are accounted for. The lion breeding ranches in the country have mustered a standing population of over 6,000-8,000 captive lions, (Funston & Levendal, 2014: 1), although more recent reports say it could be as high as 14,000. (Harvey, 2018: 8) This is three to five times the estimated population of wild free-roaming lions in the country, which includes those lions found in national parks, with populations estimated at over 2,000 individuals (*Biodiversity Management Plan for Lion in South Africa*, 2014).

Captive lions are bred specifically for the purpose of trophy-hunting and the lion bone trade. Lion breeders are able to earn between R60,000 and R300,000 per lion shot by trophy hunters (Cruise, 22 July 2015), while additional revenue is made from tourist cub-petting opportunities before the lions are old enough to be shot. Then there is the selling of the skeleton passed over by the trophy hunters who usually take the head and pelt as a trophy. An annual quota of 1,500 skeletons of captive bred lion was been determined in July 2018 (Department of Environment of the Republic of South Africa, 16th July 2018). The trade in lion bones is permitted under the Convention in the Trade of Endangered Species but only "if the trade will not be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild" (CITES b.). This by-product of the captive-bred sport-hunting industry nets a lion breeder another R12,000 to R24,000 per skeleton (Cruise, 22 July 2015).

Captive-lion breeding is hailed as a successful example of the green-economic approach. The *Biodiversity Management Plan for Lion in South Africa* states: "There are substantial economic advantages to many South African societies that accrue from the conservation and use of lions" (Funston & Levendal, 2014: 2). Most importantly, there is also a perceived conservation benefit for wild lions (Van der Merwe et al., 2017: 320–321). Proponents of the captive-bred lion industry argue that the practice has deflected trophy hunters away from the rapidly dwindling wild lion populations, although this link has not been verified through any research or documentation (Harvey, 2018: 10). Continent-wide, according to the IUCN Red data, "the lion population is inferred to have undergone a reduction of approximately 43% over the past 21 years" (Bauer et al., 2016). The IUCN *Red List of Threatened Species* has cited unregulated trophy hunting has been a factor in the reduction of lions continent-wide. Their concern is "that management regimes have not always been sufficient to deter unsustainable offtakes" (Bauer et al., 2016). With its intensive captive breeding program, South Africa considers itself to have

in place an exemplary management regime by 'sacrificing' sustainably captive-bred lions for the protection of wild lion populations (Department of Environment of the Republic of South Africa, 16th July 2018).

3.1.3. Game meat production

The term 'game' loosely refers to any non-domesticated animals hunted for meat. In southern Africa, the meaning is mostly confined to terrestrial mammals including ungulate species (hoofed mammals including antelope species, giraffes, warthogs, bush-pigs and zebras) (Taylor et al., 2015: xi).

The total mass of game meat that was produced on wildlife ranches during 2014 through trophy hunting and culling was 21,220 tons. The total estimated number of jobs created by the wildlife ranching sector was 65,172 with a median salary per person per month of R3,441 (Taylor et al., 2015: 4). These estimates are only for people employed directly on wildlife ranches, and exclude people employed by industries reliant on the wildlife ranching sector but who are not employed by the ranchers themselves. Temporary workers are also not included (Taylor et al., 2015: 4).

Taylor et al. highlight a potential benefit that game meat production can have on food security in South Africa. It cites the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) definition of food security, which is as follows: "…the condition when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (United Nations Development Program, 2012).

According to the *Human Development Index*, South Africa scores higher in food security than most sub-Saharan countries, but lags behind North America, Europe, most of South America and Asia and even some African states such as Gabon, Botswana and Namibia (United Nations Development Program, 2012). During the period 2000-2010, 8.7% of children under the age of five years in South Africa were underweight, 23.9% were stunted due to chronic dietary inadequacy, and 4.7% experienced wasting from poor nutrition (United Nations Development Program, 2012). A recent report by the Departments of Social Development (DSD) and South African Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) suggested that only 20% of

South African households are food secure, while >50% experienced some degree of hunger (DAFF, 2013b).

Taylor et al. state that even though South Africa produces a large amount of animal protein through the domestic livestock industry for consumption every year, there is a shortfall (Taylor et al., 2015: 56). This, they assert citing DAFF, is partly due to the fact that the human population has doubled from 25-million to >50-million over the last 30 years (DAFF, 2013c in Taylor et al., 2015: 56), while the numbers of livestock have remained the same or declined. Cattle numbers have fluctuated around 13- to 14-million head during this period, while sheep numbers have dropped from nearly 30-million head to 22-million (DAFF, 2013c in Taylor et al., 2015: 56). There has also been an overall loss of agricultural land to non-agricultural activities such as mining and housing developments, and since 1994 the overall area under food production has declined by 30% (DAFF, 2013b in Taylor et al., 2015: 56). For Taylor et al. it "appears that the demand for meat may have outstripped the country's ability to produce it, and with the growing human population, this situation is likely to get worse" (Taylor et al., 2015: 56).

One possible solution, according to Taylor et al, would be for South Africans to eat more game meat. McCrindle et al. (2013) suggest that, if game meat resources were used sustainably, thousands of tons of game meat could be produced on an annual basis to fulfil the growing protein requirements of the domestic consumer market, and thereby cover the shortfall from livestock farming.

Game meat production in South Africa is run on a free-market basis, meaning there is little governmental interference or monopoly, which creates uncomplicated business opportunities for private wildlife ranchers with capacity to sell meat direct to the public (Hoffman et al., 2004 in Taylor et al., 2015: 56). When compared with beef, game meat has a lower total fat content (Hoffman et al., 2004 in Taylor et al., 2015: 56) and is lower in total saturated fatty acids (Viljoen 1999 in Taylor et al., 2015: 56), making it an appealing choice for health-conscious consumers. Game meat is also considered more 'organic' than many domestic livestock products because it is generally free of antibiotics and hormones (D'Amato et al., 2013 Taylor et al., 2015: 56).

Taylor et al. have determined that wildlife ranchers across South Africa already produce over 22,000 tons of game meat from a combination of trophy hunting and culling during 2014. Overall then, it appears there is strong potential for wildlife ranches to produce game meat to cover the shortfall of the livestock meat industry in order to satisfy some of the basic dietary needs of South Africans, while at the same time ensuring numbers of wildlife are maintained to satisfy those needs.

4.   Conclusion

This chapter has focused its attention on the conservation benefits of weak anthropocentrism, specifically from a basic Cost-Benefit economic view of sustainable development, as well as a focus on a developing country in need of socio-economic transformation and a means to safeguard food security. The model is one that is widely applied and accepted by most policy-makers both at a local and global level in that wildlife numbers are preserved in order to provide an economic and social benefit to humans, without which governments would ostensibly find no justification in preserving the natural environment. This pragmatic approach, while eschewing the intrinsic rights and moral consideration of wild animals, nevertheless seems to be an effective tool in preventing them from going extinct while at the same time providing significant economic, cultural and health benefits to humans. This is therefore seemingly best placed to be the model that holds in check the spectre of the Sixth Extinction since it continues to preserve wild animals even though they are utilised solely for human consumption and gratification. However, as I will now show in the next chapter, while the economic sustainability of conserving wildlife may seem like a workable solution it is in fact quite the opposite.

CHAPTER TWO: FOUNDATIONAL FLAWS WITH WEAK ANTHROPOCENTRISM IN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

> *…and yet,*
> *to me, what is this quintessence of dust?*
> *Man delights not me—*
>
> (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*: Act II, Scene II)

> *To put all living things that aren't human into one category is, first of all a stupid gesture –*
> *theoretically ridiculous – and partakes in the very real violence that humans exercise toward*
> *animals.*
>
> (Jacques Derrida, 2008: YouTube)

This chapter shall show that a weak anthropocentric approach to conservation grounded in economic pragmatism as described and discussed in *Chapter One* is foundationally flawed in that the underlying principle flounders when put into practice. The chapter consists of two broad sections:, that show respectively that (i) the dominant framework of *weak anthropocentrism in wildlife conservation* fails in practice as well as (ii) fails theoretically, philosophically speaking.

In the first section, I show that while in some cases (as demonstrated in *Chapter One*), the weak anthropocentric approach of sustainable development maintains some animal population numbers (of those species deemed to have market value), the policy not only ultimately fails to save the majority of wild animals from over-exploitation and extinction, but in many cases worsens their plight. Furthermore, as I shall demonstrate, in many cases, the policy of sustainable development tends to generate the opposite results of what is intended, in that far from preserving the targeted species, the very mechanism of trading in wildlife instead accelerates their demise. This section will show through literature analysis and case-studies precisely how a weak anthropocentric policy can have catastrophic ramifications for the survival and flourishing of the majority of the planet's faunal species.

I shall demonstrate that a weak anthropocentric policy of commercialising wildlife to be cost-effective tends toward something more akin to domestic farming practices than preservation of wild animals in wild spaces in ways that allow them to flourish. This will be demonstrated by the discussion of widespread breeding practices such as of physical variants to create higher

market value of individuals, as well as quantitative breeding for higher trade profits with animals confined in enclosed spaces with little or zero concern for dynamic biodiversity, i.e. the diversity of ways of life represented by the various life forms.

The second section of the chapter, *Philosophical Flaws*, presents a philosophical evaluation of the dominant approach to wildlife conservation. This section will be an analysis of the theoretical substratum of prevailing policies that governs our treatment and uses of wildlife. This will be achieved with a thorough critique of the anthropocentric stance underlying the dominant paradigm.

In sub-section 2.1. (*The cataclysm of dualism),* I will begin by deconstructing the philosophical bedrock of anthropocentrism, namely Cartesian dualism. This is to show how the infamous seventeenth century French philosopher, René Descartes' theoretical separation of the subject from the object; or mind from body, underscores the totality of our anthropocentric endeavours in terms of purely instrumental valuations of (other) animals. The enquiry will be conducted as a means to provide philosophical clarity about the root problem of our current conservation practices, and overall attitude toward (other) animals.

I will also show that a weak anthropocentric approach to sustainable development not only fails in preserving species from strong anthropocentric over-exploitation but is inadequate in providing that which is central to its core, namely in providing meaningful gratification and welfare benefits for the human recipients it is meant to focus on. I will reveal that the latter point specifically breaks down, from an anthropocentric utilitarian perspective, in that instead of abiding by the core utilitarian principle of greatest happiness for the greatest number, only small, elite groups of humans benefit, and mostly at the expense of the majority of the intended human recipients. In other words, Cartesian hierarchies translate into human-on-human dualisms, where only some benefit and often at the expense of the majority. This manifests conspicuously in South African circumstances of private land ownership. Most wildlife spaces in South Africa are privately owned by a small number of mainly white landowners. The number of game farms is growing with many farmers converting from agricultural to less costly game operations (Brandt & Spierenburg, 2014). Private game farms and hunting operations in South Africa tend to result in spatial rearrangements that disconnect rural non-white labourers from the land and further entrench power hierarchies between white landowners and landless black and coloured workers. I will emphasise that while providing lip-service to land reform,

in practice the South African Government demonstrates an ambiguous stance towards the processes of consolidating private property, specifically ones that accompany shifts to game farming and the concomitant strengthening of re-emerging geographies of inequality as will be shown with a case study of the Karoo region of the Eastern Cape (Brandt & Spierenburg, 2014).

In sub-section 2.2. (*Exclusionary logic in moral consideration and animal rights practices*), a similar critique into the notion of moral consideration, and specifically the seminal theories of Peter Singer, will be undertaken. I will demonstrate that this second approach, paradoxically, is also mired in conceptual anthropocentrism and in essence generates similar problems of dichotomy.

It is necessary to point out at this juncture that while I will go into relative detail in dismantling the bedrock of our anthropocentric bias in wildlife conservation, it is more to present its case as a lead into the alternative concept (which will take up the bulk of the next three chapters) rather than provide a rigorous and lengthy critique of conceptual anthropocentrism itself, which in any case was the core thread of my Master's thesis.[15]

1. Practical flaws with weak anthropocentrism in wildlife conservation

   1.1. An economic critique of trading in wildlife

In *Chapter One*, I outlined the benefits of a sustainable circulation of wildlife products. As discussed, it is weakly anthropocentric in that the livelihoods and security of humans are always the central priority, yet it functions as a conservation tool because the system acknowledges that the prevention of the over-exploitation of the environment is essential to keep on providing for those livelihoods and security. In terms of utility, a regulated trade in wild species and their products is seen as the best means (?) of conserving them since the trade model depends entirely on efficiency and wealth maximisation – a maximisation that is achieved through perpetual utility of species that preserves their numbers. Furthermore, a weak anthropocentric (regulated) trade model seems to provide a buffer against illegal trade in wild animals and their products (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 3). This was discussed in *Chapter One*

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[15] For more information see: Cruise, A. (2015) *Delinearizing the Insuperable Line: Deconstruction as an Animal Ethic* (Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University) https://scholar.sun.ac.za/

when I presented the case study of rhinoceroses. The case study gave the perception that a legal trade in rhino horn from farmed rhinos would increase and stabilise the supply of horn to Asia. In theory, this would effectively drive prices down thus reduce the incentives to poaching and illegal trade while at the same time provide an additional revenue source for private owners and public parks.

However, a review in 2014 by economists Professor Alejandro Nadal of the Centre for Economic Studies at El Colegio de Mexico and Francisco Aguayo, a PhD Fellow at the Maastricht Economic and Social Research and Training Centre on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT) at Maastricht University, comprehensively revealed that the basis of advocating commercial trade as a conservation solution for endangered species "relies on models that are based on simplistic and/or extremely restrictive assumptions." (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 1) "In most cases," according to the two economists, "these models also rely on conceptual tools that have been theoretically discredited." (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 1)

In the first in-depth economic analysis of its kind, Nadal and Aguayo state that one of the most striking features of the pro-trade model, specifically as it pertains to wildlife conservation, is the high level of misinformation:

> To anyone who comes in contact with the corpus of literature on wildlife trade, and in particular the literature recommending the use of market-based policies, the uncritical use of theoretically discredited analytical instruments is a striking revelation (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 2).

Nadal and Aguayo attest that the most important issue with such discredited misinformation is the false conviction that markets behave as self-regulating mechanisms that smoothly lead to economic efficiency while at the same time preventing animals from going extinct. The economists show that during the past forty years, economic theory has developed and evolved beyond the basic Cost-Benefit Analysis so touted in wildlife conservation into a series of highly complex theoretical models. They note that in almost every field of economics, "from industrial organisation, to evolutionary, institutional and behavioural economics, and from debates in macro-economic theory to work on complex and non-linear systems," such complexities have "had vital implications for theoretical, empirical and policy-oriented research" (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 3). And yet, they point out, "the economic analysis of wildlife trade seems to

be an exception: it appears to have been trapped in the backwaters of textbook economics" (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 3). Nadal and Aguayo maintain that wildlife economics based on weak anthropocentrism is wholly inadequate in preserving wildlife. I will discuss their theoretical arguments in the section to follow (1.1) and then apply practical examples to back up the theory (1.2).

1.1.1. A theoretical economic critique of trading wildlife

The pro-trade economic models based on simple Cost-Benefit Analysis clearly show that the argument in favour of wildlife trade "only holds logically when competition is perfect (in the sense that suppliers are unable to set prices), supply is vertically integrated, laundering and stigma effects are inexistent, there is no product differentiation, and agents do not behave strategically" (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 14). These simplistic assumptions, according to Nadal and Aguayo, "eliminate all sources of instability, overshooting and maladjustment in price formation processes." They warn that removing these assumptions reinforces a cautionary recommendation against legalising wildlife trade (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 14).

- Rhinoceroses

Let me once again return to the justification for legalising the rhino horn trade as discussed in *Chapter One* in order to show that the application of these simplistic economic theories ultimately fails to preserve the species.

Speaking before the Committee of Inquiry (COI) to deliberate on matters relating to a possible trade of rhino horn at the Department of Environmental Affairs in South Africa on May 30, 2015, Nadal stated: "If the objective of this policy is to put out of business incumbent firms [criminal syndicates], it is essential to know how these firms will compete with the new entrants [legal traders] in the emerging market environment" (Department of Environmental Affairs in South Africa, 30th May 2015: 6). The argument for a trade in rhinos is based on the idea that legal supplies will out-compete illegal sources. It is assumed this goal is achieved through price reduction. Since poaching efforts are proportional to expected revenues, any mechanism that reduces those revenues is automatically assumed to reduce poaching (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 23). However, Nadal told the COI that an increased supply is neither a necessary, nor a sufficient condition to bring the price of a commodity down. What actually leads to price

reductions, he reasoned, is additional competition (Department of Environmental Affairs in South Africa, 30th May 2015: 6). In their review of the common economic analysis of the wildlife trade, entitled *Leonardo's Sailors*16, Nadal and Aguayo argue that typically, "new competition will bring down prices if it has succeeded in abating costs and if it finds it in its interest to actually offer a substitute product at a sufficiently lower price" (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 22). Thus, new competition should put lower prices on the shelf for the benefit of consumers. However, the economists warn that there are many reasons why legal suppliers of wildlife products may not outcompete illegal traders from the market:

Firstly, the assumption that illegal supply is inherently more costly than legal supply and that the first can only survive if prices remain high, "is an assumption made with no empirical grounds" (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 22). The costs of bribing, smuggling, and laundering should be compared to the costs incurred by legal export, import, selling, and advertising activities. "Without attention to more detailed geographical and regulatory conditions, relative cost advantages become more and more difficult to predict ex-ante" (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 22).

Therefore, Nadal and Aguayo believe any variability in agents' cost structure cannot be simply assumed away. Without adequate information it becomes very difficult to predict the effect of a legal flow of wildlife products entering the supply chain. They affirm that it is not obvious that prices will fall and, if they do, that this will entail a reduction in the incentives for poachers. In the event of a new flow of supply from a legal source, market conditions will be shaken, and shares will be redistributed. The incumbent traffickers may start to find their monopoly rents begin to fall if other agents succeed in establishing direct contact with retailers and final consumers at lower costs. The market shares of suppliers that offer a smaller price will grow, but only to an extent proportional to their supply capacity. This may not necessarily exhaust all rents and market niches for illegal products (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 22).

Moreover, legal and illegal supplies may not even compete with each other but actually expand reciprocally, with illegal suppliers acting as occasional contractors for legal traders if there is excess demand. The presence of laundering may as well be taken as an indicator of capacity constraints of legal products, of lower poaching costs, or of product differentiation and the

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16 From a quote of Leonardo da Vinci who said: "He who loves practice without theory is like the sailor who boards a ship without a rudder and compass and never knows where he may be cast."

existence of segmented markets (or a combination of them), and therefore as a signal of supply variability conditions and entry barriers. Also, rhino horn traffickers may have the capacity to withstand the pressure of legal sources of supply (Nadal & Aguayo, 2014: 23). Thus, far from driving prices down and satiating the market a legal trade may in fact accelerate demand and increase laundering of illegal rhino horn into the legal trade.

Another point of contention for Nadal and Aguayo is not only the lack of knowledge on the supply side but also the demand side in Asia for rhino horn. Assuming that the proposed market-based policy does lead to price reductions, the response from the demand side would need to be rigorously evaluated. Nadal pointed out to the COI that:

> The lack of information on demand applies to potential responses to price changes with respect to different formats of the final product (complete horn, pieces or powder). Each one of these different uses probably has a different sensitivity to price changes, income effects, and market re-organization. None of these uses are substitutes and thus we may not observe them in the same individual at the same time. They may entail relationships underlying consumer behaviour that are more complex than those normally assumed by standard consumer theory (Department of Environmental Affairs in South Africa, 30th May 2015: 8).

The assumptions concerning consumers and final demand used in simple economic models are based on highly restrictive conditions. Nadal maintains that in these models, consumers make fully informed, rational choices, with a schedule of preferences ordered according to decreasing marginal utility. "But once we relax the over-simplistic assumption that we are dealing with a single commodity, the downward sloping demand curves are logically inconsistent. This is one of the reasons why simplistic trade notions about the rhino horn market need to be abandoned and replaced by a more realistic and rigorous framework capable of analysing both, consumer behaviour and market-level demand dynamics" (Department of Environmental Affairs in South Africa, 30th May 2015: 8).

Nadal believes that because the nature of firms and the structure of the existing illegal rhino horn market are not well understood, it is impossible therefore to rule out the case where some traders may seek to compensate revenue losses through the market expansion via lower prices or other avenues. He states that pro-active marketing campaigns are standard strategies in all

branches of economic activity, and they cannot be ruled out in the rhino horn market. If this takes place the market will actually grow and develop as prices are brought down (Department of Environmental Affairs in South Africa, 30th May 2015: 8). This last point is perhaps the most significant as an increase in the market will almost certainly create a demand that would outstrip the production capacities of a legal trade alone. This means, traders will again start targeting wild rhinos through poaching syndicates.

Thus, for Nadal, who was the Chair of the Theme on the Environment, Macroeconomics, Trade and Investment (TEMTI) for the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP-IUCN) when he gave his presentation before the COI, the overall absence of more information on the nature of traders, the structure of markets, price-formation dynamics and the response of final consumer demand means that it is not possible to adequately evaluate a policy proposal to legalise the rhino horn market. Indeed, Nadal explicitly and correctly warned the COI that legalising a rhino horn market could instead "lead to a serious case of policy failure and the extinction of rhino populations could be the end result" (Department of Environmental Affairs in South Africa, 30th May 2015: 9).

1.1.2. A practical economic critique of trading wildlife

While the international trade in rhino horn is prohibited, with theorists on both sides of the debate only speculating on its outcomes in undermining wildlife trafficking, there are however around 5,000 endangered species of wild fauna where trade *has been permitted* under international regulations (CITES c.). In many cases – following Nadal and Aguayo's theoretical injunction (2014) – the legal trade has resulted in strong anthropocentric over-exploitation and, in some cases, with dire consequences to the future survival of the species concerned.

Here I will show that the prevailing argument that a regulated legal trade will undercut and reduce the illegal trafficking of endangered wildlife has been disproven for a number of high-profile mammals – namely all species of tigers for their bones (Mills, 2016), bears for their bile (Dutton et al., 2011) and, most significantly, African elephants for their ivory. These examples do not bode well for the plan to treat rhino similarly.

- African elephants

In *Chapter One* I mentioned that a partial lifting of the ban by CITES of the international trade in elephant ivory occurred in 1997. This came a decade after all international commercial transactions of elephant ivory had been banned (CITES CoP17 Prop. XX, 2016) when it was agreed at the CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP) in Lausanne in 1989 that African elephants had met the biological criteria in terms of an overall decline in population size for an uplisting to Appendix I, meaning commercial trade was no longer permitted (CITES Conf. 9,24).

However, during the CITES CoP 10 in Harare in 1997, Parties recognised that some southern African elephant populations were not declining and well-managed. Accordingly, a vote to transfer the populations of elephants in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe to Appendix II was taken and the necessary two-thirds majority effected to enforce a downlisting of elephants for those four countries. The downlisting, however, came with a special annotation attached, which meant that rather than permit an unrestricted trade in ivory from these countries, the CITES Secretariat allowed three of the countries[17] , to make a limited one-time sale of ivory to Japan totaling 50 tons (CITES Decision 10.1). The ivory was to be "derived from existing stocks gathered from elephants that have died as a result of natural causes or from problem-animal control" (CITES, 16th July 2008).

Following much of the debate within CITES at the time whether the trade in ivory from legal government stocks would lead to decreased poaching levels (CITES, 12th November 2002), the one-time sale was permitted primarily on a kind of socio-economical experimental basis. The experiment was conducted in order to see whether a legal trade would indeed undermine the illegal one and slow down the rate of poaching (Reeve, 2002: 77). The experiment was subject to a series of conditions laid down in CITES Decision 10.1 which included a reinvestment of trade revenues into elephant conservation as well as the implementation of an international system for monitoring the effects a legal trade would have on the poaching of elephants and trafficking of their tusks (Reeve, 2002: 77). The CITES Secretariat, therefore, established two long-term monitoring systems – Monitoring Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) and the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) – to oversee and measure the experiment's success rate (Reeve, 2002: 79 & 81). MIKE, a site-based system (initially from 45 sites in Africa and

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[17] South Africa was excluded for the time being.

15 in Asia), sought to measure and identify trends in elephant poaching in both Africa and Asia. Its aim was to assess the factors driving elephant killings and to determine whether such killings are linked to CITES decisions. It was also designed to track the degree of law enforcement effort at these sites (Reeve, 2002: 83-4). ETIS operated under the auspices of TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network formed under the IUCN. ETIS' goal was and is to collect global law enforcement data on elephant product seizures, corruption, domestic ivory markets, background economic variables and other factors (Reeve, 2002: 80-82).

However, eight African elephant range states[18] as well as India for the Asian elephant and a number of scientists and non-governmental organisations at the time raised serious concerns about MIKE's process of implementation and its effectiveness (Reeve, 2002: 79). Criticisms included methodology for site selection, the system's inability to demonstrate causality (that poaching was or was not caused by the reopening of the ivory trade), its considerable cost, and lack of involvement of range states in its development (CITES Inf. SC41.12, 1999). ETIS was dependent on prompt reporting of seizures but given the history of Party responses, it was likely any such reporting would be delayed (Reeve, 2002: 88). The objections were overridden by the Secretariat, most other Parties like Japan and the four southern African countries wanting to trade in ivory, and IUCN observers tasked with developing MIKE (Reeve, 2002: 79).

For MIKE, the effectiveness of the CITES experiment in 1997 would have been best determined by comparing levels of poaching pre and post ban (Lemieux & Clarke, 2009: 455). This process was measured by the number of carcasses found without tusks. Unfortunately, such data was not available for many African countries. Researchers were forced to pursue a number of alternative evaluative strategies such as economic modelling and extrapolation of the 1989 ban's likely effects compared to the post ban from 1997 onwards as well as analyses of ivory seizures, observational studies of ivory markets, detailed case studies of particular countries and longitudinal analyses of elephant population data (Lemieux & Clarke, 2009: 455).

As for ETIS, the effectiveness of the legal trade came from ivory seizure data collated to examine whether ivory markets have been reduced, but all the reports indicated that the international ivory market was still active after the one-time sale experiment and was even

[18] Burkina Faso, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Mali and Zambia

growing in certain countries (Dublin et al., 1995; CITES 2002; 2004 a; Williamson 2004; Milliken et al., 2007; Born Free Foundation 2007 in Lemieux & Clarke, 2009: 456). In another approach to studying ivory markets, researchers posed as buyers to collect data from markets on the number of outlets selling ivory, the number of carvers employed, the price of ivory and the number of pieces for sale. In brief, these surveys found that some ivory markets declined while others were growing (Stiles 2004 in Lemieux & Clarke, 2009: 456). Overall, Lemieux & Clarke found that attempts to assess the effectiveness of the CITES one-time sale "yielded few firm conclusions" (Lemieux & Clarke, 2009: 456). This, they concluded, was largely on the basis of theoretical arguments where some have concluded that the ban had been successful while others found that the ban was "detrimental to countries that depended on ivory sales to fund elephant conservation; that it had little effect on a poacher's decision to hunt; and that it successfully reduced ivory markets in some places but not everywhere" (Lemieux & Clarke, 2009: 456).

Yet in spite of the MIKE/ETIS research being inconclusive, the CITES Standing Committee, which oversees the implementation of CITES regulations and recommendations, gave the go-ahead in 2007 for another one-time sale (a term that had now become a misnomer). Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe with South Africa added, were authorised to sell a total of 108 tons of government-owned ivory, more than double the amount of ivory of the previous sale. Most significantly, the Standing Committee agreed to add China to Japan as an importing country (CITES, 16th July 2008).

While the first one-time sale was inconclusive in undermining the trafficking of ivory, the second proved to be an unmitigated disaster for elephants. In the years following the second "one-time sale" in ivory, the poaching levels of African elephants for their tusks spiked dramatically. According to the final results of the Great Elephant Census announced at the IUCN's World Congress in August 2016, Africa's elephant population had declined by 30% in just the seven years since the second one-time sale (Chase et al., 2016). An in-depth economic evaluation of the consequences of the second one-time sale by Solomon Hsiang and Nitin Sekar of the National Bureau of Economic Research in Cambridge Massachusetts (2016) found that this was no mere coincidence. The abrupt and singular nature of the 2008 legal sale allowed the evaluators to employ an event study design model (Kothari and Warner, 2006 in Hsiang & Sekar, 2016) to identify the causal effect on the global underground network of primary suppliers. This was the summary of their overall finding:

…the legal ivory sale corresponds with an abrupt 66% increase in illegal ivory production across two continents, and a possible ten-fold increase in its trend. An estimated 71% increase in ivory smuggling out of Africa corroborates this finding, while corresponding patterns are absent from natural mortality and alternative explanatory variables. These data suggest the widely documented recent increase in elephant poaching likely originated with the legal sale. More generally, these results suggest that changes to producer costs and/or consumer demand induced by legal sales can have larger effects than displacement of illegal production in some global black markets, implying that partial legalization of banned goods does not necessarily reduce black market activity (Hsiang & Sekar, 2016: Abstract).

Thus, far from improving the population status of African elephants, the impact of trading elephant products has in fact had the reverse effect. Hsiang and Sekar's results are consistent with the theory posed by Nadal and Aguayo (2014) in that the legal sale of ivory indeed triggers an increase in black market ivory production by increasing consumer demand and reducing the cost of supplying black market ivory, and these effects dominated any competitive displacement that occurred (Hsiang & Sekar, 2016: 1). Hsiang and Sekar's findings demonstrate that partial legalization of a banned goods can increase illegal production of the goods "because the existence of white markets may influence the nature of black markets" (Hsiang & Sekar, 2016: 30). What is more, their results "are likely to extend to markets structurally similar to ivory markets, such as those for products from other slow-growing, slow-breeding, or low-population density species like rhinoceroses and tigers. These species are difficult or impossible to produce in large quantities at low cost limiting the ability of legal supplies to displace illegal supplies" (Hsiang & Sekar, 2016: 30).

Under the Appendix II annotation of the African elephant populations in the four southern African countries, no further commercial ivory sales after 2008 were allowed to be proposed by the southern African countries until 2017 (CITES CoP14 Inf. 61). Any future proposal to allow commercial ivory sales has to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties (CoP) for approval. Without the approval of the CoP, commercial international trade in elephant ivory currently remains prohibited under CITES. If there is no consensus among the CITES Parties on any such proposal, the decision will be determined by a vote, with a two-thirds majority being required to accept any proposal (CITES, 21st July 2016).

1.2. Tyranny of the prized megafauna

In her book, *Policing International Trade in Endangered Species: The CITES Treaty and Compliance* (2002), Rosalind Reeve wrote:

> Elephants are the Convention's 'flagship' species[19] and are undeniably 'special', but thousands of other listed species receive comparatively next to no attention – or funds. And spending such disproportionate sum on the verification and monitoring of two species (although the Asian elephant is yet to benefit), without even attempting to raise equivalent funds for preventative anti-poaching measures, detracts from other crucial cross-cutting issues, such as improving the capacity for enforcement of CITES at national level (Reeve, 2002: 88).

Charismatic megafauna, certainly of the mammalian kind, dominate the agendas at all CITES meetings. Elephants and big cats make up the bulk of the proceedings, even though there is little effectiveness in spending an inordinate amount of time and funding in trying to protect them through a policy of trade. Little attention, as Reeve emphasises, is given to other species.

1.2.1. The silent, unseen, unknown and unvalued majority

This anthropocentric approach is evident in the species groupings under CITES 'protection'. Of the 669 faunal species listed under Appendix I, mammals predominate with 318 species (almost half), while there are only 155 bird species, 87 reptile species, 24 amphibians and only 16 species of fish. The Appendix II listing has a similar disparity – of the 4,952 species of fauna in the listing, amphibians and fish total only 137 and 107 species respectively (CITES c.).

Fishes are the least represented group of animals under CITES but by far make up the bulk of wild vertebrate fauna on the planet with almost 34,000 species (Fishbase, June 2018), which is more than the combined number of species of mammals, reptiles and amphibians. After the first meeting of CITES in 1976, no new marine fish taxa were added to the CITES Appendices for another 26 years, when Parties agreed in 2002 to act to ensure sustainable and legal

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[19] The elephant is represented in the official CITES logo.

international trade in seahorses and just two species of sharks. Since then progress has hardly continued and CITES remains largely indifferent (?) toward marine species (CITES c.). Furthermore, given that there are now a recorded 7,77-million species of all animals (invertebrates included) on Earth (Mora et al., 2011), CITES represents an inordinately small number of animals facing survival threats.

It is not only CITES that ignores most of this planet's animal life, but conservation in general. Lord Robert May, past-president of the UK's Royal Society stated in 2011:

> It is a remarkable testament to humanity's narcissism that we know the number of books in the US Library of Congress on 1 February 2011 was 22,194,656 but cannot tell you – to within an order-of-magnitude – how many distinct species of plants and animals we share our world with (Mora et al., 2011).

In 1758, Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus created and published the system still used to formally name and describe species. In the 260 years since, about 1.25 million species – roughly one-million on land and 250,000 in the oceans – have been described and entered into central databases (roughly 700,000 more are thought to have been described but have yet to reach the central databases). And yet, Mora et al's. census into marine and terrestrial life, published by *PLoS Biology* (2011), found that a staggering 86% of all species on land and 91% of those in the seas have yet to be described and catalogued (Mora et al., 2011).

The reason for this lies with the failure of an economic slant of weak anthropocentrism in cataloguing and describing wild animals, let alone valuing and utilising them. Way back at the dawn of the Anthropocene, Aldo Leopold, warned that "one basic weakness in a conservation system based wholly on economic motives is that most members of the land community have no economic value" (Leopold, 1949: 246). Economic models of weak anthropocentric sustainable development tend to draw similar lines. Hundreds of thousands of little or unknown species of amphibians, birds, insects and reptiles are prone to total annihilation mainly because there is no recognized direct economic value in them even though many species 'invisibly' benefit human life, such as for example pollination of food crops by insects.

In South Africa, charismatic megafauna like lions, leopards, cheetah, giraffe, buffalo and elephants are major drawcards for game ranchers, trophy hunters, and wildlife-watching

tourists, but the little-known rabbits, toads, bats and beetles have almost zero value in the model of sustainable development. Consequently, they are all but disregarded by national and international policy-makers, uncared for and ignored, often with dire consequences to their survival. According to the *2016 Mammal Red List of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland* compiled by the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), about 20% of the country's mammals are threatened (Child et al., 2016). Ten species are on the critically endangered list. These ten include: five species of golden mole, two species of bats, the riverine rabbit and the Ngoye red squirrel (Child et al., 2016). As the Endangered Wildlife Trust description of the list points out: "The general public will not be familiar with many of our threatened species as they have restricted ranges and are rarely seen" (Endangered Wildlife Trust, 2016). The only critically endangered mammal that most humans will be familiar with, is the one that is anthropocentrically valued, namely the black rhinoceros.

Reptiles in the region fare even worse. According to the SANBI *Atlas and Red List of the Reptiles of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland* (2014), the region comprises of exceptional reptile diversity with high levels of endemism (Bates et al., 2014: 1). Of the 421 indigenous reptile taxa, 45% occur nowhere else in the world. Yet reptiles have "largely been ignored in conservation plans" (Atlas and Red List of the Reptiles of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland, 2014: 1). Tellingly, only 13% of known taxa were previously evaluated according to the *IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria* (*Atlas and Red List of the Reptiles of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland*, 2014: 1). William R. Branch, the reptile ecologist writing in Chapter 3.3. (*Conservation Assessment*) of the *Atlas and Red List of the Reptiles*, poignantly gives his assessment:

> Reptile Conservation in South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland, and globally, has lagged behind that of all other terrestrial vertebrates…reptiles are rarely of direct economic use and usually have limited appeal to ecotourism ventures. They cannot, therefore, play much of a part in tourist enterprises that stimulate employment to uplift disadvantaged communities. As a consequence, reptiles remain largely neglected in a fragile economic climate and a conservation paradigm that views wildlife not for its intrinsic value, but in terms of its use to people (Branch, 2014: 22).

In all, Branch says over 17% of the reptile taxa in the region are of serious conservation concern (Branch, 2014: 35). Five species are listed 'Critically Endangered', ten as 'Endangered', twenty-one are 'Vulnerable' and thirty-seven species are classified as 'Near Threatened' (Branch, 2014: 29-30). This is mainly as a result of anthropogenic factors such as habitat loss, land degradation and fragmentation, pollution, human disturbance, harvesting, climate change and invasive aliens (Branch, 2014: 37-42). Branch, however, warns that conservation measures for reptiles, amphibians and butterflies are limited to little more than Red Lists. This is mainly due to the fact that conservation in the region, and indeed the world, is viewed exclusively "as a vehicle for sustainable development that targets the social upliftment of neighbouring communities" (Branch, 2014: 50). He asks: "What value is given small, cryptic and neglected lizards and snakes that have no direct value in terms of sustainable resources?" (Branch, 2014: 50) The answer lies in the dire conservation status (as listed above) of these highly endemic yet instrumentally unvalued species.

1.2.2.   Insectageddon

One of the least known and even less valued – both instrumentally and intrinsically – are one of the largest group of animals, namely insects. Acclaimed environmental writer, George Monbiot, sums up the problem of insects in this extract published in *The Guardian* in December 2017:

> Two naturalists from Flanders, Bart van Camp and Rollin Verlinde, asked if they could come to our tiny urban garden and set up a light trap. The results were a revelation. I had come to see the garden – despite our best efforts – as almost dead: butterflies and beetles are rare sights here. But when Bart and Rollin showed us the moths they had caught, I realised that what we see does not equate to what there is (Monbiot, 19th December 2017).

Monbiot writes that "our failure to apprehend the ecology of darkness limits our understanding of the living world."[20] When the naturalists opened the insect trap, Monbiot was astonished by the range of their catch. "There were pink and olive elephant hawkmoths; a pine hawkmoth, feathered and ashy; a buff arches, patterned and gilded like the back of a barn owl; flame moths

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[20] Later on in this dissertation I will discuss the systematic anthropocentric invisibility of these species in greater philosophical detail when I introduce Merleau-Ponty's concept of the visible and the invisible.

in polished brass; the yellow kites of swallow tail moths; common emeralds the colour of a northern sea, with streaks of foam; grey daggers; a pebble prominent; heart and darts; coronets; riband waves; willow beauties; an elder pearl; small magpie; double-striped pug; rosy tabby" (Monbiot, 19th December 2017).. For all these species, almost nobody e living in the country has ever even heard of their existence (Monbiot, 19th December 2017). Altogether, there were 217 moths of fifty species in the net that night. But twenty-five years ago, there would have been far more.

Just two months earlier Monbiot wrote an explosive article in *The Guardian*, where he writes as regular columnist. The article is poignantly entitled *Insectageddon* (20th October 2017). Here the environmental writer refers to a study published by amateur naturalists in the journal *PLoS ONE* (2017) which reveals that flying insects surveyed on nature reserves in Germany have declined by 76% in 27 years (Hallman et al., 2017). The cause of the dramatic collapse, of course, is the widespread use of pesticides on surrounding farmlands to boost crop production for human or human-based consumption like feeding livestock. Apart from a potential ecological 'Armageddon', the main problem is that this was brought to the world's attention by amateur naturalists. Monbiot bemoans that "long-term surveys of this kind simply do not exist", which reflects "distorted priorities in the funding of science…There is no end of grants for research on how to kill insects, but hardly any money for discovering what the impacts of this killing might be" (Monbiot, 20 October 2017). In other words, humans don't really care enough about the invisible or near-invisible lives of insects which make up almost two-thirds of life on earth even though they have crucial ecological and instrumental functions such as pollinating plants, including crops. What we thus see, is that many of these creatures are of important instrumental value to humans, but are not recognised as such, and thus not protected, meaning that our instrumental approach fails on its own terms due to our lack of knowledge and interest. At best, they are seen as pests to eradicate at all costs in favour of mass food production for humans, which paradoxically relies on those insect populations for maximum output.

Again, the problem points to the fact that most insects have almost zero known instrumental value, and because most insect species are not economically beneficial (at least not directly), their plight is at best ignored, at worst, they are eradicated completely. Most of the world's wild flowering plants (87.5%) are pollinated by insects and other animals (IPBES, 2016: 11). The preservation of wild plants is therefore an essential foundation for the conservation of wild

animals, and humans. Pollination is a fundamental ecosystem function that is essential to plant reproduction and the maintenance of terrestrial biodiversity. Around 40 per cent of all pollinators face extinction, according to a United Nations Intergovernmental Panel for Biodiversity Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Pollinator Assessment that spent two years evaluating information from more than 3,000 scientific papers, as well as indigenous and local knowledge from more than 60 locations around the world (IPBES, 2016: 11).

In terms of sustainable development, humans could do well to provide protection for some insect species in terms of cultivating crops for human consumption, such as bees. However, even though bees are estimated to pollinate approximately a third of the world's crops (Yang, 25th October 2006), very little consideration (at least at a government policy level) is yet afforded them. This is possibly because the most stable crops such as wheat, corn and rice, which make up the bulk of human crop consumption, do not require any form of animal pollination (Yang, 25th October 2006).

1.3. Plight of the prized megafauna

The instrumental value placed on prized megafauna presents its own set of problems, as I have already demonstrated with the trade in elephant ivory and rhino horn. Thus, even those species we most value anthropocentrically are themselves harmed by the conservation practices underpinned by weak anthropocentrism. But these problems extend to other practices of sustainable development:

1.3.1.   Trophy hunting

Trophy hunting, as shown in *Chapter One*, is lauded for its benefits to conservation mainly in bringing in revenue for ongoing conservation programs. Trophy hunting is defined as the practice of selectively hunting wildlife based on the size of an individual or its physical attributes, such as horn size. By definition, trophy hunting rewards the hunter primarily with a physical trophy or photographs, and the experience of the hunt. The practice is usually applied to large mammal species (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015). Under the policy of weak anthropocentric sustainable development, trophy hunting ought to generate measurable positive benefits for the preservation of wildlife as well as make a tangible financial contribution to society, particularly amongst local communities in the vicinity of hunting areas.

However, according to its *Position Statement on Trophy Hunting*, the Endangered Wildlife Trust has found that it is quite apparent that many trophy hunting operations in South Africa do not do this (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015).

Trophy hunting raises the following problems about the sustainability of the practice for which there are few credible answers:

The first is the notion of 'selective removal'. Trophy hunting by its very nature removes the larger, most impressive looking individuals, many of which may be prime breeders, or otherwise still play an active breeding role in the population. The fact the trophy hunters target male lions with luxuriant manes, means that they are reducing the effectiveness of the gene pool to produce dominant genes. These individuals would, naturally, be expected to make a disproportionately large contribution towards breeding and therefore are key to their species' survival. Only older individuals of some species that are past their breeding prime present legitimate trophy hunting targets, but identifying these individuals is difficult without an intimate knowledge of their life histories, while others may in fact not be considered the best trophies and are avoided (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015). Cases of mistaken identity are regular and common as highlighted by the frequency of such incidences in the media. For example, the globally publicized case of Cecil the lion in Zimbabwe (Cruise, 21st July 2015), and more recently of the lion called Skye in South Africa, (Cruise, 27th June 2018) are both examples of the main gene pool of a species taken out by supposed mistaken identities.

Then, second, there is the problem of 'population demography'. There is an absence of reliable data on which to base trophy hunting quotas for some species (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015). This leads to very real concerns about the potential negative and unsustainable impact that trophy hunting can have on populations (e.g. leopards and wild lions). This is particularly relevant in areas where conflict between wildlife and people leads to increased removal of so-called 'problem animals', for which the combined impacts of both trophy hunting and the removal of 'problem animals' are not taken into account when considering their impacts on a species or population (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015).

Third, trophy hunting can disrupt the wider, social population structure of a species, even impacting on protected areas where hunting may be forbidden. This ripple effect occurs when individuals either wander naturally into hunting areas or are lured unethically out of non-

hunting areas by practices such as baiting and calling. The social instability this causes leads to unforeseen mortalities brought on, for instance, by territorial disputes as new territory holders and borders need to be established and infanticide as new territory holders kill the cubs of other males in order to breed themselves (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015). This is particularly the case with lions as again evidenced by the killing of the lions Cecil (Cruise, 21st July 2015) and Skye (Cruise, 27th June 2018).

Breeding animals for trophy hunting can, fourth, cause overall ecological degradation. The high densities of wildlife on some wildlife ranches, coupled with an inability for them to roam beyond the ranches' borders, can easily result in ecological degradation (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015). This is similar to cattle ranching when high densities of animals are penned into small areas. This has the effect of destroying floral habitat that, in turn, affects the habitat of local fauna from insects and birds to reptiles and small mammals.

Fifth, trophy hunting can also include the breeding of exotic species. Hunting of exotic can have serious negative impacts on biodiversity in that they displace the endemic fauna and flora or spread diseases, often with catastrophic consequences. The practice also negates any so-called conservation advantages of hunting indigenous wildlife, if exotics have been imported into an area where they never naturally occurred (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015). Conservation of African wildlife can hardly be considered 'conservation' of Asian tigers are bred and hunted in South Africa.

Sixth, there is the problem of species persecution. The trophy hunting industry requires that wildlife meet hunters' demands and can, for instance, exacerbate conflict with threatened carnivores. Carnivores are a financial threat to breeders and so many, especially leopards are persecuted and removed from an area of high-profile breeding stocks. So, for antelope such as roan and sable that have a high trophy value, predation is an obvious risk that can lead to the persecution of large, apex predators like cheetahs, leopards and African wild dogs which may prey on them (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015).

Seventh, to ensure that trophy animals are not lost from their property, ranchers often fence their wildlife in. Fencing prevents animals (including non-target species such as pangolins, small antelope and tortoises) from roaming over larger areas and mix with neighbouring populations. This is detrimental as it increases the local impact on vegetation, stops animals

from responding appropriately in drought situations when food is scarce and increases the chances of inbreeding (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015).

Finally, while trophy hunters invest money in conservation, this is almost exclusively limited to conserving the species that they want to hunt (e.g. limited, if any, funding is made available for the conservation of frogs, snakes etc.), meaning that any further conservation gains are by default rather than design (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015).

Thus, far from being a useful conservation tool, trophy hunting is in fact detrimental to the species they target to conserve as well as being detrimental to non-trophy species and the overall biodiversity. Furthermore, trophy hunting, much like the livestock industry, encourages intensive breeding of wild animals in order to produce better and bigger trophies as I shall now discuss:

1.3.2. Intensive breeding

Prized game species are penalised on having enough space to roam freely. They are most often maintained in small fenced areas and are therefore not exposed to natural ecological fluctuations, and lose their natural engagement with their habitat, the meaning of which will become clear. The Taylor et al. study (2015) highlights the complications of intensive breeding as a direct result of applying a weak anthropocentric sustainable development model to conservation.

Intensive breeding generally involves high-value species and comprises of:

> …the confinement of wild species in small to medium sized camps or enclosures,
> where they are fenced in, protected from predators and provided with most of, or
> all their food, water and veterinary requirements. They are often held in isolation
> or with few other species, and most behavioural and ecological characteristics (e.g.
> breeding and home range areas) are unnatural and controlled by the rancher (Taylor
> et al., 2015: xii).

Far from being wild, animals in intensively-bred enclosures are not self-sustaining – they would quickly die without human intervention, and because they are not exposed to the

processes of natural selection, animals born in captivity may have a relatively low chance of survival if released back into the wild. This is something I discuss in depth in the closing two chapters of this dissertation when I discuss the importance of being wild. But that is not the purpose of breeding them. The real purpose is strictly economic. Intensification is designed to produce 'superior animals' to maximize profits for live game sales or trophy hunting but minus their wild abilities. Breeding is manipulated to select animals for desirable traits. For example, long horns in kudu and buffalo; large body size in lions and buffalo; or multiplication of a colour variants such as black impala, golden wildebeest or white lions. These artificially manipulated species can fetch staggering prices on the open market. For example, in February, 2016 a buffalo with oversized horns was sold for a record R176-million (Crowley, 15 February 2016) and in September the same year another was sold for R168-million (Sishuba, 26 September 2016).

The Taylor et al. survey found that thirty-eight percent of private wildlife ranches in South Africa bred high-value wildlife, comprising a total of fourteen different species. Twenty three percent of properties bred colour variants in camps, with a total of fifteen varieties (Taylor et al., 2015: 2). Colour variants have become considerably more common on private land over the last decade, as evidenced by the increasing numbers of animals sold live on auction or privately; a cursory scan of any hunting or wildlife ranching magazines highlights this (Cloete, 2014 in Taylor et al., 2015: 82). In *Chapter One* it was pointed out that population numbers of wildlife in South Africa had increased ten-fold, but as evident here, it is done at a cost of manipulating wild species to the point that they are more ranched, or farmed, than wild.

Taylor et al. suggest that the reasons for this increased prevalence are purely financial: economic pressures have led some wildlife ranchers to transition from normal game farming practices and focus more on breeding prized species or colour variants. They found that during the late 1990s and early 2000s economic pressures on the hunting industry caused by factors such as harsh exchange rates, increasing marketing costs, increasing competition and the global economic slowdown, resulted in stagnation of live auction prices of 'normal' game species (Taylor et al., 2015: 82). Wildlife ranchers whose main incomes were generated by the use of plains game experienced decreased profits because their costs were increasing but their income was not. To remain financially sustainable, some of the ranchers shifted their focus to intensive breeding. This increased the demand for so-called high-value species (Taylor et al., 2015: 82). These days, game breeders are placing wild animals in intensive breeding camps for selective

breeding and protecting them from predation and disease. This leads to further *domestication* and a *loss of wildness* in species.

The resulting increase in prevalence of intensively bred animals has raised a number of problems surrounding biodiversity conservation (Chardonnet & Mallon, 2015; PHASA, 2015 in Taylor et al., 2015: 83).

Taylor et al state that the biggest danger at the moment of the ongoing selective breeding is not the variants themselves, but rather the inbreeding factor to try and get more and more of the same colour, bigger or longer horns etc. (C. Harper, pers. comm. in Taylor et al, 2015: 84). If breeders are not being careful in their selection, and they are inbreeding, this will bring out a lot of the deleterious genes as well. The easiest and quickest way for ranchers to get more colours is to breed fathers and daughters. In the first generation, they will probably not have any problems, but that also depends on the quality of the initial stock. If the initial stock come from outbred stock, and if they are good quality animals, things will likely be fine to start with. But if a breeder buys poor quality animals (and this could happen because these animals are very expensive, so the breeder may not be able to afford the best quality, or that many), such as small animals, low fertility, skew horns, or immune problems, inbred traits might become fixed more quickly (Taylor et al., 2015: 84).

Taylor et al. conclude: "With the increasing intensification of wildlife ranching, more and more so-called wild animals are being moved in the direction of domestication. Arguably, the more intensively managed animals are, the less conservation value they have" (Taylor et al., 2015: 130).

Conservation based on weak anthropocentric approaches such as these, shows there is no regard for the fact that wildlife is an integral and interconnected combination of vital aspects in a broader ecological system. As is the case in South Africa, the successful preservation of numbers, especially in private game spaces, is achieved *at the expense* of the natural environment in that wild animals are bred and stocked on ranches that are more akin to domestic livestock farms where animals are manipulated and inbred to achieve financial gains for humans and, as such, have zero overall conservation value. This loss, unacknowledged within the currently dominant paradigms of wildlife "conservation", lies at the heart of my concern in this study. Anthropocentrism, strong or weak, thus does not serve as a legitimate

conservation approach to wildlife, ultimately because the wild is taken away from the life, as I will explain during the rest of this dissertation.

2. Philosophical flaws with weak anthropocentrism in wildlife conservation

2.1. The cataclysm of dualism

Anthropocentrism thus becomes the problem, rather than the indirect solution to wildlife conservation, as some suggest. However, before any alternative paradigms to anthropocentrism are to be discussed, it is important to first deconstruct the philosophical and historical notion of anthropocentrism. This is because it is necessary to understand the root cause behind the global predilection for wildlife conservation practices based on anthropocentrism and how it permeates throughout human thinking when it comes to wild animals. Once broken down and understood, only then can a thorough and rigorous construction of an alternative concept be undertaken. In the sub-sections that follow, I first explain Descartes' dualism between mind and body human and animal (Section 2.1.1. *Descartes' mind over body)*, then (in Section 2.1.2. *The violent epoch*) I look at the consequences Cartesian dualism held for the Western world's treatment of animals. Thereafter (Section 2.1.3. *Anthropocentrism toward other humans*), I show that the supposedly insuperable line between human and animal has always been permeable in the sense that some groups of people have historically been (and still sometimes are) treated like (other) animals.

2.1.1.　Descartes' mind over body

Until the 1970s, Western philosophy and science, tended to follow an anthropocentric approach to (other) animals. This preponderate anthropocentrism culminated in René Descartes' influential writings in the seventeenth century on the dualistic separation of mind over body. By eliminating all that is not indubitable, the philosopher basically embarked on a reductive ontology that ultimately separated the supposedly disembodied mind from the bodily and material sphere. In doing so, Descartes opened up a virtually unbridgeable gap, an abyss, between the human mind and the body. This reductive substantiation is evident in Descartes' classic passage in *Meditations*:

> What then did I formerly think I was? A man. But what is a man? Shall I say 'a rational animal'? No; for then I would have to inquire what an animal is, what rationality is, and in this way one question would lead me down the slope of other harder ones, and I wouldn't like to waste the little time and leisure that remains to me by using it to disentangle subtleties of this kind (Descartes, 1884: 17).

Thus, in order to save "the little time" remaining to him and avoiding the slippery slope that leads to too many difficult questions, Descartes rejects the enquiry into a thorough animal ontology. This includes a rejection of the living, breathing human body, which, of course, is also animal. Instead, he investigates what it means to be 'rational', which he equates with having an immaterial mind or soul. He reaches his conclusion through a thought experiment set out in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. The philosopher sets about rejecting everything that he does not consider indubitable, which includes the actual existence of everything as perceived through our fallible bodily senses, until he arrives at the epicenter – *dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum* – the existence of the mental act of the doubting doubter cannot logically be in doubt. This is the full presence of the rational mind, the lone, reduced, doubting entity that has been detached from the world of objects and stripped of the ebullience of corporeal life. The disembodied, autonomous mind of the Subject, a miraculous (divinely ordained) exception in substance to everything else existing materially, is the core of Descartes' reductionist thesis and has since become the kernel of modern philosophical and scientific methodology.

However, deconstructionist philosopher, Jacques Derrida, states that while Descartes tried to ignore (or erase) the significance of the animal part of being human, the entire ontology of separating the human cogito from all corporeity is still "essentially a thesis regarding the animal" (Derrida, 2008: 27). From this viewpoint, try as he may, Descartes could never recuse his cogito from the "animal bit" (the body). Descartes covertly admitted as much by maintaining a link between the two radically incompatible, incommensurable entities of soul and body, through the pineal gland at the base of the human brain. Besides, says Derrida, the foundational ontological question in philosophy posed by almost all the principal thinkers from Aristotle to Descartes, has always been the nature of being: "Who am I?" This is an egocentric question, which transmutes into an anthropocentric one since "who am I?" can essentially be transcribed as "what is it to-be-human?" However, as exclusive to humans as this question insists on being, it must always rely on a direct comparison with everything that is *not* human. This means the foundational ontological question always comes with a rider attached, namely:

"What makes humans *separate and different* from (other) animals?" Put differently: even though humans have always regarded themselves as an exception to, and superior to, the 'animal' world, they have always had to define their way of being through contrasting it somehow with animal existence.

This exclusively animal-related question, as Derrida argued, is both the overriding and binding thread in Western ontology, one that has been answered consistently and variously through the ages by almost every principal philosopher. And thus, one might say, precisely through its evocation then repression and exclusion from human consideration, the animal has ironically always played a central role in "Western man's" self-understanding. The supposedly unique mental properties of humans have been thoroughly analysed throughout history with such conclusions as: a doubting ego, possessing consciousness, the ability to speak, to reason, to respond, to mourn and bury the dead, invent television sets, fly airplanes etcetera ad nauseum. The bottom line is that Western metaphysics is wholly preoccupied with; firstly, neatly dividing all living beings into just two distinct and opposing camps: the human Subject into one and all (other) animals into the other; and secondly, by erecting an 'insuperable line' (Bentham, 1823. XV11.122) to keep them separate. With the line clearly demarcated and entrenched, philosophy has then spent an entire epoch trying to widen and deepen it, so much so that, as Martin Heidegger pointed out, an unsurpassable abyss now ostensibly separates the human from all the other life forms (Heidegger, 2004: 17).

And yet, despite this artificially enforced abyss, an ontology of the human subject remains inseparable from the animal. This is what Derrida called being 'blind to the supplement' (Derrida, 1976: 141) – a thing added to something else *in order to complete or enhance it* (Oxford English Dictionary). For Derrida, the addition of a 'thing' as supplement to another implies both are incomplete without each other. A supplement is an addition, so it is not intrinsic to the thing it adds to but, paradoxically, the thing being added to is incomplete without the addition. The logic of supplementation is extremely important in that it troubles the nature of opposites (binaries) in their traditional 'face-off' as fully separated, mutually independent, competing antagonists. Supplementation, while still recognising differences, attaches the opposing terms to one another, showing that every side of the binary is incomplete without the other. Thus, the logic of supplementation attacks and tears down the Cartesian concept of stand-alone sovereign subject-hood presiding over objects. In other words, the cogito as a thinking being is inextricably tied to the body, the human inextricably tied to the animal. The one cannot

be defined without the other as we see with all binaries like: big and small, old and young, black and white, male and female. These Derridean notions will take on new and fuller meaning in my discussion of Merleau-Ponty.

The problem with binaries in Western thinking, is they become hierarchical. While they may rely on each other for their definitions, one side always becomes inferior to the other. The 'supplement', by definition, is inferior to the 'thing-being-supplemented', the 'body' is inferior to the 'cogito', the 'object' is inferior to the 'Subject', the 'small letter' is inferior to the 'Capital letter', 'black' is inferior to 'white', 'women' are inferior to 'men', '(other) animals' inferior to 'humans'.

Descartes argued that humans were the opposite of and superior to (other) animals because of the latter's perceived absence of speech ('absence' is inferior to 'presence'). The absence of speech, according to Descartes, was an indication that all (other) animals lacked mental capacity, rational immaterial minds, or soul. In other words, they were unable to doubt and therefore had no consciousness of themselves, but were at the mercy of determining forces exerting pressure on them. Descartes appears to come to the conclusion that since all modes of rationalisation and consciousness depend upon the existence of thought, (other) animals are nothing but mindless machines or automata (Descartes, 1999: 19). This Cartesian perspective of non-human animals as 'mindless' is closely comparable to the modern international and national conservation policies that treat such animals as instrumental objects. Weak anthropocentrism favours treating wild animals as commercial resources – objective 'things' to be traded in order to satisfy the continuous availability of a ready-at-hand resource rather than to regard wild animals as sentient and valuable in their own right (intrinsically). In spite of decades of radical philosophical critiques against Descartes' foundational building blocks, they still wield enormous power in how Western institutions approach the world, the natural world in particular.

However, Descartes' insistence on the total separation of humans from (other) animals, according to Derrida, is bad philosophy: "To put all living things that aren't human into one category is, first of all a stupid gesture – theoretically ridiculous – and partakes in the very real violence that humans exercise toward animals" (Derrida, 2008: YouTube). It makes no logical sense to separate humans from all other animals just because one can cite various mental capacities that are seemingly unique to human animals. Obviously, we can admit there are

properties unique to humans, but to attach exclusivity to a specific set of human properties and to place them in opposition to the properties of the entire animal kingdom makes no sense. As American philosopher, David Abram (who we will be seeing more of later on in this dissertation), expostulates, we humans are mightily special. Abram highlights our opposable thumbs, our ability to balance and ambulate on our hind legs, our capacity for reflection, and our slyness with tools and ever-more-complex technologies. But then he points out that the hawk is able to fly without any of the contrivances that we depend upon, and the apple tree is able to squeeze apples directly out of its limbs, some whales can dive to a depth of six thousand feet, holding their breath for over ninety minutes, and monarch butterflies undertake a massive migration. There are many more attributes of (other) animals that are astonishing, 'mightily special', too. Abram asks: "Are we humans unique? Sure we are. But so is everyone else around here" (Abram, *On Being Human in a More-Than-Human-World*). Derrida concurs, and adds that putting humans into a single category and all other animals into a separate single category leads to a very violent relationship between the two groups:

> There are considerable differences between different types of animals. There is no reason one should group into one and the same category monkeys, bees, snakes, dogs, horses, anthropods and microbes. These are radically different organisms of life, and to say 'animal' and put them all into one category – both the monkey and the ant – is a very violent gesture (Derrida, 2008: YouTube).

The violence comes as a result of the complete separation of humans in one category and all (other) animals in another, in accordance with the notion that only humans are regarded as having moral standing. Given that (other) animals are not afforded any moral value opens the door to untold violence toward them, a violence that was legitimized by Descartes.

2.1.2. The violent epoch

Directly following Descartes, an epoch of violent (strong) anthropocentrism prevailed (Derrida, 2008: 25). This separation between the human and the (other) animal coincided with Western modernity . From here the epoch progressed rapidly and exponentially with the rise of industrialisation and human population growth during the industrial age in the mid-

nineteenth century when wild animals were wantonly decimated by rapidly expanding and colonizing Western populations of humans without much thought given to their future survival.

A case in point was the East African ivory trade that took place at the exact point industrialisation came of age, which is between 1840 and 1890 (Spinage, 1973). Even though the trade in ivory in Africa was an ancient one in that it figures prominently in the earliest reference to trading activities on the East African Coast (Beachey, 1967: 269-290), in the nineteenth century an increased demand for the commodity in America and Europe, which coincided with the "opening up" of East Africa by Arab traders and European explorers, led to a sudden collapse of the ivory supply from over-exploitation by the turn of the century. During the nineteenth century ivory exceeded all other commodities in trade value — even slaves (Spinage, 1973). The uses of ivory were wide and novel, from piano keys and knife handles to chopsticks and hairpins. Essentially, ivory played the same versatile role in the nineteenth century as plastics do in the twenty-first – although ivory was a far more expensive material.

After the rampant over-exploitation of the colonial era, and certainly from the dawn of the Anthropocene era after 1945, human conservation policies, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, adopted a weaker anthropocentric slant. Rather than just unlimited exploitation of wild animals and (other) raw materials, humans began to develop ways of recycling wildlife for long-term efficiency and output. The violence against non-human animals perpetrated during the modern era, however, did not abate in the post-modern one. If anything, it got worse, more intense and more sophisticated:

> This has occurred by means of farming and regimentalisation at a demographic level unknown in the past, by means of genetic experimentation, the industrialisation of what can be called the production for consumption of animal meat, artificial insemination on a massive scale, more and more audacious manipulations of the genome, the reduction of the animal not only to production and overactive reproduction (hormones, genetic crossbreeding, cloning etc.) of meat for consumption, but also all sorts of other end products, and all that in the service of a certain being and the putative well-being of man (Derrida, 2008: 25).

To emphasise his point, Derrida compares the culminating violence on animals with the worst forms of inter-human violence, with specific mention of the Nazi Holocaust (Derrida, 2008:

26). Derrida is by no means the first and only philosopher to make this comparison. Heidegger, himself a card-carrying member of the Nazi Party, once alluded to a comparison of the meat industry with the Holocaust (Heidegger, 1994: 52). It is no coincidence that philosophers make these comparisons, and it is an important one. Assistant-Professor of Philosophy at California State University, Matthew Calarco states in his book *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (2008) that the comparison with the Nazi Holocaust obliges us "to consider precisely the anthropocentric value hierarchy that places human life always and everywhere in a higher rank over animal life" (Calarco, 2008: 110).

Acclaimed novelists such as J.M. Coetzee are likewise not shy to bring in the comparison of the Nazis and the Holocaust with our current treatment of animals, stating at first that it was the Chicago stockyards that showed the way for the mass slaughter of (other) animals. This was also where the Nazis took note later applying the same process in the Jewish death camps (Coetzee, 2003: 110). Derrida too makes the comparison:

> As if, for example, instead of throwing people into ovens or gas chambers (let's say Nazi) doctors and geneticists had decided to organize the overpopulation and overgeneration of Jews, gypsies, and homosexuals by means of artificial insemination so that, being more numerous and better fed, they could be destined in always increasing numbers for the same hell, that for the imposition of genetic experimentation or extermination by gas or by fire. In the same abattoirs (Derrida, 2008: 26).

It is an uncomfortably apt comparison in that it drives home how Cartesian anthropocentrism has manifested itself so violently in our modern society. In the Anthropocene, humans are committing genocide against wild animals as evidenced by the fact we have lost 60% of the world's vertebrate population between 1970 and 2014 (WWF, 2018: 7). Yet, genocide is an act that traditionally seeks to extinguish a race or group for good, but under the rubric of weak anthropocentrism, wildlife ranchers are deliberately increasing the numbers of wild animals so that we may commit to wholesale slaughter continuously, and in ways fast becoming similar to the factory-farming of domestic livestock. This is not about extermination of some selected species, but rotational and continual propagation of an animal Holocaust.

The association with the Nazi Holocaust brings home with clarity that the vast bulk of the < 7-billion global human population eat (other) animals without any remorse while human hunters, as one example of hundreds of thousands, use the by-products (in the form of heads, horns and pelts) to decorate the walls and floors of their houses. J.M. Coetzee conjures a macabre twist with such a comparison in *Elizabeth Costello*:

> It is as if I were to visit friends, and to make some polite remark about the lamp in their living room, and they were to say "Yes, it's nice, isn't it? Polish-Jewish skin it's made of, we find that's best, the skins of young Polish-Jewish virgins." And then I go to the bathroom and the soap wrapper says, 'Treblinka - 100% human sterate' (Coetzee, 2003: 115).

Coetzee's powerful statement here is that humans don't flinch for a second knowing that the lampshade is made from the skin of a piglet, or that the rug in the lounge is the skin of a zebra, yet if we exchange the decoration of (other) animal skins with humans we experience a revulsion at the horror, and that's just at the thought of it. This then is the central pillar of anthropocentrism – weak or strong. Anthropocentrism lacks a moral reaction to the violence toward (other) animals.

It is clear, then, that Descartes' entrenched hierarchical dualism, which is overtly prevalent in Western thought, remains the theoretical bedrock of anthropocentrism that, in turn, reflects in the indiscriminate and unlimited violence meted out towards all (other) animals. Worse, under the concept of weak anthropocentrism this violence is perpetuated under the notion of maintaining or increasing wild animal numbers to be slaughtered, traded or exploited ad infinitum.

2.1.3. Anthropocentrism toward other humans

Anthropocentric concerns for wild spaces, game parks and game farms are often regarded as elitist. The singling out of sustainable development as a solution to human inequality becomes a problem when the impoverished lives of some humans are left the same or are made worse through a policy of weak anthropocentrism. One common ground between those concerned with social inequality and the rights of non-human species can be the "critique of instrumentalism and relation between the domination of humans over animals — as an integral

part of the domination of nature in general — and the domination of humans over one another" (Kopnina, 2015: 7).

The concept of anthropocentrism has never placed all humans on an equal footing, but "typically it functions to include only a select subset of human beings in the sphere of humanity proper'' (Calarco in Crist & Kopnina, 2014: 393), while relegating the rest to the sphere of 'the animal' where moral consideration does not arise. The privileging of 'the human' has not only tracked along species-inclusive lines (Calarco in Crist & Kopnina, 2014: 393). In South Africa, conquests, colonialism, Apartheid and, as we saw earlier, modern displacements of agricultural communities by private wildlife ranchers are a straightforward extension of this anthropocentric logic – categories of 'subhuman', 'savage', 'primitive', 'black', 'Hottentot', 'coloured' and even 'labourers' have historically functioned to excise certain groups from full humanity and lump them into the sphere of (animal) otherness toward which violence and domination can be exercised (Crist & Kopnina, 2014: 393). In a similar way, the terms 'underdeveloped' or 'developing' so prominent in sustainable development terminology "may be seen to imply that the poor, vulnerable, marginal people – and in fact entire nations – need to emulate the higher stages of development exemplified by the superior sectors of the population and entire nations" (Kopnina, 2015: 7). One could argue that anthropocentrism, is the enemy of both human and wildlife interests. Anthropocentrism, therefore, destroys social and cultural diversity as well as biological diversity (Kopnina, 2015: 7), and hierarchises different ways of living among humans.

As I have started to discuss, although (the cost of) wildlife conservation has consistently been justified by the South African government post-apartheid with reference to poverty reduction and the "development of opportunities for economic and social benefit" (Morewa), in practice the current paradigm seldom yields the promises made in this regard. For example, the Endangered Wildlife Trust *Position Statement on Trophy Hunting* states that trophy hunting is often not as economically beneficial to human society as it claims to be. (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015) While some jobs are created within the trophy hunting industry, employment opportunities remain limited and the contribution of trophy hunting to job creation is often overstated – especially by government as shown in *Chapter One*. These are also often not skilled jobs, are not regulated and do not offer career paths or skills development (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015).

In South Africa, not many local communities can claim to benefit from trophy hunting on private ranches, as little of the profits generated from hunts are fed back into these communities. Besides, issues around community benefits and land ownership targets are not being adequately addressed through the current system. Key issues include inadequate legislation to enforce community involvement as well as limited business knowledge within communities to negotiate terms with private operators and run hunting operations (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015). Finally, not all trophy hunting operations provide their workers with even the basic working conditions as required under South African law (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015).

- Private game farms in the Karoo

A study by Brandt and Spierenburg entitled *Game Fences in the Karoo: Reconfiguring Spatial and Social Relations* (2014) found that in the Eastern Cape, more than 90% of mainly white-owned commercial farmers and private landowners had converted from traditional livestock farming to game hunting farms. However, Brandt and Spierenburg found that converting livestock farms to hunting operations in the Karoo results in spatial rearrangements in the countryside as well as negative relationships between white landowners and black and coloured workers (Brandt & Spierenburg, 2014: 222). To create the image of wilderness, internal fencing is removed, and high, almost impenetrable fences are erected on the outside perimeters. This process results in a substantial increase in the price of land per hectare, which in turn, hampers land reform (Brandt & Spierenburg, 2014: 222). While game farmers and government claim that the conversions benefit rural populations through job creation and skills development opportunities, in reality, according to Brandt and Spierenburg, the process "obscures the issue of labour relations on farms as well as tenure security for farm dwellers" (Brandt & Spierenburg, 2014: 222). Their research on hunting farms shows that conversions to hunting farms in fact reduces the demand for labour and thus reinforces asymmetric power relations on the farms that were evident since the frontier wars of the nineteenth century and reached a peak during the Apartheid era (Brandt & Spierenburg, 2014: 222).

The Brandt and Spierenburg study found that hunting operations take place within a network that consists of landowners, hunting outfitters and professional hunters each supporting the others' business (Brandt & Spierenburg, 2014: 227). These networks "further entrench continued processes of displacement of farm dwellers off farms into informal settlements and

townships" (Brandt & Spierenburg, 2014: 227). On the Karoo hunting farms, only a small core of permanent, mostly male workers live on the farm to do general farm work as well as hunting-related work like tracking, skinning and preparing the hunted animal for taxidermy. The rest have been displaced (Brandt & Spierenburg, 2014: 231). These labour arrangements contribute to changing labour relations and the disconnection of work and home on the farm. According to the study, the farm is no longer a home to families of permanent farm workers and "the boundaries of private property have effectively been solidified" Brandt & Spierenburg, 2014: 231).

Also, Brandt and Spierenburg discovered that "hunting tips from foreigners, presented by farmers as one of the 'benefits' of trophy hunting, are often arbitrarily distributed by farmers only as periodical rewards" rather than "structural earnings" (Brandt & Spierenburg, 2014: 231). Thus, Brandt and Spierenburg's study concluded:

> Contrary to farmers' claims, the hunting farms in the Karoo require less labour. The spatial reorganisation of the farms, reducing what little access farm workers and dwellers had to land on farms for land-based livelihood strategies, the increased outsourcing of tasks and the employment of immigrant labours have changed labour relations and interdependencies on the farms (Brandt & Spierenburg, 2014: 234).

Furthermore, in spite of some positive economic benefits of trophy hunting as described in *Chapter One*, there are a number of other concerns related to the distribution of profits. In many instances, revenue stays overseas where the transaction takes place, usually with agents, expo marketers or hunting outfitters. The revenue more often does not feed through to the country in which an animal is trophy-hunted (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015). Ultimately, the majority of income goes to the professional hunter, with relatively little trickle-down to the community and conservation (Endangered Wildlife Trust, May 2015).

Thus, far from providing meaningful benefits for both the conservation of wildlife and human livelihoods, the exclusively instrumental valuation of wildlife can in fact accelerate the demise of wild animals as well as exacerbating poverty levels amongst the majority of so-called human benefactors . These problems, centred primarily on an anthropocentric construct, are well-recognised, especially by those critics who champion a non-instrumental-valued ideal. The

dominant voice of such an ideal are animal rights activists who propose moral consideration of other animals as a viable alternative to anthropocentrism.

2.2. Exclusionary logic in moral consideration and animal rights practices

In this section, I briefly turn to the common alternative notion against anthropocentrism, namely moral consideration and the rights of (other) animals. Due to a lack of space, I will focus only on Peter Singer's alternative position. I will show that there are a number of problems associated with this alternative approach, the first (*The Consideranda Club*) being that it still draws an insuperable line between those also morally and those merely instrumentally considered, only this time the line is drawn between higher-order more 'sentient' mammals and the rest of life. At face value, it would seem that the obvious counter-argument facing the dominant paradigm toward (other) animals, as discussed above, are the theories posited by animal rights philosophers. Renowned animal and environmental ethicists like Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Clare Palmer, J. Baird Callicott, Arne Naess, Richard Sylvan (Routley), Val Plumwood (Routley), Holmes Rolston III, James E. Lovelock and many others have, since the emergence of formal animal and environmental philosophical enquiry in the early 1970s, begun to question the pervading anthropocentric dominance in Western traditional thought (Bryan Norton being the notable exception)[21], specifically "its elevation of humanity high above the rest of nature, and its celebration of human reason" (Callicott & Palmer, 2005: Vol 1, xxxv). Editors J. Baird Callicott and Clare Palmer have claimed in the general introduction to their voluminous five-volume work entitled *Environmental Philosophy: Critical Concepts* (2005) that "in the finest tradition of Western Philosophy" most environmental philosophers have taken "a non-anthropocentric turn" (Callicott & Palmer, 2005: Vol 1, xxxvi). This statement is ostensibly true. True in that the *intention* of these philosophers is non-anthropocentric but in the main they remain inextricably tied to the anthropocentric discourse they attempt to confront.

In the remaining two sub-sections (*Zoocentrism* and *Animal rights versus human rights*) I explore how one version of this alternative serves to alienate many human animals too. I will demonstrate that often animal rights approaches are accused of zoo-centrism and alienate some

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[21] Recall in *Chapter One* that Norton favours a weak anthropocentric approach to the conservation and protection of (other) animals.

human groups for the benefit of protecting animals. In short, many animal rights theories serve to exclude humans and most animals from their ethic.

2.2.1. The Consideranda Club

Broadly, animal rights theorists insist that all (sentient) animals ought to enjoy similar moral value as humans. In the 1970s Peter Singer called for a liberation movement that demands an expansion of moral horizons and claims that unless "we wish to avoid being numbered amongst the oppressors, we must be prepared to re-think our most fundamental attitudes" (Singer, 2005: 75). That re-thinking means a mental switch to consider the point of view of the disadvantaged belonging to a "very large group of beings, members of a species other than our own – or, as we popularly though misleadingly call them, animals" (Singer, 2005: 75-76). Singer wanted to find something that circumvents such reductionist hierarchical distinctions. His intended deferment from the dominant anthropocentric paradigm comes in the form of his basic principle of equality.

Equality is not about beings of different species enjoying the same rights, like the right to vote, but whether all living beings enjoy equal *moral consideration* (Singer, 2005: 77). Singer wanted to challenge the dominant anthropocentric attitude of society, not by ignoring actual differences between races, sexes, individuals and (other) animals, but by accepting an equal consideration for all living beings. Equality, says Singer, "is a moral ideal, not a simple assertion of fact" (Singer, 2005: 79). We humans tend to eschew the claim that equality among our own species is based on intelligence, moral capacity, physical strength, or similar matters of fact, otherwise why does a plumber have the same moral consideration as a philosophy professor? Thus, the principle of equality is not an (f)actual equality but a prescription of how we ought to treat others (Singer, 2005: 79). By using this sort of principle, we can see how easy it is to make a switch to morally consider (other) animals as well as humans of an 'other' nature.

Singer is a utilitarian who broadly follows Jeremy Bentham's straightforward approach to the sort of criteria that must be met to qualify for 'subjectivity'. In light of all that has been discussed so far in this chapter, Bentham's oft quoted line, benefits being presented here in its unabridged version:

The day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been witholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may one day come to be recognised that the number of legs, the villosity [sic] of the skin, or the termination of the ossacrum, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, a week or even a month, old. But suppose they are otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer? (Bentham, 1823. XV11.122).

Bentham was the first to insist that uniquely human traits were not the correct criteria for equal moral consideration. For him, the only criterion that bridges the 'insuperable line' between humanity and (other) animals are "those sovereign masters of pleasure and pain" (Bentham, 1823). As long as a being can suffer and (by default) also can experience pleasure, ethical consideration must be afforded it. This effectively means that any being, as long as it has feelings, is to be considered equally to human beings with respect to their experiences (of pleasure and pain). A being such as a plant that is not governed by sentience cannot be considered, neither perhaps coral polyps, mussels and amoebas but an animal like a cow or a buffalo that has a central nervous system can. Singer follows Bentham's ideal that the utility principle must include non-human animals too – or at least all those that are deemed sentient (Singer, 2005: 80).

Yet, the fundamental problem is that by asking whether animals can suffer, the whole enquiry tends to fall into a similar dualist/reductionist trap where philosophers are simply shifting the insuperable line to include some animals (elephants, dolphins, lions, cows, chickens, pigs) but not *most* animals (sharks, crocodiles, frogs, insects and all invertebrates). The difficulty with asking whether animals can suffer, is still arbitrarily marking the boundary, this time at wherever the level of sentience is determined. This sends philosophers toward a ceaseless debate as to the nature, extent, and moral weight of what precisely suffering entails. As Calarco emphasises, this has "led to an entire field of inquiry focused on determining whether animals can suffer and to what extent this can be confirmed empirically [do elephants suffer more than

rats?], and what the normative and legal implications of these empirical findings are" (Calarco, 2008: 119). Theories on sentience simply lure animal-rights theorists to redraw the same insuperable line, only now it is between those included and those excluded from what is morally considered with a small number of elect animal species falling on the right side of moral consideration.

Moral consideration, conceived of in this way, is anthropocentric in that it is governed entirely by human sentiment at the apex of the moral echelon. Humans in this framework enjoy the highest form of moral consideration, since we think we have the greatest capacity for suffering, while the rest of animal life is ranked below humans and toward ever decreasing levels of moral value. This is determined entirely by the perceived degree of sentience dictated solely by humans at the top. Charismatic megafauna, or 'higher-order' mammals, like elephants, lions, whales, chimpanzees, tigers, dolphins and panda bears are awarded more ethical consideration than 'lower-order' sharks, rats, snakes, spiders and bats. It is little wonder that the World Wildlife Fund has a panda as its logo. The organization wouldn't generate much human empathy, let alone funding, if they had a mosquito or snake as their logo. These reasons remain heavily anthropocentric, since panda bears are closer to our own sense of sentience than mosquitoes and snakes.

This is perhaps the biggest pitfall of all with the Benthamite question. The capability to suffer, and the degree of human-like suffering, now becomes the means to construct another version of the anthropocentric hierarchy. Thomas H. Birch who compiled a thought-provoking essay entitled *Moral Considerability and Universal Consideration* (1993), states that the problem with this line of enquiry is that it is forever seeking to draw the line between those 'inside' and those 'outside' the scope of moral concern (Birch, 1993: 315). Therefore, non-members, those whose suffering cannot be considered empirically or ontologically, suffer the atrocities meted out by those within the 'Club of Consideranda' (Birch, 1993). It just so happens that, because of our anthropomorphic view of sentience and physicality, the vast majority of animal life finds themselves forever entrapped on the outside of the club.

2.2.2.   Zoocentrism

The animal rights movement has come under fire from environmental philosophers who regard right theorists, like Singer, as 'zoocentric' (Callicott & Palmer, 2005: Vol 1, ii). The main

accusation against zoocentrism from many principal environmental philosophers such as Baird Calicott, Holmes Rolston III and others (Callicott & Palmer, 2005) as well as philosophical 'movements' such as Deep Ecology, Bio- and Eco-centrism is that zoocentrism is a refusal to look beyond the reduced parameters of an individual's suffering instead of at the effects of the natural environment or biosphere as a whole.

This can be clearly illustrated with the South African example of wildlife ranching. The same problem as with instrumental valuations manifests itself with intrinsic valuations in that both remain firmly anthropocentric. An analysis in 2001 by Castley et al. of a number of private wildlife operations in the arid and semi-arid regions of South Africa "revealed an alarming degree of undesirable large mammal introductions" (Castley et al., 2001: 344). The extent of non-native species in private wildlife operations ranged between 10 and 57%, with two-thirds of all operations surveyed having 25% or more non-native species present. These species range from fallow deer to Asian tigers. Such introductions intended to improve the economic viability of these operations, instead showed that the comprehensive and long-term ecological costs outweighed the immediate economic benefits (Castley et al., 2001: 344). Castley et al. recorded that the loss of sensitive species, such as cryptic antelope species like oribi and duiker, as a result of competitive exclusion and associated effects ultimately diminished the biodiversity of the landscape.

This is a clear case of some human valued animals (introduced species) destroying the lives of many of the native species. Concerned environmentalists, in this situation, would not hesitate to call for the removal, which often means culling, of introduced or invasive animals in order to protect the overall biodiversity of the area. Zoocentric animal rightists, however, feel very differently as the following example of Table Mountain tahr controversy highlights:

- Table Mountain's (ex) tahrs

A few years ago, a decision was made to cull the Himalayan tahrs that had been living wild on the slopes of Table Mountain since the 1930s when a few escaped from the zoo at the University of Cape Town.[22] The decision was made by environmentalists primarily because,

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[22] I flagged this example in my Masters thesis.

as alien ungulates, they were displacing the indigenous wild antelope (klipspringers) through the overgrazing of fynbos, an endemic biome that also supported a list of smaller, endemic wild animals like the extremely rare and localised Table Mountain ghost frog. The sound decision to sacrifice a few tahrs for the greater ecological good, however, caused a furore among the animal rights activists in Cape Town. The animal rights activists believed that shooting tahrs and selling off their carcasses for human consumption was cruel and that the individual right to life of the tahrs had to be respected above all else. In the end the tahrs were killed because the lives of endemic animals were correctly deemed more vital to the health of the entire natural biodiversity of Table Mountain than the moral consideration of a few tahrs (Cruise, 2015: 116-117).

The problem of invasive species and the integrity of the indigenous environment is not the only problem with an animal rights approach. The movement often comes into conflict with human rights concerns.

2.2.3. Animal rights versus human rights

Another major problem with the movement for animal rights, is that the movement competes with other political identities, especially human-related ones, like the rights of the underprivileged, women and minority groups. Particularly within the social fabric of a country like South Africa, animal rights issues are expected to invariably take a back seat to these other 'more pressing' political identities.

Paradoxically, it is among socially and politically progressive thinkers that it is the greatest challenge for the animal rights movement to gain a centre stage (Cruise, 2015: 134). Many progressive thinkers and legislators, regard animal rights as an elitist luxury, or simply an inconsequential fringe group, while the country's high human unemployment, rampant poverty and human suffering are seen as far more urgent and important issues. The problem is animal rights theory does not include any human benefits in their manifestoes and because of this they are ranked extremely low in the listings of other political movements and policies. This is indicated in the predicted budget expenditures of the South African National Treasury for the period 2018-2019: Social Development, Economic and Community Development, Learning and Culture, and Health are to receive R259,4-billion, R200,1-billion, R196,3-billion, R351,1-billion, and R205,4-billion respectively while the Environment gets a paltry R7,1-billion

(National Treasury of the Republic of South Africa, 2018). The latter is one of the smallest beneficiaries of the national expenditure budget. In fact, the South African National Parks (SANParks) receives a miniscule annual grant from government to carry out its mandate. This is not nearly sufficient to cover the management costs. The organisation is forced to utilise its own revenue derived from commercial activities, such as conservation fees and accommodation to subsidise the shortfall (SANParks, 2018: 198).

Animal rights ideas have also permeated somewhat into national conservation management policies. This was especially the case during Apartheid but is still widely evident today. This is the notion of 'fortress conservation' (Büscher, 2015: 1, Jones, 2016). The central theme of fortress conservation thinking is that humans do not have a place in nature, that they threaten ecosystems and species, and hence that conservation areas must be 'defended' against humans (read: 'local communities'), if necessary, by force and coercion (Büscher, 2015: 2; Jones, 2016). In South Africa, it was clearly apparent prior to 1994 that many "people and communities in and around protected areas are marginalised or excluded from nature"[23] (Kaminsky, 2010).

The idea and practice of fortress conservation seems to have lost little of its appeal in current times. It is now viewed as 'class' or 'economic' instead of 'race' based. Critical researchers find that fortress thinking persists in the governance of protected areas in South Africa (Harris 2014; Kepe 2014 in Büscher, 2015: 2). The Kruger National Park in South Africa is a case in point because it is one of the most iconic parks globally, long regarded as a classic conservation fortress (Carruthers 1995 in Büscher, 2015: 2). This was especially apparent during Apartheid years when people were moved from the land to make way for the National Park. In 1998, almost forty land claims were lodged on land within the Kruger National Park (Wray & Strauss) but the decision was taken by government not to restore the land rights of the claimants (Government Communication and Information System of the Republic of South Africa, 2009). Despite this, there have been some attempts by government to break through the fortress, but much of the limited progress has recently come undone by the massive 'green militarization' triggered in response to rampant rhino poaching in the Kruger National Park (Lunstrum 2014 in Büscher, 2015: 2). The result is a return of 'Fortress Kruger', a term actually used by those involved in protecting KNP from poaching incursions (interview, Kruger National Park staff officer, 6 February 2014, Skukuza, South Africa in Büscher, 2015: 2).

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23 'Nature' here implies the natural environment.

To make matters worse, the elitist cliques in promoting animal rights and conservation practices before human needs has led some activists to adopt regressive, and occasionally, militaristic strategies and actions that, firstly, are contrary to social reform and, secondly, are unlikely to win the intended empathy from the general human population. Organizations like Sea Shepherd, for example, have been saddled with militaristic and violent innuendo, labelled as 'eco-terrorists' or 'eco-fascists' because of the violence meted out toward those hunting whales and dolphins. This kind of war-like action and rhetoric is easily associated with militaristic or nationalistic policies of vicious inter-human acts of violence. War and terrorism are common associations one makes with this kind of rhetoric. As a result, people tend to associate such attitudes with actual war and often take a dim view of the perpetrators as their behaviour compares to violent oppression. After the hunting of Cecil the Lion, the hunter, Walter Palmer, was hounded by animal rights activists who verbally abused, not just the hunter himself but his family and even clients who still attended his dental practice after the case went viral in the media and social media (BBC News, 29th July 2015). Militaristic metaphors by animal rights activists have connotations of acts of war, violence and, at worst, genocide. Consequently, it may be construed, by those on the outside, that conservationists and the animal rights movement are violent and racist and are subliminally regarded with a suspicion that can manifest in open derision (Cruise, 2015: 134-137). I will demonstrate in the final chapters how an eco-phenomenological approach will potentially assist animal rights movements in their use of language and counter the tension between human and animal rights. This will be achieved by shifting the focus away from a zoocentric approach to something broader, namely something that considers the interdependence of all life forms as an interconnected web rather than binaries that constantly face off and vie with each other for dominance.

3. Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that what lies at the heart of our current crises regarding the Sixth Extinction of wild animals is predominantly the predisposition toward anthropocentrism.

This prevailing anthropocentrism is demonstrated theoretically both in deep-rooted human ontological and ethical pursuits. This highlights the widespread contagion of Cartesian dualism, either in terms of the human rational mind versus the corporeal body, or the exclusion of most animals over the minority who display anthropomorphic moral agency or physicality

with the Club of Consideranda. This tendency or bias in Western thought, as criticized in this chapter, is the bedrock of a manifestation of global and national anthropocentric policies in attempting, and failing, to preserve the planet's species from complete annihilation. At the same time, it also forms the bedrock of the colonial period's ruthless exploitation of nature. The fact that anthropocentrism underlies both unlimited exploitation of nature and our dominant paradigm for trying to limit that exploitation, points to a pertinent contradiction. Furthermore, anthropocentrism is not just a pretext for our violence and extirpation of (other) animals but serves as a means for human exclusion and dominance too. It is obvious then, that the key to preventing further decline of wild species, and to prevent further human-on-human subjugation is to fully dismantle anthropocentrism, no matter strong or weak, in our pervading attitudes. A fully non-anthropocentric paradigm that can be applied is therefore required if we are to have any hope of saving wild species and marginalised human communities.

In the next chapter, I will introduce the conceptual basis for the possibility of such a paradigm – phenomenology.

CHAPTER THREE: THE PROSPECT OF PHENOMENOLOGY AS A NON-ANTHROPOCENTRIC PARADIGM

> Back to the things themselves!
>
> (Husserl, 2001: 168)

Phenomenology is rooted in experience of the world. It is a study in the *involvement* of an experiencer with his or her surroundings, an involvement which profoundly shapes the experience and perception. From this basic premise, phenomenology makes an immediate departure from the notion of a Cartesian dualism of an egocentric 'Subject' separated and distant from the corporeal world. It is this insistence upon an unavoidable 'involvement' with the world that makes phenomenology a promising prospect in providing a non-anthropocentric paradigm.

The study of phenomenology looks at the structure of various types of immediate, bodily experience in terms of meaningful phenomena, appearances or perceptions. Phenomena are the appearances of things, or things as they appear to us, or the ways we experience things. It is not only about perceiving things around us, but phenomenology includes also actions that demonstrate a connectivity with the world. The fundamental acts of breathing, eating, talking and walking show a direct connectivity with our surrounding environment that cannot be avoided. Studying the structure of experience includes different kinds of experiences like relatively passive experiences of seeing, smelling or hearing, and active experiences like touching and tasting, which in turn develop into more complex actions such as walking, swimming, rolling in the mud, howling at the moon or hammering a nail. Phenomenology analyses these experience-structures that develop into other types of experience like thought, memory, imagination, emotion and desire (Smith, 2018).

In section one of this chapter (*The Non-Anthropocentric Prospect of Phenomenology*), I will show how in these embodied experiences within the world, phenomenology can be clearly differentiated from Cartesian dualism (and the resultant manifestation of anthropocentrism). This is because the latter as discussed, takes everything in the world as non-subjective or objectively given entities acting and reacting to and with one another. As a non-anthropocentric prospect, phenomenology could be the new paradigm in wildlife conservation since its focus deals with the way an experiencer – be it an elephant or a human; a bat or a gnat – bodily and

perceptually *experiences* and interacts with its surroundings. Phenomenology therefore considers living beings, not as objective entities, but as organisms within a broader natural sphere. It is the focus on the natural sphere that makes phenomenology an exciting new prospect in wildlife conservation.

In traditional phenomenology, as I will lay out in section 1.2 of this chapter (*Potential non-anthropocentric foundations in traditional phenomenology*) there are five principal philosophers that developed the discipline as we know it[24] – Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). With these thinkers, phenomenology developed into a full philosophical enquiry as distinct from epistemology, ontology, ethics and logic – although it contains foundational elements of all these disciplines (Smith, 2018). According to David Woodruff Smith's *tour d'horizon* of phenomenology in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: "with these philosophers, the discipline of phenomenology was prized as the proper foundation of all philosophy" (Smith, 2018: online) in that it is essentially anti-reductionistic, anti-Cartesian and finally also a solid alternative to anthropocentrism.

Aside from Merleau-Ponty, whose work will be analysed in the chapters following this, I will in this section *briefly* provide an overview of the other four principal phenomenologists' arguments, primarily to show how the foundation of the discipline evolved, and to highlight the core principles of phenomenology. I do not want to labour too much in the detailed and often complex ideas in the broader aspects of traditional phenomenology and its methodologies, since it detracts somewhat from the core of this dissertation, namely Merleau-Pontian phenomenology as the truly non-anthropocentric approach to wildlife conservation.

Importantly, in section two of this chapter (*Anthropocentric pitfalls in traditional phenomenology*), I will reveal that while the overriding concern was to dismantle the dominant Cartesian paradigm, the various versions of traditional phenomenology as laid out by Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Levinas were unable to untangle completely from the anthropocentric web they tried so hard to unravel. While these philosophers came close in their overall projects, the all maintained feint elements of anthropocentric bias that ultimately still favours human

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[24] There are other phenomenological thinkers before (Brentano, Hegel), during (Scheler, de Beauvoir, Arendt) and after (Derrida, Abram), but arguably the credit goes to Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty for the foundational development of traditional phenomenology as a discipline.

over (other) animal, at least from an ethical perspective. It was only Merleau-Ponty who was successful in making a complete break from anthropocentrism. It must be said however that without the foundation laid by these thinkers, especially that of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty would not have been able to progress in his own endeavor.

1. The non-anthropocentric prospect of phenomenology

Overall, phenomenology is primarily concerned with the structure of consciousness and, in its most basic form, with attempts to create conditions for the 'objective' study of topics considered 'subjective', such as judgements, perceptions and emotions. However, phenomenology does not attempt to study consciousness from the objectifying perspective of normal scientific-empirical analysis that say clinical psychology or neurology does. Instead, it seeks through systematic reflection of the surrounding world to determine the essential properties and structures of direct, immediate and subjective *experience* (Menon et al., 2014: 172).

Historically, phenomenology is the philosophical tradition that began in earnest during the first half of the 20th century with Edmund Husserl, whose adoption of the term propelled it into becoming the designation of a philosophical discipline. Phenomenology came into its own with Husserl, as epistemology came into its own with Descartes, and ontology or metaphysics came into its own with Aristotle and Plato (Smith, 2018: online).

1.1. A return to the things themselves

"Back to the things themselves!" exclaimed Husserl (Husserl 2001: 168) in *Logical Investigations*, Husserl's magnum opus published in 1900. He was specifically referencing phenomenology's charge against the dominant Cartesian paradigm in philosophy. It was Cartesian dualism, as well as the descendent empirical realism that, for Husserl, had tended to forget its own roots in *real-time* experience. Basically, from Husserl onwards, phenomenology's concern was with overcoming the dualistic heritage of Cartesian Western thought that traces our alienation from nature to the conceptual severance of mind from body, human from animal. The process of Cartesian reduction ignores the lived, subjective experience one has of living beings and inanimate entities in the natural world. It instead tends to reduce the description of these 'things' to the listing of their externally related parts.

For example, the typical scientific (Linnaen) description of a wildebeest is not one of how we would experience a living dynamic being grazing the tall yellow grass on an open savanna, but separated from its surroundings and in its constituting parts. This is much in the same way one would describe the interlocking parts of a machine, as Descartes would have done when he described (other) animals as automatons:

Genus: *Connochaetes* under,

Kingdom: *Animalia*,

Phylum: *Chordata*,

Class: *Mammalia*,

Order: *Artodactyla*,

Family: *Bovidae*,

Sub-family: *Alcelaphinae*,

Species: *gnou.*

We describe machines in this way. Take a look at how the car I drive is described by the motor industry:

Manufacturer: *Toyota*,

Make: *Land Cruiser*,

Series, *J100*,

Transmission: *VX 5 speed-automatic*,

Engine: *4.2 L 1HD-TI6 Turbo Diesel*;

Model: *2002*

Yet, even with ecology's Cartesian attempt to ignore world-experience, we find that the genus word for the wildebeest, *Connochaetes,* derives from a perceptual experience of it – the Greek words, *kónnos*, meaning 'beard'; and, *khaítē*, meaning 'flowing hair' or mane (Benirschke, 2002). These hidden meanings in the Greek description point to the fact that science is *unable* to describe the wildebeest *without* first experiencing it. A beard is something the human experiencer recognises in his own subjective self and is thus able to make a comparison, a link, to the wildebeest that he is experiencing,

Furthermore, the common name 'wildebeest' was also given from what was *experienced* when Dutch settlers, on their way to the interior of South Africa, first saw them in around 1700. Due to their resemblance to wild cattle, the settlers called them 'wild ox' or 'wildebeest' (Talbot & Talbot, 1963: 20-31). In this sense, direct sense *experience* is the core and basis of any description or ontological investigation, the basis finally, of every knowledge claim. The following experience is essentially what phenomenology is about:

- Kalahari wander

During my many expeditions into the Kalahari Desert, I would often get lost, or stuck, sometimes for days before I could extract myself from the wilderness. Yet, while it was a challenge, being trapped in a land of little water and plenty of wild beasts actually wasn't so bad, especially the longer I remained immersed in it. For me, the mornings were always cool (to the *touch*) and the air bracing, if not slightly dusty. The *smell* of coffee and its bitter *taste* as I bit into a dunked rusk somehow complemented the *sound* of the roar of a distant lion. Often, I had close encounters with lions and hyenas who would wander into camp more out of curiosity than anything else. At first, I had a deep carnal fear about their presence, especially at night, but over time I got used to them, as they did with me. Often, I would get the sensation of being watched. I would turn around and be faced with a pair of amber eyes watching me with an intent that signaled one of enquiry rather than attack. I continuously had to (rather gently) clear the camping area of cobras and scorpions, for fear I would accidently stand on one. They politely acquiesced when they discovered I was no threat to their survival. I also endured legions of flies and bees that would cling to my sweat-drenched body to satiate their thirsts as temperatures exceeded 40˚C. Initially, the insects crawling over me (touch) caused no end of discomfort with endless swatting and swishing on my behalf, but again after a time I got used them. If I thought logically about the insects, they created a mild tickle, nothing more. It was hardly something to fret over. The desert thunderstorms in summer were the most challenging of all these experiences, indicating that our sense perceptions of our environment are always value-laden, correlating with our species needs, desires and vulnerabilities and capacities. Great purple thunderheads spewing shards of lightning would roll in during the afternoon and cause complete mayhem. Tent poles snapped and canvas ripped, or the entire tent would blow away bouncing over the dunes like a tumbleweed. Drenched and cold, I sought solace in my hip-flask of brandy, the soothing liquid warming the mood once again as a bright double rainbow arcs (vision) across a spruce of camelthorn trees against an indigo sky. The

Kalahari can be a special place. The most familiar pattern on every one of my Kalahari travels was to sip a glass of wine (taste) around a crackling fire at dusk (sound and sight). Almost always, spurfowl would cluck around the tent like domestic chickens, and the ambient sound of a hundred toktokkie beetles tapping their armoured abdomens on the ground – tok-tok-tok – would add to the orchestra of crickets. A jackal would usually yip-yip in the distance, and a nightjar would follow his lead with a quavering call (sound). The desert was pure bliss. This pattern would repeat itself night after night, expedition after expedition.

The point about this little excerpt, is that this is not about an aloof subject listing off the features of an outside, objectively knowable, world of determinate objects. Instead, it is all about my deeply *interactive experience* through all my perceiving senses with an ambiguous and uncertain wilderness. They were about me being sensorily and bodily immersed in a breathing, heaving realm that responds to my emotions and physical tribulations as I do with it in return. At no point did I feel above or beyond this unique world but fully a part of it, even as I tried to 'read' or 'interpret' the environment, discern between mere irritation and actual threat to my existence, for example. The discipline of phenomenology, then, is about the study of these complex accounts of temporal and spatial interactions. It is about distinguishing focal and marginal awareness. This includes an awareness of one's own experience and awareness-of-oneself in different roles, such as thinking, seeing, sweating and swatting. It also includes kinesthetic awareness of one's movement, of purpose or intention in action; and of awareness of other living beings in empathy, fear, inter-subjectivity and collectivity, of linguistic activity involving meaning, communication, attempting to understand the tok-toks, clucks, yips, grunts and roars of others, and social interaction with one's own and other species. In short, whatever I perceive is entwined with my own embodied subjectivity exposed to the surrounding world, and thus the meaning that I make of my lived experience, is a function of the relation between me and the surrounding world.

At this point I will introduce the four thinkers and their phenomenology as they pertain specifically to a non-dualistic way of thinking about knower and known. The point is to provide the broad overview before exposing their specific problems with detaching themselves from anthropocentrism.

1.2. Potential non-anthropocentric foundations in traditional phenomenology

1.2.1. Husserl

Husserl's hope was that phenomenology would break down the Cartesian paradigm and return us to the things as we directly experience them in phenomena. For Husserl, our knowledge of 'things' is not about listing fixed and finished 'objects'; instead, phenomenology requires a return to that world which precedes knowledge, "of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematisation is an abstract and derivative of sign language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: viii-ix). This world of phenomena precedes all knowledge claims and grounds them in sensory experience. All knowledge, inclusive of scientific knowledge and representation of the natural world (as we find in a map or textbook), is finally, as Merleau-Ponty states here, an abstraction and a derivative of the immediate embodied experience, e.g. of the 'countryside'.

Husserl maintained that a phenomenological study different forms of experience just as we experience them from the perspective of the subject living through or performing them, as I did with my experiences in the Kalahari Desert. Thus, I characterise and describe experiences of seeing, hearing, imagining, thinking, feeling, wishing, desiring, willing, and, of walking, talking, driving a car, etc. Husserl asserted that in order to study the structure of consciousness, one would have to distinguish between the act of consciousness and the phenomena at which it is directed (Husserl, 1962).

For Husserl, the leading property of all experiences is their *intentionality* or 'aboutness' – the directedness of experience toward things in the world. The property of consciousness is always a consciousness of or about something (Smith, 2013: online). According to classical Husserlian phenomenology, our experience is directed toward things only *through* particular concepts, thoughts, ideas, images, etc. These make up the meaning or content of a given experience. Consciousness is always consciousness *about* something, an intentional object, which we perceive directly 'as' something, i.e. as meaningful. For example, a vertically placed rectangular wooden plank in a doorframe is not experienced by us as simply a material object of a certain shape and texture, but we immediately (pre-theoretically) perceive it as a door which allows us to pass through to another room. David Woodruff Smith states:

Conscious experiences have a unique feature: we *experience* them, we live through them or perform them…This experiential or first-person feature — that of being experienced—is an essential part of the nature or structure of conscious experience: as we say, 'I see / think / desire / do.' This feature is both a phenomenological and an ontological feature of each experience: it is part of what it is for the experience to be experienced (phenomenological) and part of what it is for the experience to be (ontological) (Smith, 2013: online).

Therefore, Husserl contended that consciousness is not 'in' the mind, as Descartes would have it, but rather consciousness is always of something other than and outside of the mind itself, namely of the intentional object (Menon et al., 2014: 172), such as a door. For Husserl, human consciousness is a lived, intentional, directedness upon the phenomena in the world.

Husserl's thinking is that there is a distinction between the act of consciousness, what he called *noesis*, and the phenomena at which it is directed (he called this *noemata*), or its content. Husserl argued that what we observe is not the object as it is in-itself, but how and in as much it is given in the intentional acts of the perceiver. Knowledge of objects would only be possible by 'bracketing' all assumptions about the existence of an external, "natural" world and the inessential (subjective) aspects of how the object is concretely given to us. This procedure Husserl called *epoché* – suspension of judgement of the things as they appear to us, and an attempt to return to the raw perception (Husserl, 1963: 238).

Epoché is about perceptual experience, which can be construed from descriptions from a *first-person point of view*. According to Husserl, this is done "to ensure that the respective item is described exactly as it is experienced" even if there is a "perceptual error" (Husserl, 1963, 249) Therefore, it is always possible that one is subject to an illusion or even a hallucination, so that one's perceptual experience is not truthful or factual. If one is hallucinating or under an illusion, there is really no object of perception. However, with Husserl's phenomenology the experience one undergoes is exactly the same as if one were successfully or accurately perceiving an external object. Therefore, for Husserl, the phenomenological description of a perceptual experience should be independent of whether for the experience under investigation there is an object it represents or not. Either way, there will at least be a perceptual *content*, even if in error. It is this content that Husserl calls the perceptual *noema*. Thanks to its noema, even a

hallucination or an illusion is an intentional act, an experience "as of" an object. Phenomenological description is concerned with those aspects of the noema that remain the same irrespective of whether the experience in question is verifiable or not. Thus, a phenomenologist must "bracket" her belief in the existence of the perceptual object, and then return to verifying the experience at a later point in time (Smith, 2018: online).

Husserl stressed that representations such as objectiveless hallucinations can in a sense be characterised as "representing an intentional object", provided that this characterisation is understood to be made "under an existential assumption", as follows: "*If* the act of hallucination or illusion *were* verifiable, it *would* successfully represent such-and-such an object (under such-and-such aspects)" (Smith, 2018: online).

With this 'phenomenological reduction', one is able, he thought, to suspend judgment regarding the general belief in the existence of the external world (Husserl, 1962: 238). In short, we direct attention, in reflection, to the structure of our own conscious experience.

An example of this could be construed when one day in the Kalahari I saw what I thought (in the instant I saw it) was a kangaroo. My experience was real but the immediate interpretation of it was incorrect. Post-experience analysis told me kangaroos obviously do not exist in the Kalahari – what I had seen was in fact a spring-hare (a large rodent that bounds around on its hind-legs like a kangaroo). Husserl would argue we concern ourselves with *how* the animal is meant or intended (I 'see' a kangaroo, not a spring-hare). Thus, bracketing the animal off, we turn our attention to my experience of the animal, and specifically to the content or meaning in my experience. This animal-as-perceived or the appearance or phenomenon of a kangaroo, Husserl calls the *noema* or *noematic* sense of the experience (Smith, 2018: online).

It doesn't matter whether the 'object' is a substance or a figment of the imagination. In short, phenomenological method relies on the description of phenomena as they are given to consciousness in their immediacy (Menon et al., 2014: 172). This structure of intentional consciousness comes to light in the course of what Husserl calls the "phenomenological reduction" (*Husserliana*, vol. XIII, pp. 432 ff), which uses the method of *epoché* in order to make coherent sense, in terms of the essential horizon-structure of consciousness, of the transcendence of objective reality.

1.2.2. Heidegger

While Heidegger owed a debt to Husserl for introducing him to phenomenology, he takes Husserl's version somewhat further. Like Husserl, Heidegger rejected the idea of a human knower or 'subject' as a transcendent, distanced 'spectator' of the objective world. However, Heidegger rejected the Husserlian centrality of the human as *first-person* experiencer since, for Heidegger, Husserl still treated the human experiencer too much as a transcendent consciousness, or a distanced spectator, which stands as an exception to what it perceives.

Heidegger stated that phenomenology should not bracket questions of being or ontology, as the method of Husserlian *epoché* would suggest. In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger argued instead that we and our consciousness are always 'in the world', not transcendent of it (Heidegger, 1962: 84). We do not study our activities by bracketing the world, rather we interpret our activities and the meaning things have for us by looking to our contextual relations to things in our surroundings (Smith, 2013: online). Heidegger, therefore, resisted Husserl's neo-Cartesian emphasis on consciousness and subjectivity, including how perception presents things around us to our consciousness. Instead, Heidegger, held that more fundamental ways of relating to things are to be found in practical activities like hanging a painting or hammering a nail where a phenomenological study reveals our situation in a context of equipment and in being-with-others and being-in-the-world.

Heidegger uses the example of a hammer as an ontological extension of ourselves. It is what he calls 'ready-to-hand' (Heidegger, 1962: 123). Here our situation is in the context of our equipment and being *with* things, not only of being conscious *of* them. As with the hammer, it is ready-to-hand in that we *use it* without theorising about the hammer itself as an object. This is similar to walking through a doorway without first conceiving of the door as a unique material object. For Heidegger, merely being conscious of or observing something is seeing an entity as, what he called, 'present-at-hand', as opposed to the more primary relationship we have with things, which is ready-to-hand. The transcendent Cartesian subject as a passive and distanced knower is concerned only with the bare facts of a thing or a concept, but forgets the real purpose of its being or being with things and being inextricably interconnected with them (Heidegger, 1962: 126). For Heidegger, our understanding of beings and their being is best revealed through phenomenology. Here, with Heidegger, the connection with classical issues

of ontology is more apparent than with Husserl, because of a real, lived, concreate and practical (action-oriented) connect with the objective world.

Heidegger, therefore, transformed Husserl's transcendental consciousness into *an* inherently social and thoroughly worldly being who always already operates with a pre-theoretical grasp of the a priori structures that make possible particular modes of Being (Wheeler, 2017). When we start to ask the question "who is this being?", the human being, also called Dasein by Heidegger, we always come in a sense too late, or after the fact of having already lived a human life with a certain pre-theoretical grasp upon the world. He also transforms Husserlian intentionality into the concept of '*being-in-the-world'*, which is a non-intentional, or perhaps pre-intentional, openness to a world (Wheeler, 2017). Let us go back to my experience of the spring-hare in the Kalahari. The confusion and wonder felt toward this animal that looked like a kangaroo as it bounded across the grassy dunes at sunset was my real-time experience. In this sense, I am in-the-world participating with the natural phenomena around me. I am not a transcendental subject analysing experiential data from afar. Sure, I was mistaken with the taxonomy of the animal, but the experience of awe remained authentic.

Heidegger's philosophy that acknowledges human existence as 'being-in-the-world,' can also be understood as embeddedness and inseparability from the world (Heidegger, 1962: 103). Heidegger's phenomenology challenges the concept of dualism far more than Husserl in that his challenge is especially evident in rejecting the notion of the human subject as a spectator of objects/phenomena espousing that both subject and object are *inseparable* (Heidegger, 1962: 124). In presenting human being as inseparable from its worldly surroundings, Heidegger introduced the concept of *Dasein* (Heidegger, 1962) I will explore this in more detail later on in this chapter when I present Heidegger's own difficulty in over-coming anthropocentrism, but for now the basic definition *Dasein* – literally 'being there' – is one that explores the notion of a living being through the activity of 'being-in-the-world'. The very use of the word 'there' in being breaks down the ontological priority of subjectivity, the epicenter of the first-person experiencer, of being 'here'. It places the old Cartesian 'subject', the semi-divine, distanced and abstract knower of things, in a specific, concrete place and location and makes her interested in the ('her') surrounding concrete world in a practical, engaged way[25]. Heidegger's

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[25] At risk of getting ahead of myself, one may start to think of Heidegger's 'worlding' of the human self as similar to the way we speak about other animals' 'habitat'.

being-in-the-world is unitary and "must be seen as a whole" (Heidegger, 1962: 79). In presenting the 'worldhood of the world,' Heidegger criticised Husserl's attempt to explore consciousness separate from or prior to the world in which the person (as first-person) is situated. Instead, Heidegger put forth the argument that understanding is achieved through worldly activity. Heidegger argued that *Dasein*'s understanding of their being and the being of other entities encountered through everyday interactions is what serves as the point of departure for all knowledge (Heidegger, 1962: 81).

For Heidegger, we and our activities are always 'in the world', our being is being-in-the-world, so we interpret our activities and the meaning things have for us by looking to our unfolding contextual relations to things in the world. Indeed, for Heidegger, phenomenology resolves into what he called 'fundamental ontology'. We must distinguish beings from their being, and we begin our investigation of the meaning of being in our own case, examining our own existence in the activity of *Dasein*.

1.2.3. Sartre

Jean Paul Sartre's version of phenomenology in his seminal work *Being and Nothingness* became the philosophical foundation for his notion of existentialism. In Sartre's model according to Smith:

> the central player in consciousness is a phenomenon, and the occurrence of a phenomenon just is a consciousness-of-an-object. The chestnut tree I see is, for Sartre, such a phenomenon in my consciousness. Indeed, all things in the world, as we normally experience them, are phenomena, beneath or behind which lies their 'being-in-itself'. Consciousness, by contrast, has 'being-for-itself', since each consciousness is not only a consciousness-of-its-object but also a pre-reflective consciousness-of-itself (*conscience de soi*). Yet, for Sartre, unlike Husserl, the 'I' or self is nothing but a sequence of acts of consciousness, notably including radically free choices (Smith, 2018).

Sartre maintained that one can only experience one's own subjectivity in the presence of the Other:[26]

> The look which the eyes manifest, no matter what kind of eyes they are, is a pure reference to me. What I apprehend immediately when I hear the branches crackling behind me is not that there is someone there; it is that I am vulnerable, that I have a body which can be hurt … in short, I am seen (Sartre, 1986: 259).

Through vivid description of the 'look' of the Other, Sartre laid the groundwork for the contemporary political significance of the concept of the Other as in other groups or ethnicities, (Smith, 2013) and potentially other animals. Sartre's existential project is rooted in a more fundamental phenomenology. In a nutshell, the power of Sartre's being-for-the-other has great potential. The experience of placing one's trust in the usual world order (the preformed reductionistic categorizations or conceptualizations like 'subject', 'self', 'other', 'animal' and so on) is disrupted by the presence and gaze of the Other. Feeling irrationally ashamed in front of the Other causes the subject later to reflect whether at that very moment he knows who he is or what the Other is asking with that gaze. Jacques Derrida wrote about the uncomfortable feeling he had when his cat walked into the bathroom one day and saw him naked (Derrida, 2008). The gaze, wrote Derrida, was uncanny and he had a hard time overcoming it:

> I often ask myself, just to see, who I am – and who I am (following) at the moment when caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example, the eyes of a cat. I have trouble, yes, a bad time overcoming my embarrassment (Derrida, 2008: 3-4).

The gaze is not the property of the subject but of the Other, yet the gaze reflects the subject's potential thoughts like a mirror back at the subject. When the subject (Derrida) gazes at the Other (his cat), he realises that the Other is gazing back, but from a point outside the field of

[26] Sartre writes the word 'other' with a capital 'O' to designate the usage of a constitutive other that 'supplements' the Self. It demonstrates an intersubjectivity so as to describe how the Self is altered by the appearance of the Other, of how the world then appears to be oriented to the Other person, and not to the Self. This usage became common with other phenomenologists post-Sartre. Levinas used the term with his thesis of the face-of-the-Other, as we will see shortly.

the subject's perception, and thus there is something finally ungraspable and unknowable in the gaze of the Other.

This disruption of the subject, then, is an important development in phenomenology in that it opens up the possibility for the human experience of (other) animals to be thoroughly decentered or non-anthropocentric, just as the experience of another person's gaze disrupts and de-centres the self and the subject from the centre of its world. The return of the gaze, therefore, de-centres the subject and breaks down the hierarchy with the Other. Even if not always acknowledged, this is a key moment in the development of the phenomenological thrust towards non-anthropocentrism, as will become clear.

1.2.4. Levinas

Emmanuel Levinas was a Jewish Lithuanian-born French philosopher who was a contemporary of Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and Sartre. While he may not have been as influential as the aforementioned philosophers in the development of phenomenology as a discipline, his contribution to phenomenology, nonetheless, has been significant, and is pertinent to the thread of this dissertation.

Levinas, typical of his fellow scholars of phenomenology, criticised traditional philosophy for being rooted in a damaging, deeply unethical, Cartesian dualism. In some ways, Levinas' phenomenology is similar to Sartre's Being-for-the-Other as he analyses how the Other disrupts the egoism of the Self, but he is different in that he centres exclusively on the face-of-the-Other, whose perceived recognition of sentimental attributes suspends the selfish egoism and creates, following Sartre, a 'being-for-the-Other' (Levinas, 1969: 64-70). It is the perception of the living face that causes a disruption with the perceiving Subject, since the face, above all, reveals recognisable emotions, like vulnerability and suffering. This in turn, causes a disruption in the usual hierarchical subject-object dichotomy. For Sartre the face of the Other almost always presents as a threatening, menacing gaze, an active external disruption of the comforting world of the Self in which the Self otherwise rests in tranquil sovereignty. In contrast, for Levinas, the face of the other first and foremost disrupts the Self's with an ethical demand issuing forth from the vulnerability and irreplaceability of that living, animated face.

The interesting part for any purposes of Levinas' phenomenological approach to the face-of-the-Other is that it seems perfectly suited to include (other) animals, although he did not work this out in any detail. That he nevertheless had a sense of how important the gaze of the Other animal might be for human dignity, becomes evident in this essay published late in his life, called *The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights* (1975).

The Name of a Dog is a story about Bobby, a stray dog that befriended Levinas and his fellow Jewish prisoners of war during their internment in a camp near Hanover in Nazi Germany. What is interesting about this actual phenomenological encounter is that Levinas succeeds in blurring the line between canine animal and human animal. Levinas and his fellow Jewish prisoners have been reduced to nonhumans by their captors: "… stripped of our human skin. We were sub-human" (Levinas, 2004: 48). However, in the eyes of the stray dog, which they named 'Bobby', "there was no doubt that we were men" (Levinas, 2004: 48) It means that, unlike the injustice meted out by the human guards, the dog showed no discrimination towards them. To Bobby, Levinas and his fellow P.O.W.s were men in every normal sense. They were not the sub-human embodiment of evil that had to be eradicated from the planet according the warped Nazi ideology. Bobby would bark and wag his tail every time the prisoners returned from their daily routine of backbreaking labour. Levinas and his fellow prisoners naturally appreciated the dog's moral ascendency over their guards – "the last Kantian in Nazi Germany" (Levinas, 2004: 49) – primarily because Bobby's attitude reflected back onto them that they were still very much human. This story points to the fact that Levinas does, to some degree value non-humans, especially dogs, as phenomenologically equal, at least as morally agentive.

* * *

As we can see from the four principal philosophers highlighted above, the development of phenomenology gradually breaks down Descartes' separation of mind over body and the distant observance of the world based on an unequal hierarchy. The fundamental tenet throughout all of their works, that which defines the basis of phenomenology itself, is that the human being is not a detached mind, aloof, alone and separate from a corporeal world, but instead an extension of a corporeal body immersed in the things that surround it. Although they emphasise the worldliness and embeddedness of the human mind, none of them, arguably, take the corporeity of the perceiver seriously enough. That only happens with Merleau-Ponty. While none of the philosophers (apart from Levinas to a limited degree) considered (other) animals

directly in their phenomenological developments, the foundations that they laid in their works led to the gradual erosion of the cornerstone of anthropocentrism, Cartesian dualism.

Nonetheless, none of these philosophers was personally able to break completely with the Cartesian paradigm. In all of them structural elements of Descartes' fundamental concept remained, an indication of the tenacious hold this thinker's main ideas has had on the Western tradition. This impeded any further progress in shaking off anthropocentrism, as I shall demonstrate now for each thinker in turn …

2. Anthropocentric pitfalls in traditional phenomenology

2.1. Husserl's Transcendental (re)Turn

As mentioned, Husserl's phenomenology is based on the study of consciousness as experienced from the *first-person point of view*. While the focus is on the object (noemata) rather than the subject, the very act of intentional directed upon the object (noesis) is, however, subjective in that it originates from a first-person perspective. This immediately raises the spectre of dualism by reintroducing a Cartesian-type binary between the first-person consciousness and everything else, which is the content of that consciousness. As mentioned, this is a problem Heidegger flagged in *Being and Time.*

Like Descartes, Husserl's 'phenomenological reduction' is transcendental (Husserl, 1913: 194) in that he still considers the consciousness of the subject as central and an apriori preceding experience. Granted, Husserl finds the experience of the Subject more important than the Subject itself, but it's still the Subject as the experiencer that remains central while that which is experienced is marginal and, as such, objective. In this respect, he is not very far removed from Descartes' focus on the doubting doubter. For Husserl, consciousness of any given thing calls for discerning its meaning as an 'intentional object'. Such an object does not simply strike the senses, to be interpreted or misinterpreted by mental reason; it has already been selected and perceived beforehand. (Husserl, 1913: 105-109). The problem with this approach is that Husserl is left, just as Descartes was, with a transcendental ego that experiences the world as 'other' or 'over there'. In this way, I (the Subject) am reducing my experience to an object with a set of separate parts. Using the aforementioned example, a mammal with long legs and short

forearms in a desert in southern Africa. This is undeniably dualistic in that Husserl's creation of an aloof 'first-person' judge will inevitably circle back to the pitfalls of anthropocentrism.

2.2. Heidegger's 'being-poor-in-the-world'

As we have seen, Heidegger argued against Husserl's transcendental solipsism of the supreme first-person experiencer analysing that which is experienced.

However, Heidegger, while providing a far better alternative to Husserl's solipsism and latent Cartesian dualism with the concept of *Dasein*, which is a very different, much more worldly creature than Descartes' 'Subject', also could not finally avoid the trap of anthropocentrism. Even though Heidegger's approach is less Cartesian in that he avoided the transcendental relapse of the experiencer, it is of great wonder that he did not follow through what seems like an obvious line of analysis, namely, to include (other) animals in his notion of being-in-the-world.

One would be forgiven for thinking that this phenomenological sort of 'being' includes all beings, since, as author J.M. Coetzee has Elizabeth Costello remark in his novel by the same name, "the overriding sameness of all living beings comes from 'being-alive-in-the-world.'" (Coetzee, 2003: 78). However, Heidegger insisted that *Dasein* only applies to humans (Heidegger, 2004: 17). During his lecture courses of 1929-30, which have been compiled as the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1938), Heidegger penned an excerpt posthumously entitled *The Animal is Poor in World*.[27] In his notes, Heidegger asks the familiar philosophical question: "Does the animal too have world … in the same way as man, or in some other way?" (Heidegger, 2004: 17) By 'world' Heidegger means accessibility to other beings and the environment. It seems as if Heidegger is about to include (other) living beings into his project, yet Heidegger falls right back into dogged anthropocentrism in his final analysis. Heidegger resolutely reinforces the otherness of non-human animals by making a clear distinction between the human-relation-to-the-world and the non-human-relation-to-the-world.

In *The Animal is Poor in World* Heidegger presents three entities: the stone (material object), which is 'world-less'; the animal, who is 'poor-in-the-world'; and humans who are 'world-forming' (Heidegger, 2004: 17). With the notion of 'being-poor-in-the-world' Heidegger

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[27] The title was added to the original text by Atterton and Calarco when they included it in their book *Animal Philosophy: Essential Readings in Continental Thought* (2004).

insists he is not making a hierarchical value judgement compared with humans' 'world-forming' relationship. To explain his thesis Heidegger goes on to ask if one could put oneself into the mind of a lizard basking on a stone in the sun. The inanimate stone, it is obvious, has no concept of the world because it has no consciousness, but the lizard, a living thing, has a conscious world-relation. The lizard has 'access' to the world around it, like a warm stone to seek out and lie on (Heidegger, 2004:17). This responsiveness to the environment by the lizard, and its accessibility to various objects and other beings means, in Heideggerian terminology, it 'has-world'. But the fundamental question for Heidegger, echoing that ontological question by all philosophers throughout the ages, is: does the lizard 'have-world' in *the same way* a human does?

There should be, according to Heidegger's broad development of phenomenology, no reason why not to include other animals. Yet Heidegger turns away and falls right back into a dualist dogma and redraws Bentham's insuperable line in the process. The lizard, he maintains, is incapable of making a relational connection between the warm stone and the sun that warms it. When a human lies out in the sun on a rock, the sun is accessible to her as the sun, and the rock is accessible to her as the rock. Lizards cannot understand these entities *as such*. (Other) animals respond to sets of relationships, but they are specific to survival or instinctual relationships like food, predators or mating partners. They cannot respond to or understand entities *as entities*. In other words, lizards cannot grasp the ontological differences between entities. The lizard, says Heidegger, is poor-in-the-world because she can have access to other beings but not to other beings as such (Heidegger, 2004: 17-18). One has to wonder where Heidegger's insight into lizard experience comes from.

Therefore, Heidegger, like Husserl and Descartes et al., remains steadfast in insisting on making a clear and qualitative distinction between world-forming humans and world-impoverished non-human animals. To continue to separate humans from all other animals by insisting on unique human properties remains an area of much criticism, especially when it comes from a philosopher who, in all other aspects of his work, steadfastly attacked the notion of Cartesian dualism.

However, it is perhaps Heidegger's personal discrimination of (other) animals that may have affected his thinking in this instance. One perhaps could forgive Heidegger for living during a time long before any notions of animal rights and environmental thinking began. Certainly, the

overall basis of his project was non-anthropocentric, one that, despite his personal bias could point toward the inclusion of (other) animals, a baton that Merleau-Ponty would eagerly pick up and carry to its logical conclusion.

This is not to say that Heidegger did not understand his weakness. In fact, after *Being and Time* he became acutely aware that he had not quite broken the anthropocentric shackles. In what he himself called his 'turn', the later Heidegger began to understand that his concept of *Dasein* still bore the faint hallmarks of subjectivity that ultimately blocked the path from a complete break away from the Cartesian construct (Wheeler, Winter 2018).

2.3. Sartre's being-in-itself

Sartre's concept of the gaze of the Other, as I have discussed, seems to break the hierarchical nature of subjectivity lording it over its world. Yet, one cannot help thinking that the focus still remains on the subject – the Subject is still the focal point of the encounter, not the 'Other' – and therefore the anthropocentric bias will somehow remain. In Sartre's opinion, consciousness arises from an awareness of other things. As we found with Husserl, consciousness is always and essentially consciousness *of something*, whether a thing, a person, an animal, or a figment of the imagination. By appearing to itself, Sartre argues that consciousness is fully discerned. But consciousness is, in Sartre's sense, *self*-consciousness – a Husserlian-like relapse into the self as the primary subject of experience.

This problem of the primacy of the Self to itself is shown most clearly by the fact that Sartre did not explicitly include other animals in his version of phenomenology. His enquiry presumes the human being is distinct from plants and animals in that plants and animals merely exist (being-in-itself) – or simply as objects in the external world – while human beings alone are conscious of their *own existence* (being-for-itself). Sartre was hardly an expert in animal behavior and probably, like Nagel, could not fathom what it was like to be a bat (Nagel, 1974). Even modern animal behavior experts have a hard time determining whether non-human animals have consciousness, certainly in Sartre's being-for-itself sense. It is a classic Problem-of-Other-Minds scenario as "the topic of consciousness per se in animals has remained controversial, even taboo, among many scientists" (Allen & Trestman, 2017). Despite the *Cambridge Declaration on Animal Consciousness* (2012) stating that many scientists agree that "the weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological

substrates that generate consciousness", other scientists, including Marian Stamp Dawkins, who has been prominent in the science of animal welfare (Dawkins, 2012), are not ready to endorse the claim, writing: "The mystery of consciousness remains. The explanatory gap is as wide as ever and all the wanting in the world will not take us across it" (Dawkins, 2012: 171–172). As Colin Allen and Michael Trestman point out in their essay entitled *Animal Consciousness*:

> Many philosophers and scientists have either argued or assumed that consciousness is inherently private, and hence that one's own experience is unknowable to others. While language may allow humans to cross this supposed gap by communicating their experience to others, this is allegedly not possible for other animals (Allen & Trestman, 2017).

In this vein, Sartre did not really give the human-animal relation any attention. As with Husserl, Heidegger, Descartes, and almost all other philosophers before and after him (at least those writing before the 1970s), Sartre's lack of consideration regarding (other) animal consciousness remains a result of the pervading anthropocentrism in philosophy.

Even if more attention were given to (other) animals, the notion of consciousness, like that of sentience, sends philosophers down the endless road of trying to determine the nature and extent of consciousness in various animals from gorillas to mosquitoes. The usual way humans think about consciousness is anthropocentric – as primarily an innate endowment of ourselves, which other animals may or may not share in virtue of being sufficiently *like us*.

> It is consistent with an evolutionary perspective that humans are the only conscious animals. This would imply that consciousness was acquired through a recent evolutionary event that occurred since the split of our ancestral lineage from that of our closest non-human relatives, chimpanzees and bonobos. But such a view requires support; though perhaps intuitive to some, its choice as a default position is arbitrary (Allen & Trestman, 2017).

From this viewpoint, the question: 'Are (other) animals conscious?' is theoretically ridiculous (as Derrida would argue) because it implicitly groups bats and gnats together with lions and lemurs, and always in contrast and opposition to humans. In reality, lions are more closely

related to humans than they are to bats, genetically at least, "so framing the question this way embeds a false presupposition" (Allen & Trestman, 2017).

2.4. Levinas' face-of-*some*-others

While Levinas's face-of-the-Other appears to go the furthest in dismantling the anthropocentric paradigm, he lapses back into anthropocentrism by also drawing the insuperable line between humans and (other) animals. Non-human faces, thinks Levinas, do not disrupt the Subject in the same way human faces do (Levinas, 1969: 64-70), although he could never rigorously explain why. This was highlighted toward the end of his life in a 1986 interview when students from the Universities of Essex and Warwick pressed Levinas to clarify why a human face carried more value than a non-human one. Levinas answered, somewhat unassuredly, that:

> One cannot entirely refuse the face of an animal. It is via the face that one understands for example a dog. Yet the priority here is not found in the animal, but in the human face. We understand the animal, the face of an animal, in accordance with Dasein. The phenomenon of the face is not in its purest form in the dog. In the dog, in the animal, there are other phenomena. For example, the force of nature is pure vitality. It is more this that characterizes the dog. But it also has a face" (Levinas, 1988: 169).

This last point highlights a potential contradiction in classical phenomenology. While moving experience away from the Cartesian cogito toward the things in the world, the traditional version of the discipline still relies on a first-person perspective to analyse those worldly phenomena that are experienced. In this sense, phenomenology seems inextricably tied to an anthropocentric outlook.

However, when asked in a follow-up question by the students in 1986 whether his concept of the face-of-the-Other should be extended to all non-human animals, Levinas admitted that while it could be extended to (other) animals his enquiry is "a prototype to human ethics" that "arises out of a transference to animals of the idea of suffering" (Levinas, 1988: 171). To his credit, Levinas recognised the same problem with the Benthamite question. The ageing philosopher saw the face, first and foremost, as a human condition that is extended onto certain (other) animals but only as a comparison to their own faces. Dogs, like Bobby, he admitted,

can invite moral obligation because the face is recognisable and familiar to us, but said Levinas during the same interview, "I don't know if a snake has a face. I can't answer that question. A more specific analysis is needed" (Levinas, 1988: 171). Levinas, it is clear, understood the limitations of his own thesis and that he was aware that he never gave enough consideration to non-human animals, especially snakes, in his phenomenological disquisition.

Yet, like Heidegger, Levinasian phenomenology does remain open enough for further analysis. There are a limitless number of ways in which the face of a specific (Other) animal can interrupt and disrupt one's selfish pursuits.

3. Conclusion

While the works of these prominent thinkers of phenomenology open up the prospect toward a non-anthropocentric paradigm, the world of phenomena as described by them, remains experienced from the first-person human perspective – be it a transcendental Subject (Husserl), or a human subject that has-world (Heidegger), or a human being with consciousness (Sartre), or a recognizable face as compared to humans (Levinas). The *human* animal remains the primary 'experiencer' of a world that is experienced. It is therefore not surprising that for Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Levinas, (other) animals remained part of that experienced world while humans remain at the epicentre as experiencers of the world.

Heidegger and Levinas became aware of their own failures to break completely away from the Cartesian paradigm but never quite fully achieved that break-through. It is only with Maurice Merleau-Ponty that we find a complete albeit gradual break from the anthropocentric contagion of Western thought and practice. In the next chapter, I will explore how Merleau-Ponty was able to tunnel phenomenology out of the anthropocentric mire.

CHAPTER FOUR: MERLEAU-PONTY'S NON-ANTHROPOCENTRIC BREAK-THROUGH

> We do not begin *ab homine* as Descartes…
>
> We do not take Nature in the sense of the Scholastics…
>
> …is not Nature in itself, a philosophy of Nature,
>
> but a description of the man-animality *intertwining…*
>
> Nature as the other side of man (as flesh…)[28]
>
> (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 274)

This chapter is the central pillar of this dissertation as it introduces the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Here, I will demonstrate that Merleau-Ponty's final conception of phenomenology reveals no sharp distinction between humans and (other) animals in that it avoids comparisons of (degrees or types of) consciousness (and sentience for that matter) and comprehensively fills in the supposed abyss that separates human 'subjects' from non-human 'objects'. With the later Merleau-Ponty, we see phenomenology finally shrugging off the vestiges of anthropocentrism that plagued his predecessors and thereby laying the foundation for the development (by others) of a full-fledged, non-anthropocentric, eco-phenomenology.

While heavily influenced by Husserl, Heidegger and his good friend and fellow French compatriot, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, toward the end of his career, became increasingly critical of the fundamental underlying theoretical tendencies of their, and his own earlier, phenomenological methods. This was, however, as Ted Toadvine suggests in his account of Merleau-Ponty for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, done with the intention of reforming rather than abandoning phenomenology (Toadvine, 2018). It is primarily in his posthumous writings collected in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968) that he works out a phenomenology that finally soars free from the grip of anthropocentrism and the reign of the Cartesian 'Subject'. This occurs with Merleau-Ponty's innovation of the concepts of 'flesh' and 'chiasm', which many consider to be his most fruitful philosophical contributions (Toadvine, 2018: online). These two concepts are central to Merleau-Ponty's project and will be discussed in detail throughout this chapter.

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[28] From Merleau-Ponty's last working note (March 1961) before his death in May 1961.

Merleau-Ponty greatly inspired many philosophers who applied his notions specifically to non-human animals. It is important to showcase these examples in order to illustrate the immense fruitfulness of his ideas for ecological theories, since Merleau-Ponty never worked out these details himself. At the same time, the theoretical advances he made are crucial to grasp in order to appreciate their radical nature and implications. These Merleau-Pontian *applications* will be discussed in the second section (*The More-Than-Human-World*) of this chapter in order to show clearly how Merleau-Ponty's concepts link to how (other) animals participate in a world that is neither Cartesian nor anthropocentric. Most prominent among these phenomenological thinkers was Jacques Derrida, whose excellent deconstruction of Cartesian dualism, is a bold testament to the groundwork laid by Merleau-Ponty. Derrida shows how a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology is effortlessly applied to include (other) animals, both in breaking down the hierarchical Cartesian barrier and in pointing toward a new paradigm in the human attitude to (other) animals. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari also feature for their analogy of rhizomes and arborescents and their notion of becoming-animal. Another philosopher that was influenced directly by Merleau-Ponty, is David Abram, an American advocate of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Unlike Derrida, who concentrates entirely on the Cartesian human-animal dichotomy, Abram extends Merleau-Ponty's philosophy to include the full biodiversity of the natural world, including trees, soils and mountains. And indeed, the implications of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology take us beyond the human-animal ethical relation and go way beyond the scope of this dissertation with its focus on the conservation of wildlife and wildness, in that it proposes a brand-new way of understanding the place and nature of the human species in among the other natural phenomena.

Finally, threaded throughout this chapter, since phenomenology is all about experience in the corporeal world, I will provide (as I have in all previous chapters) actual life-world experiences to demonstrate in more concrete terms each stage of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological endeavour.

In section one of this chapter (*Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological development*) I will show how Merleau-Ponty's philosophical progression finally takes phenomenology out of the anthropocentric pitfalls that plagued his predecessors. In a variety of sub-sections, I show how his development moves from the notion of a "body-subject", which still harbors vestiges of anthropocentrism to the "chiasmic" nature of "flesh" in his last work as a radically new paradigm-shift in the human-animal (non)dichotomy. Section two of the chapter (*The more-*

than-human world) demonstrates how his phenomenology points to a world beyond anthropocentrism, what Abram called the 'more-than-human-world.' (Abram, 1996) Here we see how Merleau-Ponty's later phenomenological development includes all animals (including human ones) on an interrelated level.

1. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological development

The key to Merleau-Ponty's break-through as evident in his earlier work *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) was the unequivocal and unprecedented focus on *the primacy of the body*, rather than the *consciousness of the mind*. In brief, as Merleau-Ponty's original analysis shows, the corporeal, living, breathing, tactile body of the 'subject' is in fact the solution toward dismantling the anthropocentric problem. It is the body alone that enables one to enter into relations with other beings, both animate and inanimate, for without the body's eyes, voice, hands, or skin a human would be unable to see, to hear, and touch things; or be seen, heard and touched by them. In other words, without the body, the part that Descartes dismissed, and the earlier phenomenologists slowly started to acknowledge, there would be no possibility of experience or perception and therefore nothing for the rational mind to function upon, no 'noemata' in Husserl's terminology. For Merleau-Ponty, it is the emphasis on the living and perceiving body (what Merleau-Ponty at first described as the 'body-subject'[29]) instead of the supposedly transcendental mind that begins to break down the bedrock of anthropocentrism. In fact, in his thinking, it is not the mind that is transcendental or primary, but the body, and the mind is reconceptualised as a function of embodied life in the world.

For most of his career, as with the other phenomenologists, Merleau-Ponty focused on clarifying the relation between the mind and the body, the objective world and the experienced world, and especially the expression of the world in language and art, history, politics, and nature. According to Toadvine's entry on Merleau-Ponty in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring, 2018):

[29] This was a term he later rejected for its continued reference to 'subject' and replaced by another term, 'the flesh', as we shall see further on in this chapter. The underlying concept of the body, however, as central to his ontology remained intact.

The characteristic approach of Merleau-Ponty's theoretical work is his effort to identify an alternative to intellectualism or idealism, on the one hand, and empiricism or realism, on the other, by critiquing their common presupposition of a ready-made world and failure to account for the historical and embodied character of experience (Toadvine, 2018: online).

In his most well-known work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty, like Heidegger, argues that the basic level of perceptual experience is a "living communication with the world that makes it present to us as the familiar place of our life" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: 79). In this earlier development of his phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty also rejects Husserl's focus on a conscious subject set apart from the surrounding world – a transcendental observer. Instead, the early Merleau-Ponty, following Heidegger, attempts to show that consciousness is intricately shaped in and by the world through perceptual experience of it: human consciousness is an embodied, worldly consciousness. Consciousness, the world, and the human body are intricately intertwined and mutually engaged. This is what philosophers and scientists over the ages have tried to ignore, and yet as Toadvine suggests in his explanation of Merleau-Ponty's thinking:

Perception orients itself toward the truth, placing its faith in the eventual convergence of perspectives and progressive determination of what was previously indeterminate. But it thereby naturally projects a completed and invariant 'truth in itself' as its goal. Science extends and amplifies this natural tendency through increasingly precise measurements of the invariants in perception, leading eventually to the theoretical construction of an objective world of determinate things. Once this determinism of the 'in-itself' is extended universally and applied even to the body and the perceptual relation itself, then its ongoing dependence on the 'originary faith' of perception is obscured; perception is reduced to 'confused appearances' that require methodical reinterpretation, and the eventual result is dualism, solipsism, and skepticism (Toadvine, 2018: online).

Merleau-Ponty argues that this scientific, empiricist reduction of experience to fit 'the theoretical construction of an objective world of determinate things' is a distortion, because it does not base knowledge on any immediate experience or sensation, but on widely held

prejudice (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 4-5). Merleau-Ponty understood this empirically-centred prejudice had to be an *ex post facto* abstraction in that causal and physiological accounts of perception explain perception in terms that are only arrived at after abstracting from the phenomenon itself. Merleau-Ponty criticised philosophy and other disciplines for treating phenomena like elements of 'an objective world of determinate things'. We saw how a wildebeest is described (or listed) in common ecological lexicon in the previous chapter. It is this kind of objective description that Merleau-Ponty objected to. The central theme in *Phenomenology of Perception* is Merleau-Ponty's insistence on the 'primacy of perception'. Merleau-Ponty recognised that one's own body is not just an objective 'thing' but is rather a permanent condition of experience. The primacy of perception signifies a primacy of experience. Merleau-Ponty writes that:

> We started off from a world in itself which acted upon our eyes so as to cause us to see it, and now we have consciousness of, or thought about the world, but the nature of the world remains unchanged; it is still defined by the absolute mutual exteriority of its parts, and is merely duplicated throughout its extent by a thought which sustains it (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 39).

Merleau-Ponty is explicitly against the notion that our experience of the world is reduced to defining it in its separate parts, rather than as we experience it in the original sense perception. The Cartesian assumption that involves passively perceiving something and then interpreting that perception is, for Merleau-Ponty, a false one. The usual presumption is still that a being exists either as a thing, or as a consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 198), but for Merleau-Ponty the perceiving body-subject conforms to neither of these positions; its mode of existence is manifestly more complicated and ambiguous. Our perception of things as we experience them is never about listing the parts of the object we see before us – like the parts of a broken wine bottle. Instead, the broken bottle generates so much more of experience of wine bottles, or wine, or bottles in general, or broken bottles and what they all represent from other experiences. Glass can cut if handled incorrectly, the liquid of the wine provides a pleasant sensation when drunk, and there's a feeling of loss when it is spilt (for me anyway).

Merleau-Ponty, therefore, argues for an intersubjective or relational conception of consciousness, where the body of the subject is always already purposefully engaged with its surroundings, rather than a transcendental, incorporeal Subject analysing the surroundings from a distance. The corporeal body (*le corps propre*) is therefore central to Merleau-Ponty's account of perception. It is the body's tangible involvement with the things that surround it that renders the connection between consciousness and the world that we spontaneously experience. Playing on Husserl's famous exclamation, Merleau-Ponty said the "fundamental philosophical act" would be to ignore the determinism of the 'in-itself' and "return to the lived-world" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: 83). In other words, back to being among and with the things themselves. This is very unlike Husserl whom we saw lapse into a transcendental solipsism reminiscent of Descartes. Rather than a transcendental ego, Merleau-Ponty, like Heidegger, wrote that consciousness always has a *situated* perspective of the world as a consequence of being *bodily located within the field* of which it is conscious of (Toadvine, 2018).

1.1. The body-(non)subject

As I have mentioned, Merleau-Ponty insists the body is not the self-contained object as described by Descartes or in anatomical journals and school textbooks that reduces it to listed parts like the circulatory, digestive and respiratory parts of the body. For Merleau-Ponty the body is an entity that breathes, sleeps, hears a lion roar in the distance, explores the Kalahari on foot and experiences constant waves of phenomena from the desert dust blocking the nose of the adventurer, to the hot breeze wafting across the dunes causing him to sweat, and then cool. This is a body that draws its sustenance from the air, soils, and plants, and that finds the shade of trees to cool from the heat, so that it is very difficult to discern at any moment precisely where the living body begins and where it ends. In short, "the body is my very means of entering into relation with all things" (Abram, 1996: 46-7).

Merleau-Ponty creates a phenomenology that strives, not to explain the world from a distance, but from our experienced situation within it, while at the same time "recalling us to our participation in the here-and-now, rejuvenating our sense of wonder at the fathomless things, events and powers that surround us on every hand" (Abram, 1996: 47). The Cartesian transcendence of a mind separate from and above the surrounding world is overcome by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of immediate sensory experience, for it is the senses

transmuted through my body that disclose the proliferation of entities and elements in the Kalahari Desert in which I am thoroughly immersed. In short, we humans find ourselves originally in the midst of, rather than separated from the world.

Nor does the body solely belong in the mechanical-physical realm. My body is not just an objective automaton standing in the desert and computing the activities of nature. Rather, my body is me *engaged in action* with all the things and animals I perceive. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology expands upon Husserl's notion of intentional directedness when he addresses the role of attention in the phenomenal field. The field is the experience of the body (feeling the heat and dust), the spatiality of the body (within a dune landscape), the versatility of the body in movement and in speech (pitching and breaking camp), with other selves, (engaging in my fellow travelers, clearing the area of snakes and scorpions), temporality (expecting the approach of a thunderstorm) , and the notion of freedom (open-ended series of choices such as where best to pitch the tent). Merleau-Ponty expertly sums up his embodied form of phenomenology, writing:

> Insofar as, when I reflect on the essence of subjectivity, I find it bound up with that of the body and that of the world, this is because my existence as subjectivity [= consciousness] is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because the subject that I am, when taken concretely, is inseparable from this body and this world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: 408).

For Merleau-Ponty:

> [The] body unites us with the things through its own ontogenesis, by welding to one another the two outlines of which it is made, its two laps: the sensible mass it is and the mass of the sensible wherein it is born by segregation and upon which, as 'seer', it remains open and because it is a two-dimensional being the body and it alone brings us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 136).

This is the fundamental basis of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. The human body subject as material coexists with the surrounding world – with the air, the dust and the (other) animals that the 'body' may encounter. As Merleau-Ponty says: '… because it is a two-dimensional being the body and it alone brings us to the things themselves'. It is a concrete, sensible coexistence that is not segregated but one that is intertwined in many ways with 'the mass of the sensible' beyond mere consciousness of things, yet it is 'separate enough' that it can perceive and observe the world. Segregation is not construed here in the Cartesian sense – of a qualitatively different, separated and insular being – but one where there is a two-dimensional nature of the body, separate and distinguishable, yet interconnected. This is a body that partakes actively, passively and unavoidably in the world.

As an illuminating way of describing Merleau-Ponty's embodied concept, philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in the essay *Becoming Animal* (1987) describe the concept as follows: The pair, both heavily influenced by Merleau-Ponty (Toadvine, 2018: online) differentiate between two ways of conceptualizing phenomena: the arborescent (a tree) versus the rhizome (a rootstalk or tuber). The arborescent concept is hierarchical, has a centre (the subject) and peripheries with a strong spinal axis of organization. The rhizome, on the other hand, is anti-hierarchical and grows in a lateral manner with no centre, no beginning or end and no privileged viewpoint. The Cartesian ego is an arborescent concept while the actual living, sensible body is a rhizome, enveloped in air and dust, and partaking laterally with its surrounding world. Becoming animal (human or not) is not a classificatory, genealogical tree but a rhizome that sends out roots and shoots horizontally (Deleuze & Guattari, 2007: 39). Becoming animal is a process that is neither regressive nor progressive because these would imply that some forms are higher or better than others. The term 'becoming' rejects the notion of the hierarchical or lineal especially the assumption that humans are of a 'higher' order since a human is, in terms of his or her body, animal. This is a thorough departure from anthropocentrism since it throws the human off 'his' pedestal as a superior being above all other life forms. Instead, by insisting that human consciousness is governed through the rhizome of the body it places humans in among and immersed in the living world surrounding it. This concept, however, is somewhat simplistic in an ethical sense as it points towards moral egalitarianism, which is not something eco-phenomenology insists upon. One simply has to ask about the moral status of a mosquito compared with a human to see how, in an ethical sense, this becomes problematic. I will address this ethical aspect in the final chapter of this

dissertation. Nonetheless, Deleuze and Guattari make a compelling argument against anthropocentrism overall.

The 'becoming animal' concept is precisely the experience I had with my forays into the desert. I had stepped away from the world of surveying nature from television sets or windscreens of motor vehicles and stepped out into and surrounded myself with nature. No longer did I feel like a subject privileged and removed from the objective world surveying it from afar but fully immersed in it. I coexisted, blended, bonded and rooted my body into the dust and heat of the desert much like a rhizome does with the soil. My Kalahari immersions were, for me, the true fullness of animal becoming. The interaction, interconnection with nature provided a carnal awareness of my body as a wild, natural entity, exposed to the natural environment and at the same time drawing sustenance from it.

1.2. The Animal that Therefore I Am (following)

Deleuze and Guattari were not the only philosophers to be influenced by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Here I use Derrida's linguistic play on the famous Cartesian statement to illustrate some of the implications of Merleau-Ponty's own thinking.

Derrida's nuances of language as a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology are evident in the title of Derrida's book *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (2008). Typical of all phenomenologists, Derrida takes issue with Descartes and his deeply entrenched anthropocentric dualism. With his own title, Derrida deconstructs that infamous Cartesian 'I think therefore I am' phrase, a phrase that has more than any other in philosophy cemented the hierarchical dichotomy between the human self and the animal other, as discussed. The deconstruction works brilliantly in French, the language Derrida wrote in, but I will attempt to provide an adequate translation and analysis in English.

In French, Descartes' famous declaration 'I think therefore I am' is written in French as: *Je pense donc je suis,* but Derrida in his own title takes the ontological *je suis* (I am) and juxtaposes it with the verb which also happens to be *je suis*[30] (I follow). This is a technique

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[30] In French, while 'I am' and 'I follow' are written the same: 'je suis', they conjugate from different root words: 'etre' – to be; and 'suivre' – to follow.

that is central to any deconstruction. In a similar vein to Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming animal', the technique replaces the enclosed static egoistic 'I am' with a dynamic, temporal non-egoistic or indeed relational 'I am following'. This takes away the stand-alone 'I am' and places it in the world by providing the cogito with a bodily function, an active, dynamic orientation and a constitutive relationship (following). Derrida's book title, *l'Animal que Donc Je Suis*, could both mean: 'the animal that therefore I am' as well as 'the animal that therefore I am following', which moreover directs our attention to the ontological decentering of the human subject.

The English translator of Derrida's text informs the reader in his *Notes*, that Derrida's title could also variously mean 'the animal that therefore I am (more to follow)'; or 'the animal that therefore I become (by following)'; or 'the animal that therefore I follow' (Derrida, 2008: 162). The linguistic play here is clearly working against the Cartesian prioritization of the self-contained, static consciousness of the doubting Subject over and against everything else because it involves a real-time fluid experience – following. Just by playing with the order of words and the slight differences in language structure, this title produces limitless phenomenological connotations. Does the title say: 'I am an animal', or 'I am being-animal?' Perhaps, following Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 232), 'I am becoming an animal' or 'I am after the animal?' (Just the word 'after' again opens up a spectrum of further phenomenological interpretations like 'in pursuit', 'hunt', 'behind', 'in the wake of', 'in search of', 'in honour of'), which signifies movement, interplay and crossing of borders.

Also, since I no longer just 'am' – the lone ego emerging from nowhere – Derrida, talking of his title, states:

> … everything in what I am about to say will lead back to the question of what 'to follow' or 'to pursue' means, as well as 'to be after', back to the question of what I do when 'I am' or 'I follow', when I say 'Je suis' if I am (following) this suite then [je suis cette suite], I move from the 'ends of man', that is the confines of man, to 'crossing the borders' between man and animal. Passing across borders or the ends of man I come to surrender to the animal, to the animal in itself, to the animal in me and the animal at unease with itself (Derrida, 2008: 3).

This is a linguistic employment in deconstructing Descartes' most rigid and reductionist concepts because just by introducing the slightest change in the meaning of the egoistic *je suis* the whole Cartesian ontological structure is disrupted. Here we find how Derrida and Merleau-Ponty begin to problematise and smudge the human-animal divide, by drawing attention to the inescapable connections and relations between these categories.

Derrida's account is a linguistic version of Merleau-Ponty's central tenet in *Phenomenology of Perception*. The transcendental ego (I am) is replaced by a bodily embodiment within the world, a participatory entity that moves within its surroundings (I am following). However, Merleau-Ponty was not entirely satisfied with his own earlier conceptualization of the embodiment of the body in the world. It still had connotations of 'subject-hood' (hence his rejection of his own term 'body-subject'). Merleau-Ponty recognized that the human consciousness, even as body-subject, remains at the epicenter of the world and therefore remains anthropocentric. He needed to figure out a way in which he could deny the human body centre-stage.

1.3. The cross-reversibility of the flesh

In the unfinished *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), written just before his death in 1961, Merleau-Ponty introduces a whole new set of terms, a new vocabulary, in order to overcome the anthropocentric foundations of phenomenology and do justice to the radical insights that flow from his positioning of the living and perceiving body as starting-point for understanding consciousness, experience and knowledge. .

Merleau-Ponty now develops a new way of speaking about embodiment. He begins to write of an altogether new term – 'the flesh':

> What we are calling flesh…has no name in any philosophy. As the formative medium of the object and the subject, it is not the atom of being, the hard in itself that resides in a unique place and moment: one can indeed say of my body that it is not *elsewhere*, but one cannot say that it is *here* or *now* in the sense that objects are; and yet my vision does not soar over them, it is not the being that is wholly knowing, for it has its own inertia, its ties (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 147).

Merleau-Ponty here stresses that 'the flesh' is the element in which the body and the surrounding world connect and which denotes the primordial relationship or kinship between subject and object. He describes the flesh as an 'elemental power':

> The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need an old term, 'element', in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an 'element' of Being. Not a fact or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to the here and now (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 139-40).

What Merleau-Ponty is attempting to explain here is that the flesh is an element[31] in that it is not seen but is understood. The flesh is a space in between the divergence of the mind and body of perceiver and the perceived, between the subject and the object. Instead of a simple dualism, and this is the key to Merleau-Ponty's thinking, this divergence between perceiving and the thing-being-perceived (between the sentient and the sensible), also allows for the possibility of overlapping and encroachment between these two *apparently* divergent and hierarchical terms, or dehiscense. Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that this is not anthropocentric projection. Instead:

> carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 136).

Merleau-Ponty is stating here that the element of flesh is not a reduced thing but something far more complex, open and limitless, and the living body consists in a 'constitutive paradox'. It exists as a connection and a relationship between beings, even as it has enough distance on things that is necessary for perception. Like Sartre's 'being-for-the-Other', the flesh constitutes a concrete and mutually constitutive relationship we have with other beings. For example, a

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[31] 'Element' is used by Merleau-Ponty here in the ancient Greek philosophical sense i.e. the basic concept that explained nature in terms of earth, water, fire, air and space. But one could also interpret a sixth element in Merleau-Ponty's notion of the flesh, similar to that of René Magritte's surreal painting "The six elements" (1928), which hints at the multiple, interwoven interconnection of the human body with these older Greek elements.

stranger standing before me speaks to me, forcing me to acknowledge she is a sentient subject like myself while at the same time I am a sensible object in her gaze. We are each therefore simultaneously both subject and object, an irreducible paradox and ambiguity that characterises all existence at the same time. We can extend this relationship beyond seeing and hearing. The stranger extends her hand and I accept it. The connection of hands blurs the subject-object relationship even further as both hands entwine. In this handshake who then is the subject, and who the object? Each is actively touching (and feeling) the other's body even as their own body is being touched by another. In the former mode we exist as subject, in the latter as object in the world. This dilemma highlights Merleau-Ponty's famous example of one person's right hand touching the left. The two simultaneously touch and are touched:

> I can identify the hand touched in the same one which will in a moment be touching... In this bundle of bones and muscles which my right hand presents to my left, I can anticipate for an instant the incarnation of that other right hand, alive and mobile, which I thrust towards things in order to explore them. The body tries... to touch itself while being touched and initiates a kind of reversible reflection (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 93).

Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, the human 'experiencer' is no longer the transcendental ego but a sensuous body that intertwines with and embraces his environment:

> there is encroachment, infringement, not only between the touched and the touching, but also between the tangible and the visible, which is encrusted in it, as, conversely, the tangible itself is not a nothingness of visibility, is not without visual existence. Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world…There is double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible…he who looks must not himself be foreign to the world he looks at (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 134).

We therefore cannot see or touch ourselves, or even somebody else, without awareness of our own tangibility and capacity to be seen and touched by others. Any absolute distinction between being-in-the-world as seeing and touching and being-in-the-world as seen and touched, is impossible. Our embodied subjectivity is never located purely in either our

tangibility or in our seeing and touching, but in the intertwining of these two aspects, where the two lines intersect with one another. As Merleau-Ponty says, 'he who looks must not himself be foreign to the world he looks at', but must in fact himself be the kind of thing that can be looked at and be seen. It is this similarity of being, between perceiver and perceived, this intangible 'thing' or 'stuff' that we share with the universe and that makes our existence here possible, that Merleau-Ponty calls 'flesh'.

In the stand-alone final chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible*, "The Intertwining — The Chiasm" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 130-162), which forms the crux of his argument, Merleau-Ponty describes this phenomenon in depth:

1.3.1. The intertwining aspect of the flesh

'Intertwining' translates from Husserl's *Verflechtung* – entanglement or interweaving – like the mesh of a fabric (Toadvine, 2018). In the classical dualist conceptualization, there is usually a gap between me as a seeing or touching subject and as an object that is seen or touched; in fact, in Descartes this is an almost unbridgeable abyss. As a result, there is a divergence between the sentient and sensible aspects of our existence, in which these two moments or modes of being get stabilized and frozen and definitely divorced from one another. However, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that seeing and touching and being seen and being touched cannot be dichotomous orders of being in the world, because they are *reversible*. The concept of my one hand touching the other does more than merely represent the body's capacity to be both perceiving object and subject of perception. The left hand is not merely another 'object', but the same fleshy substance that is capable of reversing the situation back to the right hand. We cannot touch ourselves, or somebody else, without recognition of our own tangibility and capacity to be touched by others.

Importantly, it is not only about the touching of bodily flesh on flesh in the literal sense. Flesh as we have discussed is not a 'thing' but an element. The generality of Merleau-Ponty's term 'flesh' embraces the seer and the seen in the same ontological order. Indeed, this is true of all the senses – hearing, tasting and smelling. But the flesh goes beyond this. Importantly, there is also an 'intercorporeity' of the flesh (Toadvine, 2018: online). The title of Merleau-Ponty's last work is *The Visible and the Invisible*. Both concepts are equally original to his concept of perception. Merleau-Ponty's sensible flesh — what Merleau-Ponty calls the 'visible' — is not

all there is to flesh, since flesh also transmutes itself into an 'invisible' dimension too, the *flesh of ideas*. This, however, is not an Husserlian-like relapse into a transcendental ego. These are notions that cannot be 'seen' but, insists Merleau-Ponty, in these cases the ideas "cannot be detached from the sensible appearance and be erected into a second positivity" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 149). He is implicitly here rejecting the Platonic (and Cartesian) notion that ideas exist in a separate, second order of being, radically separated from 'the sensible appearance'. The invisible passions, concepts and ideas of love and distrust, destitution and suffering, in fact all of our ideas, however abstract, all originate and are grounded in and intermingle with what we, our bodies, have originally experienced sensibly in the world. Ideas are thus not alien to this material world, are not imposed onto an inherently meaningless material mass, but instead they emerge out of the dynamic interactions among fleshy things.

Language is formed in a similarly embodied corporeal-incorporeal fashion. What we treat as 'pure ideas' are nothing more than a certain divergence and ongoing process of differentiation, now occurring also within language, rather than just in sensible things (Toadvine, 2018: online). Ultimately, we find a similar relation of reversibility within language that has been located within visible/invisible sensibility. Just as, in order to see or touch, my body must be part of the visible and capable of being seen, so, by speaking, I make myself one who can be spoken to (allocutary) and one who can be spoken about (delocutary) (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 154). While all of the possibilities of language are already outlined or promised within the sensible world, reciprocally the sensible world itself is unavoidably inscribed with language (Toadvine, 2018: online). I will pick up on Merleau-Ponty's theme of language in *Chapter Five* when we apply his concept to the natural world.

1.3.2. Chiasmic aspect of the flesh

Chiasm, referred to in the title of his last chapter, is a Greek word meaning 'cross-shaped'. This has two senses – the same in French and English – and both are relevant to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. There is a physiological sense that refers to a cross-shaped structure formed at the point below the brain where the two optic nerves cross each other as well as a point where paired chromosomes remain in contact and exchange genetic material; and a literary one that refers to figures of speech that repeat structures or concepts in reverse order.

The chiasm of the flesh, then, is described as "a crisscrossing or a bi-directional becoming or exchange between the body and things that justifies speaking of a 'flesh' of things, a kinship

between the sensing body and sensed things that makes their communication possible" (Toadvine, 2018). It is more than simple reciprocity or reversibility but a cross-dimensional aspect that bolsters the idea of intertwining. Merleau-Ponty's chiasmic ontology ensures that in some sense the 'other' is always already intertwined within the 'subject' or rather the 'self' in a far more complex reciprocity than just two-halves exchanging with one another, and he explicitly suggests that self and non-self are always, at the same time, the obverse and reverse of each other. He therefore affirms an interdependence of self and other(s) that involves these categories crisscrossing and intertwining with one another, shaping and framing each other, but without ever being reducible to each other.

The chiasm then, is simply an image to describe how this overlapping and encroachment can in time take place between a pair that nevertheless retains a divergence, in that touching and being touched are obviously never exactly the same thing. The generality of 'flesh' embraces an intercorporeity, an anonymous sensibility shared out among distinct bodies: just as our two hands communicate across the lateral synergy of our bodies, I can touch the sensibility of another (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 142). As Merleau-Ponty writes in a working note from November 1960:

> the idea of *chiasm*, that is: every relation with being is *simultaneously* a taking and a being held, the hold is held, it is *inscribed* and inscribed in the same being that it takes hold of. Starting from there, elaborate an idea of philosophy: it cannot be a total and active grasp, intellectual possession, since what there is to be grasped is a dispossession – It is not *above* life, overhanging. It is beneath. It is the simultaneous experience of the holding and the held in all orders. *What* it says, its *significations*, are not absolutely visible: it shows by words. Like all literature. It does not install itself in the reverse of the visible: it is on both sides (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 266).

This is a revealing excerpt in that Merleau-Ponty is showing that there are no binaries and therefore no hierarchy in the concept of chiasm since 'subjecthood' and 'objecthood' simultaneously combine and cross-exchange with one another to the point that the one cannot be dominant and the other subjugated.

Chiasm of the flesh, therefore, is a promising figure for rethinking the mutually constituting relationship of the traditional binaries between perceiving 'subject' and the perceived 'object' world. As Merleau-Ponty has shown, we humans experience these intertwining mediations

corporeally in our sensible exchanges with the perceived world, as well as 'invisibly' through words and music and the passions. Such exchanges happen through an 'encroachment' that blurs the boundaries between what are joined together.

Such an ontology completely rejects any notion of the sovereign Subject, which has always elevated a rational, autonomous individual, capable of imposing their interpretation or understanding upon a situation that is entirely and always external to them. In Sartre's case, specifically with regards to the dichotomy of being-for-itself and being-in-itself, Merleau-Ponty would argue that such notions overlap in such a way as to undermine any absolute difference between them (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 137); they constitute a foundational, necessary paradox which we share with all living beings, rather than two detachable types of being. As a consequence, Sartre's conception of an absolute freedom "is also rendered untenable by the recognition of the ways in which Self and world are chiasmically intertwined" (Reynolds: no date online). Merleau-Ponty is showing that there cannot be any complete disconnection from the surrounding world. The experiencer is always experienced and therefore immersed, involved, embodied and intertwined with his or her surroundings. Recall the quote above where he said that the human (knowing) body 'does not soar over [objects], it is not the being that is wholly knowing, for it has its own inertia, its [own] ties' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 147).

Merleau-Ponty, therefore, expertly finds in this ontology a new departure for describing the relationship between the body and the world, Self and Other, facts and ideas, sensibility and language. He insists that every living body is the seat of consciousness and that the embodied flesh of the body is always already in and of the world, never set apart from it. Anthropocentrism, therefore, becomes a false construct under such an ontology.

2. The more-than-human world

Merleau-Ponty's ontology, therefore, is without doubt non-anthropocentric. He transforms the insuperable line or hard dichotomy between Descartes' Subject and object, between Heidegger's in-the-world and poor-in-the-world, and between Sartre's in-itself and for-itself, into a constitutive paradox characteristic of all living bodies. His concept of the chiasm of the flesh ultimately paves the way for a completely different relationship between human and (other) animals, since it is one that is not constructed on hierarchical sovereignty or binary opposites that, in turn, justifies the instrumental exploitation and violent mistreatment of (other)

animals. Instead, by showing that perceiving subject and perceivable object are two sides to the same coin of every living body, he reveals a fundamental continuity between human and all other life forms. Even though Merleau-Ponty never addressed the animal question directly, his phenomenological formulation of the notions of chiasm, dehiscence and intertwining, and of flesh, drawn up at the beginning of the Anthropocene, can be effortlessly applied to developing a meaningful interrelationship between human bodies, and wild animals and their wild places.

That's not to say, however, that Merleau-Ponty did not consider (other) animals. There are traces of Merleau-Ponty's direction toward including (other) animals in his doctrine, especially in the last months of his life. Merleau-Ponty himself did write, in the working notes of his unfinished tome *The Visible and The Invisible,* that the primacy of being was a "brute", "wild being" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 168 & 200), that the body is "the living bond with nature" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 27). Furthermore in the last paragraph of his final completed chapter "The Intertwining — The Chiasm" he writes that language "is the voice of the things, the waves and forests" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 155); while stating in his final working note before he died, "Nature as the other side of man (as flesh)" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 274). According to David Abram this carnal life-world that Merleau-Ponty speaks of is in fact the biosphere, which in a phenomenological sense is:

> the matrix of earthly life in which we ourselves are embedded. Yet this is not the biosphere of objectifying science, not that complex assemblage of planetary mechanisms presumably being mapped and measured by our remote sensing satellites; it is, rather, the biosphere as it is experienced and *lived from within* by the intelligent body – by the attentive human animal who is entirely part of the world that he, or she, experiences (Abram, 1996: 65).

In many of the notes of his three lectures courses on the very concept of Nature conducted at the prestigious Collège de France in Paris between 1956 and 1957, Merleau-Ponty spoke consistently about nature and pointed out that we humans have forgotten our own source and Being within it because we have objectified nature. Modern humans have pretended to be disengaged observers, á la Descartes. (Merleau-Ponty, 1970: 63-69; 83; 97-99).

As Abram highlights:

Such hierarchies are wrecked by any phenomenology that takes seriously our immediate sensory experience. For our senses disclose to us a wild-flowering proliferation of entities and elements, in which humans are thoroughly immersed. While this diversity of sensuous forms certainly displays some sort of reckless order, we find ourselves in the midst of, rather than on top of this order. We may cast our gaze downward to watch the field mice and the insects that creep along the bending grasses, or to glimpse the snakes that slither into the hollows deep underfoot, yet, at the same moment, hawks soaring on great winds gaze down upon our endeavours … Does the human intellect, or 'reason', really spring us free from our inherence in the depths of this wild proliferation of forms? *Or on the contrary, is the human intellect rooted in, and secretly borne by, our forgotten contact with the multiple non-human shapes that surround us?* (Abram, 1996: 48-49)

Of course, these days most humans no longer participate in the last remaining vestiges of natural surroundings. Almost all our relationships are either with other humans or human-constructed technologies. Our most common contact with (other) animals is when dead parts of them lie in front of us on the dinner plate, or we wear and adorn our furniture with their skins, have bits of them in our toothpaste, shampoo, cleaning products and even car tyres. Yet, the point that Merleau-Ponty may be drawn upon to make is we humans need to humbly accept our involvement as members of the living natural world since without the oxygenating force of vegetation, the pull of gravity, the insects, birds, plants and mammals that are vital for global food production, clean water and carbon sequestration, we humans simply will cease to be. These insights are not only corroborated by objective sciences, but in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, we become aware of how they are given in the fabric of each and every sensory experience and perception.

2.1. The primacy-of-being

The acknowledgment of the body as central to my conscious relationship with the world is not to reduce me to a set of mechanisms, a corporeal Cartesian sack of matter (skin, flesh and bones). Instead, this is a breathing, sensing, intelligent animate lived body that draws its sustenance from nature even as it makes sense of its surroundings – the soils, plants and air - while at the same time contributing in return to these same elements.

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As Abram suggests: to accept the body as the means of being-in-the-world, "is to acknowledge our existence as one of the earth's animals" (Abram, 1996: 47). This ongoing interchange between my body and outside entities is a continuous 'dialogue' that unfolds largely independent of my conscious awareness, and it is seldom thematised. Yet, for Abram, the interchange between one's living body and its material surroundings is "an experience of reciprocal encounters of tension, communication, and commingling" (Abram, 1996: 56), and I will add to that: "of our very survival". This evokes the sense of the flesh as an 'element' (as mentioned earlier) of an open, limitless, reciprocal chiasmic nature of a living being moving, bonding, feeling, receiving and giving in a world that moves, bonds, receives and gives in return. Human being and (other) animals all partake in this elemental power of being.

In short, everything we experience is underpinned by a chiasmic *encounter with nature* whether we are aware of it or not. The examples are endless and infinitely variable like the swarm of thirsty bees seeking the moisture of my body in the heat of the midday sun in the Kalahari Desert. My acceptance of the bees occurs at the point where my flesh ends, and theirs begins. This process is instantly reversed too. As I feel ticklish, the bees experience moist sweat and the touch of my skin and hair follicles. And, it is not just the sense of touching and being touched, but an intertwining of other senses too. The sound of their humming, the cool touch of my skin, the ticklishness of their thousand little legs. Should I move too rapidly in adjusting my position in the hammock in which I lie beneath the camelthorn tree, I risk the chance of getting stung as the bees will react to a sudden change in my body language and instantly adjust their own reaction accordingly. I am constantly exposed to the materiality of the world, just as the other creatures are exposed to my materiality. As Abram articulates:

> The sensing body is not a programmed machine but an active and open form, continually improvising its relation to things and the world. The body's actions and engagements are never wholly determinate, since they must ceaselessly adjust themselves to a world and terrain that is itself continuously shifting (Abram, 1996: 49).

Such reversibility and encroachment of chiasmic structures between us informs Merleau-Ponty's ontology of 'flesh' in that a continuity or kinship links us supposedly disparate beings – human and insect. In other words, Merleau-Ponty's ontology is not a staid, listed description

of a bee but of how bees dynamically and intentionally interact with us and their surroundings. Nor is it humans described as bipedal homo sapiens with four limbs and opposable thumbs but of infinitely complex scenarios of how we go about dynamically and intentionally reacting and participating in the same surroundings as the bees.

Thus, to define another being, or even our bodies, as an inert or passive object is to deny the reality of constantly engaging with our surrounding world. If the bodies of self and other were indeed a set of closed mechanisms as Descartes, anthropocentrism and instrumentally-centred conservation would have us think, "it could never come into genuine contact with anything outside itself, could never perceive anything new, could never be genuinely startled or surprised" (Abram, 1996: 49). By defining the natural world as a determinate set of objects, we therefore cut ourselves off from the reality of the natural world surrounding us, which is really a denial of being.

Let me return to Derrida who continues to interpret his own title's disruption with a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology. Here, while he weaves in and around the ontological question of 'who I am (following)', Derrida discovers from the verb 'to follow' the necessitation of two further notions: "I am inasmuch as I am after [après] the animal" or "I am inasmuch as I am alongside [auprés] the animal" (Derrida, 2008: 10). The similarity between the diacritics (the accents that alter pronunciation and/or meaning) once again sounds better in French – *aprés* and *auprés*. Both similar-sounding words connote via the diacritic of being-near (*prés*) the animal, which leads to being with, being-huddled-together or being-pressed (cf. the root word *pressu* for English press as well as French *prés*), which could also mean 'compressed', 'impressed', 'repressed' or 'pressed-against'. The diacritics scatter Descartes' reduction, and dilute any attempts at strict conceptualization or mechanization of our relationship. They effectively destroy the illusion of a fixed abyss between 'cogito' and 'animals'. No more is there the ontological, singular 'I am', but a more plural, and intricately involved 'I am animal', 'with animals', '… alongside animals', '… following animals', '… among animals.' There is, as one can clearly see, no rank categorisation. Also, since I am following the animal it is 'being-there-before-me' it can allow itself to be looked at, regarded, analysed, compared, and the animal can also *look back at me*.

2.2. The animal gazes back

Following Merleau-Ponty's concept of intertwining and reversibility, Derrida continually reverses the human/animal opposition back and forth. The 'I' may regard the animal as other, but equally the animal may regard the 'I' as other. The animal too has a point of view, a point of view, like us, and of us, similar to Sartre's and Levinas' Other. The result, as can be seen on countless occasions throughout Derrida's oeuvre, is a complication of the traditional notions of definition and reference within the language structure, which ultimately serves to break down the hierarchical binary prevalent in language – the egotistical 'I am' (*je suis*) could be the more inclusive, fluid and flowing 'I follow' (*je suis*). Thus, 'I am' is no longer an autonomous static entity or concept of 'self', looking out across a great chasm at the other. The differential 'I follow' throws the 'Subject' in among the rest, scrambles it, multiplies it, mingles and as a result the supposedly clear distinction between humans and 'other animals' becomes blurred. Derrida's title therefore throws the Cartesian human self in among the pigeons, along with all the other animals.

With the Merleau-Pontian notion of intertwining, as we regard each other, the human and an (other) animal become intricately entwined – the obverse and reverse of each other at the same time but without being reduced to the other. This reveals a kind of phenomenological disruption that both affects and challenges us prior to any rational reflection or empirical debates we may have on the being of (other) animals. Levinas' phenomenon of the face, or specifically, the gaze of the Other, is what disrupts our dualistic high-ground by committing us to *respond* to the gaze[32] in some way. Our relation to the Other comes from a response to its gaze and in these instances one's trust in the usual world order, including the preformed reductionistic categorisations or conceptualisations (like 'subject', 'self', 'other', 'animal' and so on), is disrupted. When Derrida noticed his cat staring at him when he was naked in the bathroom one day, he made this comment:

> If I say "it is a real cat" that sees me naked, this is in order to mark its unsubstitutable singularity. When it responds in its name (whatever "respond" means, and that will be our question), it doesn't do so as the exemplar of a species called "cat", even less so of an "animal genus" or kingdom. It is true that I identify it as a male or female cat. But even before that identification, it comes to me as this irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, into this place where it can

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[32] The word 'gaze' is not simply a visual perception but includes the other's perceptions of what it sees.

encounter me, see me, even see me naked. Nothing can ever rob me of the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized [rebelle à tout concept] (Derrida, 2008: 9).

Derrida's point here is this is not about cats as a species nor about what attributes make cats, say, different from bats. Nor is it about reducing all (other) animals to a homogenous and single Linnaen class, or whether it's a kangaroo or spring hare. This was a once-off, unique encounter with "an other in a face-to-face duel", and with "an unsubstitutable singularity" (Derrida, 2008: 9) that cannot be bracketed by a reductionist referencing term like 'animal' or 'cat' or even 'little' or 'female cat'. By deferring from the reductionist description of cats as a species, Derrida, following Heidegger and certainly Merleau-Ponty, is contesting the possibility of reducing the animal, and himself, to a basic object of knowledge. He instead acknowledges the singular creature as a subject of knowledge. Derrida, therefore, veers from the simplistic anthropocentric treatment of his cat as a species of animal by insisting on the *idiosyncratic nature of a singular event*. He also avoids the empirical question of what another animal could be thinking or feeling, since, following Levinas' line of enquiry, the gaze of the cat is reflecting such enquiry back toward him, the simultaneously seeing and seen subject. Thus, and most importantly in an anti-Cartesian vein, 'Derrida' is no longer really a subject in the classical sense of the term, but rather a (Merleau-Pontian) subject-now-object – an other to the Other. The gaze is not the property of the subject but of the Other, yet the gaze reflects the subject's potential thoughts like a mirror back at the subject. When the subject (Derrida) gazes at the Other (his cat), he realises that the Other is gazing back, but from a point outside the field of the subject's perception. This is precisely the chiasmic nature that Merleau-Ponty is speaking about. The order is reversed and cross-reversed continuously. A similar insight is reflected in Aldo Leopold's comment: "To look into the eyes of a wolf is to see your own soul" (Wolf Conservation Centre: website). Leopold means that there is often some deep connection in the face-to-face encounter with another animal, which leaves the selfdisrupted. It is something not fully explained except the fact it emphasizes Merleau-Ponty's point that we are chiasmically entwined with each other. Our being includes the being of the other, and vice versa.

I have experienced something similar to this myself. Here is another encounter of many I have had with the lions in the Kalahari:

I had driven one morning to a large waterless pan to see if it was a suitable place to set up camp. I came across a pride of lionesses lazing under the only tree on the edge of the pan. While observing them from a short distance, I noticed a movement to the immediate rear of my vehicle. I stuck my head out the window to get a better look. It was a large male lion with a luxuriant black mane. He lifted his gaze, and those fiery amber eyes looked directly into mine. It was a strange sensation. I was completely transfixed by the gaze, like a rabbit caught in the headlights of a car at night. The lion just held me with his stare. I couldn't move let alone bring myself to take a photograph. I was so completely spellbound.

I have had many such encounters of witnessing animals-that-witness, of being held in an animal gazed, being sized up, or puzzled over. The timeless gaze of a curious humpback whale I encountered while diving made me feel how puny and vulnerable I am. This is a feeling I often get when faced with elephants who notice my presence – their gaze impacts on my understanding of myself. Such unexpected encounters brought home that I am not just a sentient subject but also a sensible object, or even a crushable object, in the eyes and trunk of the other. Abram points out that "once we acknowledge that our own sentience, or subjectivity, does not preclude our visible, tactile, objective existence for others, we find ourselves forced to acknowledge that *any* visible, tangible form that meets our gaze may also be an experiencing subject, sensitive and responsive to the beings around it, as well as to us" (Abram, 1996: 67).

2.3. Co-participatory perception

There is a potential anthropocentric barrier to overcome here, which I touched upon in *Chapter Three* when I discussed Levinas' difficulty with overcoming anthropocentrism. The gaze of a cat, or a lion, or even a whale is easily recognisable to our anthropomorphic minds. But, following Levinas coming unstuck with the line of questioning from the students of the Universities of Essex and Warwick in 1986, what of the gaze of a snake? Or, better yet, a shark, or mosquito or a fly? These are hardly the eyes that can elicit a similar response; it is harder to attribute a sense of the world to creatures like that. However, as Merleau-Ponty has informed us, perception does not always refer to the visual or tactile part, it could be any of the other senses (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 147). Derrida himself prefers to use the word 'regard' or 'address' in these instances (Derrida, 2008). 'Regard' means 'to consider' or 'to think of' not necessarily 'to look at', implying that any form of consideration – visible or invisible – from the Other constitutes a 'gaze', 'the flesh' or perception as such. The mosquito keeping me

awake at night, smells me as a source of fresh blood. The bacteria working in our stomachs is such a form of invisible chiasm of the flesh – so-called 'bad bacteria' (viewed from our perspective) give us a stomach-ache, 'good bacteria' in the form of probiotics help us digest food.

French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), emulating Descartes, stated that (other) animals merely obey a fixed coded program by reacting to external stimuli, as the fly and the crab do against my movement toward them. Lacan argues humans are different in that they respond to each other with a complex spoken language (Derrida, 2008: 123). Lacan, however, is incorrect in assuming that just because (other) animals do not respond to each other or to their situation in the anthropomorphic sense it means they do not respond at all. Merleau-Ponty had often argued that the key to a response is participation or engagement (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). Any form of perception – visible or invisible – is inherently participatory. It's an experience of an active interplay, or coupling, between the perceiving body and that which it perceives. The feeling of a fly crawling on my arm causes me to experience a mild annoyance. For the fly, as I raise my hand to swat her, it is perhaps fear, or, at the very least, a desire to preserve her own life.

- Clever Hans, the mathematical horse

A great illustration of participatory nature of perception is a story I have related many times because it completely wrecks Lacan's blatantly Cartesian notion that (other) animals only obey fixed coded programs. What's more, it reaffirms Merleau-Ponty's notion of the horizontal chiasmic nature between engaging entities that are not exclusively human. This is the story of Clever Hans, the Mathematical Horse (Pfungst, 2010). Clever Hans was an Orlov Trotter horse that performed in front of large human crowds in Germany around the beginning of the twentieth-century. The horse's attraction was his ability to add, subtract, multiply, divide, work with fractions, tell time, keep track of the calendar, differentiate musical tones, and read, spell, and understand German. For example, his owner, Wilhelm von Osten, would ask Hans: "If the eighth day of the month comes on a Tuesday, what is the date of the following Friday?" Hans would answer by tapping his hoof eighteen times. For any question asked, whether from Von Osten or any member of the crowd, Hans would come up with the correct answer, almost every time. Von Osten exhibited Clever Hans throughout Germany drawing large, enthralled crowds, a spectacle that was even reported in the *New York Times* (1904).

As a result of the large amount of public interest in Clever Hans, the German Board of Education appointed a commission to investigate the phenomenon. Philosopher, and early phenomenologist who studied with Franz Brentano, Carl Stumpf (1848-1936) formed a panel of thirteen people, known as the *Hans Commission*. This commission concluded in September 1904 that no tricks were involved in Hans's performance (New York Times, 1904). The commission then passed off the evaluation to biologist and psychologist working for Stumpf, Oskar Pfungst (1874-1933), who further tested the basis for these claimed abilities. Using a substantial number of trials, Pfungst found that Clever Hans could get the correct answer even if Von Osten himself did not ask the questions. This ruled out any possibility of fraud. However, the horse only got the right answer if two conditions were in place: 1.) when the questioner knew what the answer was; and 2.) the horse could see the questioner. Pfungst then proceeded to examine the behaviour of the questioner in detail. What he found was something quite unexpected. Pfungst discovered that as the horse's taps approached the right answer, the questioner's posture and facial expression changed in ways that were consistent with an increase in tension, which was released when the horse made the final, correct tap. This provided a cue that the horse could use to tell it to stop tapping (Pfungst, 2010).

It shows that Hans was not so mathematically clever after all, but he was certainly far more perceptive than the crowds could possibly have imagined. Thus, the participatory perception systems of horses – and this is true of all living beings – depends on the detection of small postural changes, and other 'forms' of communication, which would explain why Hans so easily picked up on the cues given by his human interlocutors, even if these cues were unconscious. For the enthusiastic crowds, however, their own participation with Clever Hans' perceived mathematical brilliance was something bordering on the wonderous. They did not perceive that Hans was using their own human-induced set of participatory and transcendent phenomena to come up with the right answer. Instead, the crowd genuinely believed that Hans was good at mathematics and other complex anthropocentric mental antics.

3. Conclusion

Merleau-Ponty would suggest that for all these participants – horse, owner and crowd – that there is a perceptual chiasm of their bodies. They participate actively in the world. This is what Merleau-Ponty meant by the chiasm of the flesh. Clever Hans' own engagement induced the

humans to assist through a transformation of their bodily actions, which then startles them with what they themselves unknowingly created yet bodily performed, clearly enough for a clever horse to "read".

Furthermore, in such a phenomenological field, as we have seen with Clever Hans, the consciousness of a being does not need to be cognitively knowable, but rather by participating in a bodily perception the participants invoke an obligation (Wood, 2004: 131), an obligation to accept that humans are not alone and that other beings participate with and among us, not necessarily as equals but as partipatory life forms whose existence within the interconnected web of life is important. Such obligations occur through instances in moments of time and space that precede and initiate possibilities of recognition, and such events disrupt and rearrange such experiences of time, self and being, and highlight the reductive shortcomings of our anthropocentric attitude toward (other) animals.

In light of this, it does not matter whether an animal has the ability to reason, have consciousness, or is able to suffer. Nor does it matter whether an animal is broken down into the indeterminate sum of its parts as Charles Dickens has one of his antagonists describe a horse in *Hard Times* (1854):

> Quadruped, Graminivorous, Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs too. Hoofs hard but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth (Dickens, 1854: Chapter 2).

The point is, for Merleau-Ponty, humans were intertwined participants in the dynamic world of swirling, interchanging, fluid horse phenomena of Clever Hans, not distant observers of a vastly reduced, definition of a horse in *Hard Times*.

In the next chapter, I apply Merleau-Ponty's concepts of the chiasm of the flesh to the 'natural environment' and the animals (human and non-human) involved with and living within that environment.

CHAPTER FIVE: A RETURN TO THE WILD

> *Deep in the forest a call was sounding, and as often as he heard this call, mysteriously thrilling and luring, he felt compelled to turn his back upon the fire and the beaten earth around it, and to plunge into the forest, and on and on, he knew not where or why; nor did he wonder where or why, the call sounding imperiously, deep in the forest*

> (Jack London, *The Call of the Wild)*

In this chapter, the idea is to show how a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology completely reconfigures ways of considering so-called wild animals[33] in the natural environment and begins to point to a new ethic in conservation.

Of course, one needs to first define what a 'natural environment' actually is. The same is true for the notions of 'wild' and 'wilderness'. Section One of this chapter (*Being-Wild*) will address these points. I will show that 'wild' is not the simple binary opposite of 'non-wild' or 'domesticated' or 'tame' or 'civilised' or 'human'. Rather, it is something that mediates between and on various levels in all forms of life and in all forms of surroundings whether it is a spider on the wall of my apartment in the city of Cape Town or an elephant in the unfenced and untrammeled natural expanse of Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe. The important point is that 'wildness', as per Merleau-Ponty's concept of the flesh, is a fundamental dimension of *all life*. Having said that, this is a dissertation where wild animals and their conservation, traditionally understood, is the focus, so this chapter will concentrate on this aspect rather than just the broader sense of Merleau-Ponty's project as set forth in *The Visible and The Invisible.*

In the second section (*Nature as Flesh*) of this chapter, I will expand on how wild animals ought not to be taken as singular objects, but instead should be named and treated as *expressing*, *communicating* and *interacting* with other beings and their physical environment. The spatio-temporal interactions of living beings with other beings and their surroundings is not mechanistic or deterministic as originally thought. These reductionist views historically led humans to treating (other) animals as automata, commodities or resources, as discussed. In contrast, for example, a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology does not treat a rhino as a 'thing', or

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[33] The term 'wild animal' is in itself problematic in that it encompasses much more than being living in the wilderness, as I will demonstrate shortly. 'Animal' also includes the human 'animal' and 'wild', as will be seen shortly, is a state of being rather than just a location in a wild place.

static object or enclosed being, which is made up of parts or attributes that are deterministically animated by external forces. It rather treat the rhino as a perceiving and expressing being, interacting in a meaningful way with her wild environment and communicating with other living beings in her geographical vicinity. In other words, living beings are not stand-alone entities, but embodied creatures always dynamically and purposefully inhabiting a broader ecological realm. In terms of conservation, the animal embedded physically and expressively in her environment plus her environment are understood as belonging together, but not combined as one, rather as intertwining yet distinct organisms. Louise du Toit states that there is "a necessary distance between the living body and its milieu – the precondition of its engagement with it is its ability to discern possibilities for engaging with the environment, i.e. possibilities for change, i.e. virtualities." The projection of a world within a milieu depends on some distance or spacing opening up between the body and its environment" (Du Toit, 2019: 13). Thus, the living body and the environment are co-constituted and co-constituting in an ongoing way, in the 'world' of the animal.

In the third section (*Language of Being*), I reveal how Merleau-Ponty's later phenomenology, when applied to a science like ecology, replaces the staid objectifying language of the empirical sciences, by dismantling the binaries between the body and the world, self and other, seer and seen, touch and touched, facts and ideas, sensibility and language, humanity and animality. It thereby better expresses the complex ambiguities and mutual intertwinings, characteristic of all life Ultimately, Merleau-Ponty replaces these opposing concepts with a form of chiasmic mediation. Chiasm, as we have seen, refers to an 'encroachment' or crossing over between two irreducible aspects of the body – the sensible and the sentient. The sensible body reveals a chiasmic structure that Merleau-Ponty says characterises every living being (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 137). We experience chiasmic interactions corporeally at the basis of our sensible exchanges with the surrounding world. As we saw in the previous chapter, they occur through an interaction that smudges the boundaries between what is joined, such that we can no longer say precisely where activity becomes passivity, where the seen becomes the seer, the touch becomes touched or where the self ends and other living beings or the world begins. Merleau-Ponty thus reveals a new way of describing the relationship between the living body and the / its world.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), Merleau-Ponty started to understand that human language too was a carnal 'wild' phenomenon, rooted in sensorial experience with the world.

This is the key point of this chapter as we see how fundamental language becomes as the foundation stone pointing toward an eco-phenomenological conservation ethic. In the chapter entitled 'The Body as Expression, and Speech' in *Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty writes that the body's first act of communication with the world is a spontaneous gesture toward it. In this third section of this chapter, I will show how language in both human and non-human is in fact a product of the wild environment, arising out of the bodily gesture. 'Wildness', for Merleau-Ponty, manifests itself, among other things, through organisms' capacity for communication and language. Merleau-Ponty's shows that human language is just another extension of the interconnectedness of participating with the natural environment. Language is a key to our interconnectedness with the wild, rather than that which would supposedly mark us as an 'exception' to the natural and wild world, because it is a physically as well as a tonally expressive component of being-wild. Language, as Merleau-Ponty shows, is not exclusively a human condition but an action that belongs to all life, not just in making noises but in bodily and a large variety of other forms of expression. Language is an inextricable extension of our participation in the sensuous natural world, which we share with all living bodies in this world.

Developing Merleau-Ponty's notion of chiasm, this section will also begin to show that things with no obvious point to their existence (like mosquitoes) in fact play an expressive and relational role in the lives of other beings. This kind of portrayal, as David Wood writes, "teaches us that the life, death and flourishing of things is tied up with other factors, conditions and creatures in ways for which we typically do not have a map, and under variability tolerances we do not know" (Wood, 2001: 16). Wood goes on to state that "we can study these things, of course. But as much as ecology is a science, it is also a counsel of caution, precisely because it deals with the *interaction* of widely disparate kinds of things" (Wood, 2001: 16). And so, through a Merleau-Pontian concept of language and the resultant renewal of the description of ecological functions – let's call it 'poetic ecology[34] – there now begins to emerge the foundation of a conservation ethic. The interaction and interconnectedness of all life, rather than the simple preservation of numbers calculated and based on instrumental value, becomes the focal point in a conservation of wildlife.

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[34] This is a term used by Craig Holrege (2016) in *Meeting Nature as a Presence: Aldo Leopold and the Deeper Nature of Nature* (Nature Institute).

To build upon and reinforce these concepts in Sections Two and Three respectively, I will include the ideas of two early ecologists, Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944) and Aldo Leopold (1887-1948). The works of these two men are excellent examples of scientists who broke from the usual objective methods of regarding the natural world to adopt a conservation approach that implicitly, albeit it indirectly, follows a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology. The aim of focusing on these *proto*-phenomenologists is to show how Merleau-Ponty's theoretical concepts of flesh and chiasm begin to take shape in an applied sense. The choice of these two early ecologists is important in that they link the theoretical Merleau-Ponty, who himself did never apply his theories in a practical sense, to the prospect of a contemporary environmental ethic and a practical approach to wildlife conservation in the era of the Anthropocene. These men are also important in that they express, through an innovative use of descriptive language, a Merleau-Pontian style of phenomenology that completely avoids the anthropocentric pitfalls that plague conservation efforts in the modern world.

Of the first of the two early ecologists (presented in the second section), it is significant that Merleau-Ponty's own development of ideas explicitly makes use of Jakob von Uexküll's in-field studies of ticks and sea urchins (among others) and his concept of 'Umwelt' (surroundings). Uexküll gave Merleau-Ponty most of the foundational concepts into advancing his ideas of intertwining and the chiasm of the flesh (Umbelino, 2013: 352) and was able to lead Merleau-Ponty to an alternative way of thinking about wildness and how it entails a primordial interconnection with humans, wild animals and the natural environment. Uexküll also begins to pave the way for how animals bodily express themselves with other beings and their environment, which led Merleau-Ponty to draw his own conclusions regarding humans.

The other ecologist is regarded as one of the greatest of the twentieth century. He is often cited as the father of the environmental movement and certainly in environmental philosophical circles. This is none other than Aldo Leopold, whose pioneering opus, *The Sand County Almanac*, (published posthumously in 1949) introduced the notion of a land ethic, a concept that was unprecedented at the time, and in many ways still remains peripheral to mainstream conservation policies as discussed in *Chapter One*. In the third section of this chapter, I will delve into Leopold's thinking about the importance of preserving the wild environment as an applied version of Merleau-Ponty's theories. Leopold broke protocol with scientific language in describing his life in the wild. It is with his vivid descriptions of his experiences of the wilderness that Leopold was less a distant observer of nature and more a Merleau-Pontian

phenomenologist in and of nature. Leopold, as an example of how language shapes our relation to the wild environment and vice versa, coincidentally links to Merleau-Ponty's own concept of language. The pages of *Sand County Almanac* are filled with wonderful examples of how language is shaped by the environment and vice versa. Leopold speaks of mountains as animate and dynamic. They too are forms of expression and communication. I will show what Leopold means by 'thinking like a mountain'. Leopold also shows how seemingly insignificant animals are critical to the overall health of the entire ecosystem. Without them and their meaningful self-expression within their wild environment, there probably would not even be an ecosystem.

I shall conclude this chapter (fourth section *Ukama: The Interdependence of All that Exists*) by showing just how deeply human communication is dependent on the wild environment. I will provide a real example of this by introducing a unique traditional Zimbabwean concept called *Ukama*.

It is with these thoughts that I will lead into the final chapter. A chapter where I explore ways in which modern humans can re-discover the natural world that will possibly provide a new and better way of conserving the wild animals and wildness that underlies and ultimately makes possible all life.

1. Being-wild

The element of flesh is a connection and a relationship between beings, among beings, and their surrounding environment. But here is the key. The Merleau-Pontian concept of flesh is about the carnal, bodily interrelationship between *all* beings – human and non-human animal – both with each other and with the natural world. Recall that Merleau-Ponty held that the primacy of being was a "brute", "wild being" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 168 & 200). This suggests that the concept of the flesh is primal. It points to the fact that being is fundamentally bodily and corporeal (fleshy). The flesh is where the living being 'encroaches' upon the physical world that surrounds it and vice versa. Merleau-Ponty may have been referring to human bodies in this description of wild-being but it is obvious his concept of the flesh includes all (other) animals from dung beetles to elephants. As discussed in previous chapters, phenomenology is essentially about spatially and temporally embodied living beings perceiving the world around them in relation to their own activities and goals within this environment. Perception is made possible by there being living bodies that occupy distinct places at particular times, "bodies

endowed with a mobility that reflects their needs and desires" (Wood, 2001: 1). Perception is inextricably linked to every living creature's perceptive, carnal embodiment in the world – in them having eyes, ears, paws, radar senses (as in bats), electroreceptors (as in sharks), muscles and other bodily components that give them mobility and functionality (or rather intentionality) in various dimensions within their surrounding natural environment. That embodiment manifests also in more complex, invisible ways, as in all animals having various desires and needs that shape and direct perception to include what they can do in that environment, which "could be said to constitute perception, rather than qualify it" (Wood, 2001: 2).

All these embodied natural dimensions are characterized by the ontological characteristic of 'being-wild'. For all animals, even domesticated and human ones, the involvement in the world is one of 'wildness'. Lawrence J. Cookson, in *A Definition for Wildness,* writes:

> In relation to wildness, an organism's internal quality is improved through the parsimonious arrangement and coordination of one's adaptations and internal drivers, while its external quality is achieved through attunement with one's surroundings. With wildness, an organism gains internal clarity, thereby presenting a consistent face or purpose to which other organisms can adapt (Cookson, 2011: online).

'Wildness' then refers to an animal's constitutive interconnection ('attunement with') to the natural world that they rely on for their survival and which forms the material basis for all their projects. Their lives (and ours) are shaped and conditioned by the earthly elements, and in turn help to shape them ('presenting a consistent face … to which other organisms can adapt'). These include the air all living beings breathe, the water they drink, the soil that produces food, it is the planet's specific distance from the sun, the spin of the earth that create the ocean currents which determine weather patterns such as wind and rainfall. These, in turn, support forests, savannahs and other natural environments that, in their pursuit of their own well-being and flourishing, are themselves elements essential for the continuation of all life on earth. Henry David Thoreau wrote the famous phrase, "In wildness is the preservation of the world" (Thoreau, 1906: Vol. 5. 205). In this sense, the flesh of the brute, carnal wild world that Merleau-Ponty speaks of is what enables and shapes, that carries, all our fleshy existence including both animal and human being.

But the process reverses. Merleau-Ponty's notion of the chiasm of the flesh – the intertwining and cross-reversibility - implies that the natural environment relies on wild animals' participation with it. I will show in this chapter, following Merleau-Ponty's notion of chiasm (the "sensible sentient") how wolves, birds, elephants and mosquitoes, as just some examples of millions, determine the shape and life of the natural environment and how the natural environment in turn shapes them and the other life forms in the same place. It is a perfect example of a chiasmic reversal of bodies that Merleau-Ponty speaks of.

This new understanding of the world is made possible by there being living bodies that occupy distinct places at particular times, bodies endowed with a mobility that reflects their needs and desires. "These," according to David Wood's assessment of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, "are not just natural facts about the world, but fundamental dimensions of the world, dimensions that structure the very possibility of there being facts at all" (Wood, 2001: 1). For Wood, Merleau-Ponty's approach to phenomenology is essentially "the pursuit of the relationalities of worldly engagement, both human and those of other creatures" (Wood, 2001: 3). In this sense, the application of phenomenology to the natural environment starts to become an *eco-phenomenology*, a concept that points toward a radically new approach to wildlife conservation.

Importantly, the new 'world' or ontology revealed by an eco-phenomenological approach, shows how much of a reduction and distortion is involved in taking living bodies as determinate, atomistic objects operating like coded automata in an objective, static and physical setting. Instead, living bodies should be understood as inextricable, intertwined members of a complex, chiasmic, fluctuating, open-ended ecosystem, the latter being a phenomenon that has been referred to variously in this dissertation as the 'wilderness', 'nature' or the 'biosphere'.

Under the construct of anthropocentrism, as we saw in the opening chapters, humans have rejected 'wildness' and their own 'animality' by producing a dichotomy where wildness and animality is an external, inferior and opposite 'otherness' or a least an insignificance to be transcended by human existence, development and progression. *Yet, it is wildness and animality that create and sustain all life forms, including the human condition in the world* . I shall demonstrate how humans, despite the modern insistence on a Cartesian detachment,

remain inseparable as animals from the wild environment and will argue that this is a key insight into bringing about the kind of world-view and world that flows from an eco-phenomenological appreciation of life. It is clear that no matter how much we try to ignore animality within ourselves or even destroy wildness in other animals as we have seen with game farming in South Africa in Chapters One and Two, humans can never escape its necessity for our own animal existence and well-being. Poet laureate and environmentalist, Gary Snyder, points out that at a fundamental level 'being human' means 'being wild' since we are a wild species in our bodily existence – in breathing, eating, procreation and breeding (Snyder, 1990: 15). Following a Merleau-Pontian concept of embodiment, Snyder states our bodies themselves are wholly wild in how we feed off, and contribute bodily to, our wild environment. This occurs in a myriad of daily interactions:

> The involuntary quick turn of the head at a shout, the vertigo of looking off a precipice, the heart-in-the-throat in a moment of danger, the catch of a breath, the quiet moments relaxing, staring, reflecting (Snyder, 1990: 17).

These actions are not products of a modern society but of a time when we were truly wild human animals. Wildness remains with and in us, and in domestic animals as well. It is, says Snyder, the norm, not the exception and has always been part of the basic human experience (Snyder, 1990: 7). These insights need to be taken on board for an eco-phenomenological world to flourish.

2. Nature as flesh

Merleau-Ponty recognised a deep affinity between his notion of the 'flesh' and the natural environment (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 274). In his last published working note (added to the end of *The Visible and the Invisible*), written in March 1961, he writes: "Nature as the other side of humanity (as flesh, nowise as 'matter')" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 274). Nature or the natural environment is not the static, objective world of Descartes, not the inert and passive, dead matter of his mechanistic universe, but something inherently alive, living and dynamic. The 'flesh' that Merleau-Ponty speaks of both in the visible and invisible sense as discussed in the previous chapter is the elemental point where our humanity connects with nature in terms of our spatial positioning and temporal communication within our surrounding environment. I will explain in more detail as this section develops.

Although French and writing in French, Merleau-Ponty frequently used the German term 'Umwelt' throughout his later writings and lecture courses. For example, one of Merleau-Ponty's working notes on the concept of nature states: "the body is not just a thing, but relation to an *Umwelt*." (Merleau-Ponty, 1994: 270) Loosely translated, 'Umwelt' is German for environment or surroundings. Merleau-Ponty uses it in this sense as well as the sense as derived from biologist, Jakob von Uexküll, who added that 'Umwelt' is a biological foundation that lies at the very epicenter of the study of both communication and signification in the human and (other) animal (Uexküll, 2010: 12). In his theoretical development, Merleau-Ponty picks up on Uexküll's concept of Umwelt when he begins to look to the natural sciences – especially those pertaining to the relations between living organisms and their environment – to develop and expand his ideas on the interconnectedness of humans with their surroundings.

Uexküll's fieldwork was critical for placing Merleau-Ponty's "research on an onto-phenomenological path" (Umbelino, 2013: 352) because the concept of Umwelt encapsulates the fact that to be-in-the-world, the animal body is not just a measurable point in space, but a participatory entity embedded, shaped by and responding to its natural surroundings. Uexküll's study of the behavior of wild animals within and with their own Umwelt is what Merleau-Ponty drew upon to establish his own ideas of the flesh and the relationship between the human body and the surrounding environment (Umbelino, 2013: 352). What we find here then, is that Merleau-Ponty's ontological investigations were built on the bedrock of the practical experiences of observing wild life-forms in their natural settings as recorded by Uexküll.

In his seminal work *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (first published in 1934), Uexküll demonstrates that a genuine reciprocity takes place between living organisms and their environment. One of the strengths of Uexküll's argument is that he describes here the so-called 'lesser' organisms that include ticks and sea urchins, which means the insuperable line (to use Bentham's term) dividing those within and without the Club of Consideranda has been breached right from the start. For Uexküll, the way of being of *any* organism, from tick to tiger, is that of a continuously changing chiasmic relationship within its Umwelt. In other words, Uexküll argued that the living organism, every living organism, through its participation, unfolds an Umwelt; which in turn unfolds the whole of the organism (Uexküll, 2010: 10). In this sense, organism and Umwelt share a dynamic inseparable relationship by which living body and material surrounding interact with each other in a chiasmic way. Writing in the

Introduction of the English version of Uexküll's book (2010), Dorian Sagan sums up Uexküll's primary conviction:

> Life is not just about matter and how it immediately interacts with itself but also how that matter interacts with interconnected systems that include organisms in their separately perceiving worlds – worlds that are necessarily incomplete, even for scientists and philosophers, who like their objects of study form only a tiny part of the giant, perhaps infinite universe they observe (Uexküll, 2010: 1).

Essentially, what Uexküll is speaking of is the importance of analysing the multitude of living organisms that interconnect with each other and the physical environment and not each individual as a stand-alone entity. Unlike many ecologists, Uexküll concentrated his studies on the differences of wild animals' *perceptual worlds*, rather than simply their functional attributes or the sum of their organic parts as we find in a 'normal' Linnean one. He thus by implication studies the life-worlds of non-human animals from a kind of phenomenological, i.e. subject-centred viewpoint. Using countless examples from his fieldwork, Uexküll is able to demonstrate throughout his book that animals' and organisms' perceptions, communications and behaviors are part of their purposeful action in the world, a characteristic that is thus not limited to humans (Uexküll, 2010: 3). Animals are not machine-like and robotic. Even Darwinian natural selection is unable to explain the orientation of present behaviors in wild animals toward a future end, for example, a squirrel burying a stash of nuts enough to see her through the harsh winter. For Uexküll, the Umwelt is not the environment objectified as physical substance, as a Cartesian or Linnean model would have it, but the surroundings of a living being, the *world of significance* as experienced by that being with its particular physical structure, needs and interests.

Uexküll's endeavor is undoubtedly phenomenological in that he describes wild beings not as stand-alone entities, but as organisms bound up in their dynamic surroundings. Uexküll begins his book (which he describes as a travelogue) by inviting the reader on "a stroll on a sunny day before a flowering meadow in which insects buzz and butterflies flutter" (Uexküll, 2010: 43). He then asks if we can imagine making a bubble around each of the animals living in the meadow:

The bubble represents each animal's environment and contains all the features available to the subject. As soon as we enter into one such bubble, the previous surroundings of the subject are completely reconfigured. Many qualities of the colourful meadow vanish completely, others lose their coherence with one another, and new connections are created. A new world arises in each bubble (Uexküll, 2010: 43).

For Uexküll, each and every living thing is a 'subject' that lives in its own world, of which it is the centre of perception which shapes the Umwelt into a meaningful whole, discerning for instance food, threats and opportunities. But rather than bracket the subject from its world as Husserl would have, Uexküll's understanding is more in line with the early Merleau-Ponty's 'body-subject' which, as we have seen, would later evolve into the concept of the flesh. Uexküll points out that the bubble or Umwelt is never neutral, universal, or incidental, but is specific to each species, and even to each animal in a kaleidoscope of fluctuating changes. What shines forth in one Umwelt for one animal might fade into the background for another, depending on the subject's mood, perceptual infrastructure and current purpose or intention. Each animal, therefore, co-constitutes its Umwelt through its physiognomy, stance, interests, experiential memory, and so on. The point is this biological existence cannot simply be described as a sum of its non-organic parts, as natural science tends to do, but has to be described as an active, open-ended, entwined part of a variety of disparate lives co-existing and co-participating in a biodiverse life system. Living beings, therefore, cannot be reduced to instrumental entities existing purely for human benefit and gratification but instead should be viewed as living and dynamically acting centres of interest. They cannot be viewed as existing separately but are always an interactive part of a large fluctuating elemental whole.

Let us take for example, the description of a rhinoceros. Her lived world lies in the integration of her dynamic orientation towards the totality of her wild environment rather than separated from it. Such a distorted separation is clearly visible in the 'objective' description below:

Members of the rhinoceros family are some of the largest remaining megafauna, with all species able to reach or exceed one ton in weight. They have an herbivorous diet, small brains (400–600 g) for mammals of their size, one or two horns, and a thick (1.5–5 cm) protective skin formed from layers of collagen positioned in a lattice structure. They generally eat leafy material, although their ability to ferment food in their hindgut allows

them to subsist on more fibrous plant matter when necessary. Unlike other perissodactyls, the two African species of rhinoceros lack teeth at the front of their mouths, relying instead on their lips to pluck food (Owen-Smith, 1984: 490-495).

By listing the separate attributes of an animal, viewing her as an objective thing with a list of attributes, we tend to commodify a rhinoceros and endow her with only instrumental value. As demonstrated in *Chapter Two*, a reductionist instrumental valuation of a rhino reduces her to a set of commodifiable attributes based on human needs and wants as well as to a mere a statistic (preserving population numbers) that, instead of providing a way of meaningful survival, instrumental value is, in fact, contributing to the destruction of her species and the natural environment she finds herself in. We learn instead from Uexküll's approach that there is a lot more involved in the life of a rhino. A rhinoceros, or any other living organism, is far much more than Owen-Smith's lineal, static and atomistic description above. In the process of grazing or browsing for food, or rolling in the mud, a rhinoceros is not simply blindly rehearsing a set of pre-established, instinctual behavioursbut is in fact 'becoming animal' (as dynamic and temporal) and being who she is – a participatory being evolving and becoming within and in response to her wild environment, which in turn is shaped by her behaviour.

Merleau-Ponty builds on Uexküll's ideas with his formulation of participation, which he calls intertwining. Toadvine notes that Merleau-Ponty emphasises three consequences from a body's embeddedness not just with its surroundings, but with other beings: First, the body as sensible-sentient is an 'exemplar sensible' that demonstrates the kinship or ontological continuity between all sensible-sentient beings, for example a rhinoceros and her calf . Toadvine argues that for Merleau-Ponty in order to be sentient, the body must be sensible (Toadvine, 2011: 339). The rhinoceros mother discloses an ontological continuity or kinship between herself as sentient and her calf as sensible. It is a kinship that is disclosed by the moment where a touch crosses over from organ (skin) to object (calf) and back again. What is most significant about the example of the touch touching, for Merleau-Ponty, is the link between sentience and sensibility, which first opens the body onto the world. Second, the rhinoceros' relationship is reversible, like "obverse and reverse" or "two segments of one sole circular course" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 182). Just like the example of the handshake in the previous chapter, the calf too is sentient and his mother sensible, a process which reverses continuously.

Third, the sentient and sensible never strictly coincide but are always separated by a gap or divergence or dehiscence that defers their unity (Toadvine, Spring 2019) and protects their distinctness. This last point may at first seem problematic as it harks back to subjecthood and distances the body from nature, but Merleau-Ponty recognises there is a slight border or line (*écart*) that separates the rhinoceros and her calf. This is not to say though that the rhinoceros is a subject in the Cartesian sense but rather a being participating in, through and with her calf in their natural surroundings – Toadvine calls this participation unity-in-difference (Toadvine, 2011: 339). Toadvine states that this interrelationship is an "exchange between the body and things that justifies speaking of a 'flesh' of things, a kinship between the sensing body and sensed things that makes their communication possible" (Toadvine, Spring 2019). In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty denies that this is a projection of a Cartesian subject but, as mentioned at the start of this chapter, rather a "carnal being…a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant…" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 179) His concept of intertwining "embraces an intercorporeity, an anonymous sensibility shared out among *distinct* bodies: just as my two hands communicate across the lateral synergy of my body, I can touch the sensibility of another" (Toadvine, Spring 2019).

When a lion roars at night, he is not simply uttering a sound, but is inhabiting what we might call from our (limited human) perspective a language where he expresses his (unique relation to the) world that he experiences in a way we humans – following Nagel (1974) again – cannot begin to fathom or explain with our human perception, comprehension or objective observation. In short, Merleau-Ponty, drawing inspiration from Uexküll, teaches us that any living being's world is filled with multitudinous colors, sounds, tastes, textures, attractions, threats and meanings that we human observers do not have full access to, just as we cannot grasp what sense Derrida's cat makes when she sees his naked body. Elephants have acute senses of smell that inform their perception of their surroundings in a way humans cannot experience; painted dogs have a far more advanced hearing ability that informs their world, and bees see ultraviolet light rays. We can only imagine the richness and diversity, and the 'otherness' of the environment that these other living bodies experience. Recall Uexküll saying 'A new world arises in each bubble' as quoted above. Even within the 'same' space, each different animal will configure the surroundings differently from the rest.

But what if we were to remove a body from its natural lived experience, like taking a wild animal out of the wild? Animal philosopher, Zipporah Weisberg, states that an animal removed

from her wild environment and placed into a new kind of phenomenological relationship that undermines the fulfillment of her functionality, is done a great injustice (Weisberg, 2015). Weisberg's point here is the evolution and functionality of animals have always occurred within their wild environment. It is the wild environment that has shaped the animal. Being, as Merleau-Ponty stated, is a carnal, wild being. By taking the animal out of the wild, one is in essence taking away something fundamental to her being. Recall Merleau-Ponty saying, "the body is not just a thing, but relation to an *Umwelt*." (Merleau-Ponty, 1994: 270) The wildness of an animal is thus not an inherent trait of its body as viewed in isolation, thing-like, but rather a very specific function or dimension of its constitutive relation to its *Umwelt*. Because the animal understands its life projects as they arise out of or are made possible by, the way their body is intertwined with, and operates in the familiar world, when the familiar world is removed, the animal loses their established bodily 'I can's' and thus the fundamental meanings they discern in the world.

- Being-elephant

As a concrete example of such an injustice, we might think of a baby elephant violently removed from his wild herd in Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe and sold to a safari park or zoo in China. This is a genuine practice that has been carried out over the past five years by the Zimbabwean National Parks Authority, ostensibly so that money accrued can go back into conservation to build waterholes and fences in Hwange, but in truth it is for the economic benefit of a few high-ranking government officials (Russo, 2014; Cruise & Russo, 2017; Russo & Cruise, 2018). The elephant, if he doesn't die, will continue to have a relation with his new Umwelt, but the relationship is inevitably mysterious, hostile, impoverished, dysfunctional, and a source of great misery. This is because selves, including animal selves, are co-constituted by their open-ended embodied relationship to the wild surroundings they are involved in. The animal will be alienated from its environment and from other strange living creatures, as much as from its own bodily capacities whose former 'fit' or interrelatedness with the physical surroundings has now also been lost.

As we saw in *Chapter Two* with the sustainable development or economic model, because it strictly adheres to an instrumental value paradigm, it has no way of objecting to the young elephant's capture and translocation because it willfully ignores the critical phenomena of experience and expression within his natural, wild surroundings that provide the essential

elements of being-elephant. Elephants in the wild are highly social beings and form some of the strongest family bonds of all animal species including humans. On their reductionist view, the elephant is being preserved and merely transported. However, from the perspective opened up by Uexküll and Merleau-Ponty, what they translocate is a mere elephant phenotype – in elephant terms, this individual has lost something vital and essential and to its being and well-being.

It is undeniable, even to an unemotive objective description, that by removing the baby elephant from its expressive, life-long bond with a wild environment and its living inhabitants, one is in fact removing his embodied 'wild-world' that makes this elephant an elephant, or a becoming-elephant. It is the chiasmic relationship with the wild that determines how the elephant as embodied functions and operates in his wild environment. Without the natural bonds of a wild herd and the myriad of wild activities that accompany the functionality of the herd, the vital principles that guide the development and functioning of elephants such as touching, communicating vocally, foraging, suckling, sparring, breaking branches off trees and chasing guinea-fowl, a baby elephant that finds himself alone in a concrete cell ceases largely to *be* elephant. Recall Cookson's definition of wildness in section one of this chapter:

> In relation to wildness, an organism's internal quality is improved through the parsimonious arrangement and coordination of one's adaptations and internal drivers, while its external quality is achieved through attunement with one's surroundings. With wildness, an organism gains internal clarity, thereby presenting a consistent face or purpose to which other organisms can adapt (Cookson, 2011: online).

'Wildness', we discussed, refers to the baby elephant's constitutive interconnection to the primordial world that he relies on for his survival and well-being. In the Chinese zoo, he is still an elephant in external appearance but not the elephant as shaped by his natural surroundings. Over time, the enclosed surroundings of the zoo will begin to shape the elephant and his offspring into a new creature which may retain some physical attributes of the elephant but it will lose much of the ways of expression as informed by its relation to the wild of what it means to be-elephant. Inevitably, its existence must from its own perspective have been experienced as greatly depleted of meaning and purpose.

We can see how this ties into Merleau-Ponty's notion of the flesh. The baby elephant is not a separate sum of listed parts but a sensuous body that intertwines with and dynamically embraces his environment. The flesh – the elemental line between the elephant's body and his natural world – is crucial to the development of his being in that the wild environment co-constitutes what it means to be elephant. The constant and continuous intermingling with mud, grass, branches, the rain and sky, siblings, other beings and his family herd all play important roles in forming his 'elephant-ness'. This is not simply about the presence of an elephant intertwining in his Umwelt in the moment, but rather a gradual process of becoming elephant. The flesh is about the evolution of that elephant, his growth and development in response to a certain environment or Umwelt over time, and about the intricacies of the hidden and often complex social bonds and intricate language structures he shares with other elephants, which makes or his an inherently social and relational existence. Take all of that away, and the elephant's existence becomes infinitely impoverished, depleted of meaning.

Uexküll introduces another point. The ecologist sheds further light on how animals try to create meaningful worlds for themselves in his discussion of 'objects' in those animals' worlds – both living and inanimate – as 'carriers of meaning'. He explains that a 'thing', be it a branch of a tree or the young elephants' playful sibling, becomes a carrier of meaning as soon as it enters into a relationship with the animal (Uexküll, 2010: 140), and every carrier of meaning in reverse becomes the complement of the animal (Uexküll, 2010: 146). Indeed, animals (including humans) never actually relate to 'things' and other beings per se, never relate to them as mere, brute objects, but instead only to them as carriers of meaning, which they always co-constitute (Uexküll, 2010: 140). For example, the powerful and deep flowing body of water of the Zambezi River does not appear in the baby elephant's lived perception as a mere object. Rather, he responds to it in terms of meaning: as either something that may pleasurably cool his body and slate his thirst; or as something threatening, an element that may drown him or one that hides hungry crocodiles from view.

However, the baby elephant cooped up in a cage in a Chinese zoo far from his African savannah-world has to experience a series of life-shattering and identity-shattering changes. Each time in his relation to the surroundings he finds himself in, he has to confront new and unfamiliar carriers of meaning, initially likely devoid of meaning or sense – in the truck, the airplane, the cold concrete, the human hurting him with a bull-hook. These carriers take him further and further away from his true being or his evolutionary developed Umwelt, a wild

environment that has shaped what it means to be and become elephant. By the time the elephant reaches his enclosure in China, the objects around him are likely to carry even less meaning for the elephant. If he survives, he becomes a shell of both his former and his potential self, since he ceases functioning *as an elephant*. He exists in form alone, or in a form that is not elephant-like because he does not live in his wild world.

Uexküll's characterization of animals as embodied purveyors of meaning accords ostensibly mundane or instinctual activities such as foraging for and consuming food, rolling in the mud, and frolicking, with a kind of existential depth – that brute wild carnal being of depth, shared also by the waves and forests that Merleau-Ponty speaks of (as mentioned in *Chapter Four*). These dimensions of 'animal' life is something that sustainable utility practices completely ignore. In the quest for preserving animals for the sake of numbers, there is no or little consideration for the dynamic, relational embodiment of the juvenile elephant in his wild world among members of his social group, or for his way of being in the world and of becoming-elephant.

As we can see, Uexküll's study, despite his insistence on an animal-subject similar to that of the body-subject in the early Merleau-Ponty, resonates closely with Merleau-Ponty's later phenomenology in that it detaches itself from the reductionist subject perspective and provides an analysis from the perspective of the wild animal in his or her wild Umwelt. From this perspective, the animal self or subject is only itself in relation and in dynamic interaction with its Umwelt. This brings us back to Merleau-Ponty's chiasm of the flesh – the point where the elephant-body and the surrounding world intermesh. The being and becoming of elephant "is not matter, is not mind, is not substance…it is midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an 'element' of Being. Not a fact or a sum of facts" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 139-40).

The element of being is a function of the 'flesh' which both differentiates the living body of the elephant from his Umwelt and at the same time connects the elephant inextricably and constitutively to that same Umwelt. It is the very midway between the elephant and the world, which simultaneously allows for the elephant and his Umwelt to appear as such. The term 'chiasm', applied here, refers to this more general 'encroachment' or crossing over between the two irreducible aspects of the body: the body in and being in, touching and being touched,

seeing and seen. The distinction within the body between the sensible and sentient aspects has a parallel in every being, namely the dehiscence into visible (sensible) and invisible (meaningful) dimensions. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty sees the body as a prime exemplar of the nature of the sensible, material world as a whole.

3. Language of being

In the last paragraph of his final completed chapter *The Intertwining – The Chiasm*, Merleau-Ponty wrote that the language of Being "is the voice of the things, the waves and forests" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 155). One could argue that the voice of things – the world or Umwelt – is what Merleau-Ponty meant as the 'wild world' or 'wilderness' or 'biosphere' – the world that encompasses a vast, interpenetrating web of perceptions and sensations of countless wild beings supported by meadows, streams, oceans and the icy mountain wind. This language goes beyond mere sounds or utterances but includes bodily expression and human languages too.

As any ecologist will tell you, the biosphere is an ecosystem composed of living organisms and the inorganic factors from which they derive energy and nutrients. In typically linear scientific language biologists describe the biosphere thus:

> All life on Earth depends ultimately upon green plants, as well as upon water. Plants utilize sunlight in a process called photosynthesis to produce the food upon which animals feed and to provide, as a by-product, oxygen, which most animals require for respiration. At first, the oceans and the lands were teeming with large numbers of a few kinds of simple single-celled organisms, but slowly plants and animals of increasing complexity evolved. Interrelationships developed so that certain plants grew in association with certain other plants, and animals associated with the plants and with one another to form communities of organisms, including those of forests, grasslands, deserts, dunes, bogs, rivers, and lakes. Living communities and their nonliving environment are inseparably interrelated and constantly interact upon each other (Thompson et al., 24th September 2018: online).

The description above, while it reads in typically linear fashion, later on starts to speak a little more of a flowing nature of the life-world: "In a stand of pines, there may be many species of insects, of birds, of mammals, each a separate breeding unit but each dependent on the others

for its continued existence." The interconnectedness in the rigidly objective description is palpable and so is the description of a flow of movement: "the biosphere includes the cascade of energy, nutrients, water, and gases" and "micro-organisms that break down the remains of plants and animals into simpler components for recycling in the biosphere." This once again emphasises that describing the natural environment cannot be done accurately by listing a sum of the parts without drawing on the fluctuating, dynamic phenomenological aspects of the life-world.

I will, in this section, break down the argument into sub-sections to demonstrate how this language of being develops. In sub-section 3.1 (*The Call of the Wild*), I will introduce Aldo Leopold's notion of thinking like a mountain to show just how important the interconnection of the wild environment is to shaping expression and communication both with humans and wild animals, and vice versa. Sub-section 3.2 (*All for One and One for All*) emphasises that all bodies in the environment are equally important in shaping that environment. In sub-section 3.3 (*Poetic Ecology*), I will show how phenomenology begins to change the language of objective science to enhance the description of wild animals and the wild environment and in the final sub-section (*Merleau-Ponty's Language of Being*) I explore Merleau-Ponty's own concept of language.

3.1. The call of the wild

Aldo Leopold, while most likely unfamiliar with philosophical theories such as phenomenology, provides one of the most elucidating actual phenomenological accounts of what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the language of being. He calls it 'thinking like a mountain' and it is a good example of how the dynamic environment entices a living body – be it a wolf, a deer, or a coyote – to respond to its ways:

> A deep chesty bawl echoes from rimrock to rimrock, rolls down the mountain, and fades into the far blackness of the night. It is an outburst of wild defiant sorrow, of contempt for all the adversaries of the world. Every living thing (and perhaps many a dead one as well) pays heed to that call. To the deer it is a reminder of the way of all flesh, to the pine a forecast of midnight scuffles and of blood upon the snow, to the coyote a promise of gleanings to come, to the cowman a threat of red ink at the bank, to the hunter a challenge of fang against bullet. Yet behind these obvious

and immediate hopes and fears there lies a deeper meaning, known only to the mountain itself. Only the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the howl of a wolf. Those unable to decipher the hidden meaning know nevertheless that it is there, for it is felt in all wolf country, and distinguishes that country from all other land. It tingles in the spine of all who hear wolves by night, or who scan their tracks by day. Even without sight or sound of wolf, it is implicit in a hundred small events: the midnight whinny of a pack horse, the rattle of rolling rocks, the bound of a fleeing deer, the way shadows lie under the spruces. Only the ineducable tyro can fail to sense the presence or absence of wolves, or the fact that mountains have a secret opinion about them (Leopold, 1970: 137-138).

This description of the natural environment goes beyond just mere descriptions from sight and sound. The first is the notion of extended time (the mountain has lived long enough). Again, this points back to Merleau-Ponty's chiasm of the flesh. The mountain relates to all that dwell on her slopes. The invisible bond and the interaction with the living bodies are co-constituted by the mountain. It is almost as if the inanimate mountain takes on a living form. This is something an objective account never expresses. This extract does not describe the wild environment as a static entity but rather as one that moves and flows (rolling rocks and fleeing deer). More specifically, Leopold's description of wolves in the depths of the wilderness is far more open and multi-dimensional than that of the strictly empirical or linear one in that he describes ambiguities like mountains having a secret opinion about wolves, an ambiguity that an objective description discards as irrelevant. This kind of language describes Merleau-Ponty's chiasmic relationship between the mountain and the wild animals that dwell on its slopes. Leopold's continued description of wolves highlights the point further.

- Wolves

Aldo Leopold, writing this account in 1949, was reflecting back on an experience he had had in 1909 when he was leading a crew for the newly formed United States Forest Service that was carrying out an inventory in Arizona and New Mexico. On one day:

we were eating lunch on a high rimrock, at the foot of which a turbulent river elbowed its way. We saw what we thought was a doe fording the torrent, her breast awash in white water. When she climbed the bank toward us and shook out her tail,

we realized our error: it was a wolf. A half-dozen others, evidently grown pups, sprang from the willows and all joined in a welcoming mêlée of wagging tails and playful maulings. What was literally a pile of wolves writhed and tumbled in the center of an open flat at the foot of our rimrock. In those days we had never heard of passing up a chance to kill a wolf. In a second we were pumping lead into the pack, but with more excitement than accuracy: how to aim a steep downhill shot is always confusing. When our rifles were empty, the old wolf was down, and a pup was dragging a leg into impassable slide-rocks. We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes – something known only to her and the mountain (Leopold, 1970: 138).

Like Derrida, and Levinas to some extent, Leopold acknowledges the gaze / face of the wolf, specifically the acknowledgement that the wolf was trying to make some sense of him through her eyes as much as Leopold was trying to understand the wolf trying to understand him. Yet again, we see the sentient-sensible reversal play out between the gazer and the gazed upon – hunter at wolf, wolf at hunter.

With Leopold, the gaze occurs in a far more encompassing Merleau-Pontian sense, however because what Leopold is discovering is not just a bi-dimensional encounter between hunter and hunted, but a sensation through the dying eyes of the wolf of seeing something bigger, more comprehensive and longer lasting. This 'something' in the gaze changed his outlook on the world forever because it spoke to him of a larger world to which some form of obligation, deference or respect was owed. The specific experience "rooted for Leopold a budding recognition of the living quality of the earth as a whole" which prompted him out of a dogmatic slumber and from then on he "strove to give voice to a depth of nature that transcends the grasp of the kind of scientific ecology in which he was steeped" (Holredge, 2016: 15). At the time that he killed that wolf – young "and full of trigger-itch" – the prevailing consensus among conservationists (and which sadly remains the utilitarian thinking among many private game ranchers and conservationists to this day) was that "fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise" (Leopold, 1970: 138). Leopold sensed that "neither the wolf, nor the mountain agreed with such a view." We have not learned to think like a mountain, he wrote (Leopold, 1970: 139). What he meant was that the conservation policy of humans meddling in nature in this way was wrong, and that we had to start looking not only at the way

we perceive, but also, following Uexküll's studies of animals, at *the way we think nature itself perceives our interferences*. In the subsequent years, Leopold watched "state after state extirpate its wolves". Then he watched the wolf-less mountains "wrinkle with a maze of new deer trails" with "every edible bush and seedling browsed, first to an anemic desuetude, and then to death." The trees became defoliated and finally, the denuded, dusty slopes of the mountain could no longer support the deer and they too disappeared "dead of their own too-much" (Leopold, 1970: 139). Hence, lamented Leopold, "we now have dustbowls, and rivers washing the future into the sea" (Leopold, 1970: 140). This is the long-term picture of devastation to which the long-living mountain had access, of which it had a secret knowledge.

In fact, the extirpation of wolves had a far greater impact on the mountain than even Leopold could have imagined. The insistence of looking at the entire chiasmic nature of the life-world, both animate and inanimate, rather than a list of determinate objects, revealed what environmental writer, George Monbiot, has described as "one of the most exciting scientific findings over the past half-century" (Monbiot, 2017: YouTube). What was discovered, as Merleau-Ponty had described, was the chiasmic cross-reversibility between living beings and the environment. I showed how the wild environment shapes what it means to be and become a rhinoceros or an elephant, but here with the case of wolves, it is they that shape the wild environment too.

What Monbiot refers to as a 'trophic cascade' (Monbiot, 2017: YouTube) might also be interpreted through Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'chiasm'. It was this phenomenon that occurred after the reintroduction of wolves into the Yellowstone National Park in the United States in 1995. It was the first time the area had seen wolves since they had been extirpated by the ilk of the young Leopold seventy years prior. A trophic cascade is an ecological process which starts at the top of the food-chain and cascades all the way down to the bottom (Monbiot, 2017: YouTube). Wolves are the apex predator at the top of the food-chain (as the young Leopold was acutely aware in 1909) with deer somewhat down toward the bottom, just above plants. The interesting point is the cascade is not a linear downward movement but something far more mutual and intertwined. What the young Leopold became aware of as he got older was that wolves don't just kill some species like deer, they in fact give life to many more other species thanks to the chiasmic interconnectedness of all animals within their Umwelt. Here is the story of the wolves of Yellowstone National Park:

Before the wolves were introduced, there was (just as Leopold had noticed) an overpopulation of deer and elk within the park that, despite human attempts to cull the numbers, had reduced much of the vegetation to almost nothing. However, as soon as the wolves were introduced, even though few in number, "they began to have some of the most remarkable effects" (Monbiot, 2017: YouTube). First, the wolves killed some of the deer and elk, which in turn provided an opportunity for an increase of new growth in various plants from grasses to trees. The latter had been indiscriminately browsed by the elk, who now avoided the thickets where they could be easily surprised by wolves. The herds also avoided the open areas such as the valley floors and gorges where they could likewise be seen and then trapped by the wolves. The change in behavior of the deer and elk radically altered the vegetation. Forests and thickets regenerated everywhere as a result of the herbivores avoiding these areas. The return of the trees, in turn, brought an influx of birds – the numbers of song and migratory birds increased greatly – as well as did beavers who rely on trees for their own survival. Beavers are ecosystem engineers, their dams create habitats for other species like otters, muskrats, ducks, fish, amphibians and reptiles, all of whom made a comeback. The wolves also thinned out the coyote population and as a result of that, the number of rabbits and mice increased which, in turn, meant more hawks, weasels, foxes and badgers. Ravens and bald eagles arrived to feed on the carrion of the carcasses left behind by the wolves. The numbers of bears increased too, partly from the increased carrion and partly because of a proliferation of berries from the new trees and shrubs.

In a typical Merleau-Pontian chiasm of the flesh, this shows how important and formative wolves are to the wild environment as much as the wild environment is important to them. But the chiasm goes much further. Leopold could never have known (although probably could imagine) that the reintroduction of wolves had an even more profound impact, even beyond a living ecological one. The wolves had an influence on the behavior of the inanimate world too, most significantly the rivers. Due to the increase of vegetation on the riverbanks and a regeneration of beaver numbers, the rivers became more stabilized. They began to meander less, there was less erosion from the banks, channels narrowed and more pools formed thus further creating a better environment for the myriad of thriving species in and around the rivers. The renewed growth of grasslands on the valley floors and trees on the mountainsides also prevented soil erosion, which had been widespread before the reintroduction of wolves (Monbiot, 2017: YouTube). The wolves, therefore, not only transformed the living ecosystem of the Yellowstone National Park but also its physical geography. The process of gradual

decline foreseen by the mountain in Leopold's description, could be reversed to a large extent, by reintroducing the wolf, whose disappearance had been mourned by the mountain.

Overall, the entire health of the park improved drastically, all thanks to a few wolves being reintroduced back into the life-world. This is what Leopold meant by thinking like a mountain, which is holistical and long-term, and highlights something that a study in Merleau-Pontian phenomenology points to, namely conserving wild animals is not simply to preserve atomistic numbers of some species (the deer) from others (the wolves) for anthropocentric gratification (hunting). The wolf is no longer only a predator to be killed for ultimate human benefit. It is also not simply part of a chiasmic relationship with other living beings and the natural environment in both living and non-living forms. It is the wild presence of being in the wild landscape that makes itself known through all the wild, purposeful interactions between wolves, deer, ravens, beavers, fish, trees, water, soil and the mountain.

3.2. All for one and one for all

African elephants operate in the biosphere in a similar manner to wolves. Biologists often refer to African elephants as ecosystem 'architects' and 'gardeners' (Selier et al., 2016: 6). They break branches off trees, sometimes the entire tree itself, that then creates microhabitats for seedlings and small vertebrates, like dwarf mongooses and invertebrate animals like butterflies. Elephant dung is a food source for dung beetles and a variety of birds like the spurfowl and quails, which in turn nourish the soil and provide a seed dispersal mechanism for many tree and plant species. Other bird species such as the ground hornbill and the pearl-spotted owlet rely on elephants to create nesting sites in hollows of the old dead trees knocked over by them. In the dry months, elephants dig holes in the dry riverbeds to access water, which is then available to all other water-dependent species. Their large size creates pathways through the thickets for other smaller species like impala to follow and even for humans when hiking through the African bush. Through their feeding habits they make browse available for other browsers, they maintain structure in savannahs by reducing the tree to grass ratio and create nutrient rich microclimates underneath dead trees. Overall their effect is to increase and help support biodiversity, from mites to mammals (Selier et al., 2016: 6). Again, this highlights how important species like elephants are for shaping the natural environment and vice versa – an elephant 'elephant' most eloquently and wildly if it can engage in all these activities in its preferred habitat or Umwelt.

The African elephant, like the wolf, is also an 'umbrella species' in that it requires large areas of suitable habitat to maintain viable populations that support an array of associated species (Carignan & Villard 2002 in Selier et al., 2016: 6). Elephants have vast ranges and require large intact areas to maintain their populations. Selier et al. state that by creating such vast areas in which we protect elephants, "we ultimately protect many other species that share their habitat with elephants" (Selier et al., 2016: 6). However, in South Africa, the high level of fencing, especially in the many smaller private reserves, as well as natural resource manipulation, such as the provisioning of perennial artificial water supplies (which are evident even in the largest of the national parks), impacts negatively on the movement patterns and consequently on the intensity of the wild habitat used by elephants. This leads directly to wilderness degradation. Wild habitat degradation in small fenced reserves, in conjunction with severe droughts, negatively affects elephants and other animals in the area. Within South Africa, there are only two elephant subpopulations that can move naturally as fences restrict movements elsewhere[35] (Selier et al., 2016: 9).

Yet, it is not only the charismatic megafauna that should be viewed in this chiasmic light. I have briefly mentioned dung beetles. They are as important as elephants in dispersing and breaking down the tons of dung dropped by all animals, not just elephants. The great forests and savannahs of Africa are fertilised by legions of dung beetles rolling, dispersing and burying dung. The rolling also scatters the seeds necessary for growth and rejuvenation of vegetation. Take the lowly dung beetle out of the ecosystem and we will likely see the whole system collapse. Leopold himself uses the example of birds in a similar way, beginning with the ruffed grouse:

> Everybody knows, for example, that the autumn landscape in the north woods is the land, plus a red maple, plus a ruffed grouse. In terms of conventional physics, the grouse represents only a millionth of either the mass or the energy of an acre. Yet subtract the grouse and the whole thing is dead (Leopold, 1970: 146).

[35] These are elephants in the Great Kruger Park area who can move between South Africa. Zimbabwe and Mozambique; and elephants in northern Kwa-Zulu Natal who range freely in a narrow corridor between South African and southern Mozambique.

Leopold speaks here of a 'motive power' (Leopold, 1970: 146). He states that "the beauty of the world lies not in the particular loveliness of the grouse itself, but in the unity of the life force of which it is an essential part" (Leopold, 1970: 146). 'Motive power' is the dynamic pulsating force of the chiasmic relationship between the bodily expressions of an animal shaping its natural environment and vice versa *over time*. Similar to the movement within a trophic cascade, 'motive power' means that the enduring living presence of a species triggers a domino-like movement into the larger whole of the wild landscape in that the landscape functions as a whole thanks to the actions of that animal. Whether it is American north woods, the wolf of the mountains, "the blue jay of the hickory groves, the whiskey jack of the muskegs, the piñonero of juniper foothills" (Leopold, 1970: 146-147) or countless other unseen and unheard of creatures, they are constantly shaping and being shaped by the wild environment that they inhabit. Of these activities of wild animals, is the importance of the passage of time as David Wood writes:

> On the basis of our experience of time and the temporality of our experience, we grasp the continuous identities of things, the coordination of their pulsing rhythms, and many virtual and imaginative ways in which even in the instant we enter a connectedness that transcends the moment (Wood, 2001: 4).

By thinking of time "as a series of discrete now-points, or simply 'life in the present', relational complexity is dead" (Wood, 2001: 3). It is the invisible part of time – the past and future – of how a being, such as an elephant or wolf, moves through the process of becoming and being in their wild surroundings that have long-term ramifications for the wild environment. The presence and the presently visible hides what is at stake in the longer run, as Leopold has also shown. For example, the presence of an elephant knocking over a tree hides the fact that the fallen tree will shape and create a new world in time, not just for the future of elephants, but for all the grazers, browsers, insectivores and seed-planters whose futures depend on the fact the tree was knocked over. Thus, through the process of time – Leopold's 'motive power' – a being is inextricably intertwined with its surroundings and vice versa. The long-term invisible temporal movements of the grouse, the wolf, the dung beetle and the elephant are critical for the survival of the wild environment as a whole, just as the intricate and dynamic interrelations that make up the wild environment nourishes and gives life to these animals over time. Wood states:

What the ecological perspective teaches us is that things with no obvious point to their existence play a role in the life-cycles of other beings. It teaches us that the survival of a particular species may depend on the preservation of an environment with very specific features (Wood, 2001: 16).

Every animal therefore plays a vital role in the ecosystem as much as the ecosystem plays a vital role in their being and becoming. It is a case, using Dumas' famous line, of 'all for one and one for all'. Even the mosquito plays an essential role. There are 3,500 named species of mosquito. They live on almost every continent and in every habitat and serve important functions in numerous ecosystems (Fang, 2010). The larvae of mosquitoes live in water and provide food for fish and other wildlife, including larger larvae of other species such as dragonflies. The larvae themselves eat microscopic organic matter in the water, helping to recycle it. Adult mosquitoes make up part of the diet of many insect-eating animals, such as birds, bats, adult dragonflies and spiders. They also help pollinate a wide variety of plants (Miller, 2012).

Of course, dare I say it, they are also quite effective at eradicating humans, which, as we know, are far worse than deer as over-populated destroyers of the life-world. Malaria infects some 247-million people worldwide annually and kills nearly one million. Mosquitoes also spread yellow fever, dengue fever, Japanese encephalitis, Rift Valley fever, Chikungunya virus and West Nile virus. However, given the huge humanitarian and economic[36] consequences of mosquito-spread disease, few [humans] would suggest that the costs of an increased human population would outweigh the benefits of a healthier one. The notion of every creature having a vital place in nature may not be enough to plead the mosquito's case.

Having said that, there are some unintended negative costs on other species, especially the more vulnerable ones, resulting from the human attempt to eradicate mosquitoes. A few years ago, I spent some time on the shores of Lake Malawi. It is a particularly fascinating lake in that it is isolated from the other lakes of the rift valley with no major river or tributary flowing into it. Lake Malawi has over five hundred species of cichlids – small colourful fish that have

[36] Countries freed of their high malaria burden, for example in sub-Saharan Africa, might recover the 1.3% of growth in gross domestic product that the World Health Organization estimates they are cost by the disease each year, potentially accelerating their development (Fang, 2010).

evolved from a single species around fifteen thousand years ago, which, in evolutionary time, is amazingly quick. The rapid 'radiation' from a single parent species into many closely related species evolved with different modifications to allow them to specialise in various aspects of the lake's habitat. The Malawians call the brightest ones *mbuna* meaning 'rockfish', who have evolved to adapt to the protective rocky caves and gullies near the shore, and *utaka* have evolved to exist only in open water. There are many more species. These fish are highly endemic in that they exist here and nowhere else in the world. Lake Malawi therefore is a treasure-trove of endemic fish and contains more species of freshwater fish than any other body of freshwater in the world, greater than the combined freshwater species of Europe and North America, so it is essential that they and their habitat are protected from overfishing and habitat destruction (Cruise, 2012: 406).

Unfortunately, that is where our headlong quest to eradicate mosquitoes comes in. Lake Malawi, given the large body of water in tropical Africa, is also one of the worse places for malaria. Consequently, I witnessed European members of a major global health organization make a big fanfare of handing out dozens of mosquito nets to all the families of a lake-side village. This spectacle was repeated village after village until thousands of nets had been received along the length of the lake. But the villagers, already long-used to living in a malaria-infested area, discovered a better use for them – as fishing nets. Thanks to the fine weave of the mesh, their haul of fish doubled in size and now included the rarer, smaller cichlids and all the juveniles, thus doubling the threat to an already-endangered number of species of fish (Cruise, 2012: 407).

3.3. Poetic ecology

Poetic ecology is both about listening to nature's voice and and our expression about nature. Wood says there is a contrast between a precise science and a field science (Wood, 2001: 16). A precise science fundamentally idealises its objects, and in so doing, it can develop highly sophisticated theoretical structures – most notably in mathematics. A field science, one that deals with 'experience' and 'embodiment', deals with the interaction of many quite different sorts of things, allowing no consistent method of idealisation or abstraction, and inhibiting complex axiological development. Ecology is a field science (Wood, 2001: 16), and an eco-phenomenological pursuit, as demonstrated by Uexküll and Leopold, reinforces this

complexity further. This complexity (?) is shown clearly in this extract of Leopold's, called *The Song of The Gavilan*:

> This song of the waters is audible to every ear, but there is other music in these hills, by no means audible to all. To hear even a few notes of it you must first live here for a long time, and you must know the speech of hills and rivers. Then on a still night, when the campfire is low and the Pleiades have climbed over rimrocks, sit quietly and listen for a wolf to howl, and think hard of everything you have seen and tried to understand. Then you may hear it — a vast pulsing harmony — its score inscribed on a thousand hills, its notes the lives and deaths of plants and animals, its rhythms spanning the seconds and the centuries (Leopold, 1970: 158).

One can glean from this extract that Leopold does not view ecology as a precise science. He does not list the sum of the parts in a chronological or Linnean way but instead describes things in a different dimension. Leopold speaks here of the importance of time, of movement, rhythms, sounds, the invisible and the barely audible and barely detectable. Craig Holredge states that Leopold "articulates a sensory-supersensory experience of the natural world" (Holredge, 2016: 16). This is no longer science in the usual empirical sense. As one commentator calls it, it is 'poetic science' (Berthold, 2004 in Holredge, 2016: 16). Leopold's experience cannot be described in simple empirical language, because such language tends to ignore the full phenomenological force of the experience, which prompts Leopold to instead paint vivid images that suggest what is really at work in nature. This is something that we can perceive if we relearn to engage with the wild in the right way. Holredge maintains that Leopold is hinting at what is needed to prepare for such experiences: You need to connect yourself with a place over extended time by being immersed in it and being attentive and participate by noticing and taking in what is happening around you as I was able to do in the Kalahari Desert. Leopold learned to see how mountains 'think' and how rivers, trees, deer and wolves are all dynamically interwoven. "He didn't just think about nature in terms of human needs, but he was able to think *with* nature" (Holredge, 2016: 16; emphasis added). Holredge points out that:

> Conventional ecological thinking considers nature's beings and happenings in terms of causes and effects and aims to explain all the connections. Leopold could never have written about the wolf or the landscape of the Gavilan River in the way he did had his mind been confined to seeing nature only in terms of causal links,

food webs or energy flows. In these essays [*The Sand County Almanac*] he is portraying and not explaining nature. To do this you have to step back from causal thinking, renounce the drive to explain, and focus your mind on what shows itself, what speaks in the connections (Holredge, 2016: 16).

Thus, Leopold, in his portrayal rather than explanation of the wild environment, points to a new way of encountering it. This kind of portrayal of ecology points toward a new ethic, one that shows that things with no obvious point to their existence (like mosquitoes) play a relational and co-constitutional role in the lives of all other beings. This kind of portrayal, as Wood writes, "teaches us that the life, death and flourishing of things is tied up with other factors, conditions and creatures in ways for which we typically do not have a map, and under variability tolerances we do not know" (Wood, 2001: 16). Wood goes on to state that "we can study these things, of course. But as much as ecology is a science, it is also a counsel of ethical caution, precisely because it deals with the interaction of widely disparate kinds of things" (Wood, 2001: 16). And so, through a renewal of the description of ecological functions – a new poetic ecology – now begins the foundation of a new conservation of wildlife ethic. The interaction and interconnectedness of all life, not the simple preservation of numbers through instrumental value, thereby becomes the focal point in a conservation of wildlife.

3.4. Merleau-Ponty's language of being

Leopold's poetic ecology is related to what Merleau-Ponty was getting at when he spoke of the chiasmic exchange between the living body and the world that surrounds it. In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), Merleau-Ponty started to understand that human language was a carnal phenomenon, rooted in sensorial experience of and with the world. In the chapter entitled *The Body as Expression, and Speech*, Merleau-Ponty writes that the body's first act of communication with the world is a spontaneous gesture toward it. When I feel anger, my body responds in an angry fashion, my fists clench, my shoulders stiffen, the jaw sets hard and my face reddens as I square up to that which angers me. This is a gesture that spontaneously communicates the emotion I feel at that precise moment.

But the communication reverses. The angry gesture speaks directly back to the human body of the perceiver and is understood without any interior reflection, as Merleau-Ponty explains:

Faced with an angry or threatening gesture, I have no need, in order to understand it, to [mentally] recall the feelings which I myself experienced when I used these gestures on my own account … I do not see anger or a threatening attitude as a psychic fact hidden behind a gesture, I read anger in it. *The gesture does not make me think of anger*, it is anger itself (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 184).

Speech, says Merleau-Ponty, is just such a gesture. It is a vocal gesticulation where the meaning is inseparable from the sound. It originates from the body's natural capacity to resonate with other bodies and the environment as a whole to hear and be heard in the world of flesh:

the meaning of words must be finally induced by the words themselves, or more exactly, their conceptual meaning must be formed by a kind of subtraction from a *gestural meaning* which is immanent in speech (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 184).

Speech, language and meaning, therefore, are not external mediums that we arbitrarily assign to a sound or word, but instead are entwined in the sensory world. Language is not just a set of arbitrary and agreed upon words or 'signs' linked by a formal system of syntactic and grammatical rules that represent actual things, actions and events. As children, humans do not learn language mentally as a coded system separate from the world, but bodily. By laughing with joy at the sensation of warm water in a bath, squealing in frustration at not being able to reach the cookie jar on the counter, babbling with our pets and mimicking the sound of our parents, we gradually begin to enter into specific melodies, accents and echoes of our language.

… the whole of the spoken language surrounding the child snaps him up like a whirlwind, tempts him by its internal articulations (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 40).

Thus, we acquire new words and phrases through tonality, bodily and sensory, the way they feel as they roll off the tongue, the way it connects with the body's gestural emotion. Abram writes that Merleau-Ponty took linguistic meaning to be "rooted in the felt experience induced by specific sounds and sound-shapes as they echo and contrast with one another, each language a kind of song, a particular way of 'singing the world'" (Abram, 1997: 76). Thus, we share, on his understanding, the bodily roots of language with all other embodied creatures, creatures who are similarly fleshy, and can therefore also hear and be heard in the world.

I spent a few years living in France. When I first moved there, I could not understand the words of the French language but I could understand their meaning on one particular occasion. While sitting at a street-side café in the Mediterranean town of Nice where I lived, I saw two friends meeting after what must have been a long time. The sounds were clearly of surprise and elation. Their tonal inflections were like the song of two birds singing to each other, like a musical duet. The interlocuters echoed each other in gesture and sound as they tuned into each other, remembering each other and expressing their emotion at meeting each other after so long. As an Anglophone eavesdropper, I was still able to understand precisely what was being communicated. This is because it was not the explicit meaning of the words, as much as the phonetic melody, together with the bodily gestures of the conversation, that carried the bulk of the communication. The explicit meanings of the words were in fact secondary to the carnal primacy of vocally gesticulating them. As Abram, referring to Merleau-Ponty directly, states:

> it is the sensuous, gestural significance of spoken sounds – their direct bodily resonance – that makes verbal communication possible at all. It is this expressive potency – the soundful influence of spoken words upon the sensing body – that supports all the more abstract and conventional meanings that we assign to words (Abram, 1997: 79-80).

Here we find a crucial element of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language. By affirming that linguistic meaning is bodily expressive, gestural and melodic, we find that *language and meaning-making are not exclusively human properties*. The communication within a flock of babblers in a tree, the deep rumbling of a herd of elephants as they browse through a thicket of trees, the yip of a jackal and the mournful cry of a nightjar late at night reverberate with a significance that is not much different from our own conversations. We realise that they too speak a language, a language like ours that is rooted in, and responsive to, the bodily experience with the world together with others. For Merleau-Ponty, even the most abstract of meanings is ultimately rooted in embodied, concrete experience.

Like humans, lions, as a good example, are social by nature and have similar communication behaviours. They make a variety of calls, each with a complex variety of inflections of volume, intensity, tempo and tone. These include roars, grunts, moans, growls, snarls, meows, purrs, hums, puffs and woofs. Each sound and how it is delivered has a different meaning. When a mother lioness is looking for her cubs, she will call very softly for them. The cubs recognise

this sound and call back to her to show where they are. Lions are famous for their deep resonating roars that can be heard up to eight kilometers away. They roar for a number of reasons; advertising territorial ownership, intimidation of rivals, locating pride members and strengthening social bonds. Roaring is most commonly done when the lions are most active, and as such can be heard mostly at night, especially just before dawn. Like the two people greeting each other at the café in Nice, lions do not only communicate with each other vocally. The act is often accompanied by bodily gesticulation. In fact, lions perform a very similar greeting ceremony to humans, especially after a lengthy separation; or to reaffirm social ties and confirm pride membership. It begins with a pair of lions approaching each other, often moaning or grunting and moving their lips, before rubbing their heads together, and moving on to rubbing each other's sides, usually with the tail held high or draped over the other lion, similar to a pair of humans hugging, minus (in our case) the very expressive tail. As with most mammals, human included, when lions feel threatened, they show off their teeth and try to make themselves look as big as possible by standing on their tiptoes. If a dominant male wants to show another pride member, say one of his cubs, that he is not happy, he will give him a sharp swat with his paw or a gentle bite to the neck. He doesn't want to hurt the cub much; just to let the little fellow know he has stepped out of line. To express they are happy and relaxed in each other's company, lions will lick or gnaw softly at each other.

Importantly, such communication is not only restricted to living beings. To the sensing body, *all phenomena, even rivers, trees and mountains, are animate* in some sense because they *solicit participation of the senses*. In Africa, elephants' physiognomy and expression are different depending on whether they dwell in a forest or a savannah biome. Forest elephants have developed to be smaller in size and have narrow tusks to better move through the dense foliage. They also browse rather than graze, whereas savannah elephants are bulkier, have wider outspread tusks and graze more. There is also much more jostling and sparring on the open plains, with herds being larger and typically far more spread out, than the elephants in forests who stick close to each other in small family groups. Forest elephants tend to be far more secretive.

The inanimate natural world helps to determine and shape human expression too. In the chapter *The Body as Expression, and Speech* Merleau-Ponty writes:

> It is the body which points out, and which speaks…This disclosure [of the body's immanent expressiveness]…extends, as we shall see, to the whole sensible world, and our gaze, prompted by the experience of our own body, will discover in all other 'objects' the miracle of expression (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 184).

Thus, we speak of howling winds, whispering willows, babbling brooks and rumbling thunder while, in return, our own language is nourished by the sounds of the natural world. Onomatopoeic words like 'whoosh', 'splash', 'wash', 'hush', 'rush' and 'knock', 'block', 'rock' are good examples of our carnal reciprocity with the inanimate-animate environment. For Merleau-Ponty, human language originates from the continuous interplay between the living body and the natural world – "language 'belongs' to the animate landscape as much as it 'belongs' to ourselves" (Abram, 1997: 82). With lions, one of the reasons they roar mostly at dawn, is because then the ambient temperatures across the African savannah or the Kalahari Desert are at their coolest. The denser, cooler still air enables the sound to be carried much further, thus allowing pride members to locate each other more effectively. In this sense too, the language of lions, this perceptual participation, is co-determined by the complexion of their surrounding environment, as it is co-determined by the bodily and vocal capacities and instinctual directedness upon their environment.

Merleau-Ponty makes a distinction between genuine, expressive, poetic language of the land and a language that simply repeats established formulas, like the contemporary sterilized approach of a Cartesian or objective manner in describing wild animals and the natural world. The latter carries little meaning in the expression of words and functions solely on the memory of the former. This 'expressionless' language, however, is treated as an established institution, but it is one that must first establish itself on the basis of expressive language of the land – the truly meaningful one. All scientific language is finally rooted in lived, embodied experience, however much scientific and 'objectifying' language may want to purge itself of such. Authentic expressive, 'wild', language is inherently poetic and creative in that it also uses established words in a variety of unique ways (as we saw with Derrida's manipulation of diacritics previously, and with Leopold's creative and evocative descriptions of the wilderness which start to do justice to its enigmatically complex nature). This creativity alters the established language structure to move and gesticulate with it, subjecting the whole structure to what Merleau-Ponty called a "coherent deformation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 39-83). Language is alive and open, because it is continually becoming and then altered time and again.

This 'poetic productivity' then is a carnal medium with living roots in our perceptual participation of the world around us (Abram, 1997: 84). This is why we should speak of 'poetic ecology' or 'eco-phenomenological poetry' rather than simply 'language'.

It is important to understand that Merleau-Ponty, particularly in his later writings, made it clear that human language arises from a world "whose wild participatory logic ramifies and elaborates itself in language" (Abram, 1997: 84). Language and meaning, therefore, are directly related to the earth's ecology. It is, returning once again to Merleau-Ponty in the final paragraph in the *The Visible and The Invisible*, "the very voice of the things, the waves, and the forests" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 155).

4.   *Ukama*: the interdependence of all that exists

Many years ago, while camping in Hwange, Zimbabwe's largest national park, I discovered a relatively unknown African philosophical concept that epitomises Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and how all that exists is in some way intertwined with the natural world. I had arrived at a remote camp deep in the park to find an old Shona man living there. He was in charge of maintaining the campsite, which was little more than a designated patch under a large Marula tree. As I pitched the tent, the man went into the bush to collect some firewood for me. There were many elephants about at the time, a herd of at least fifty scattered around the perimeter of the campsite and I was astonished at the bravery, or stupidity, of the old man to wander blithely among them, humming softly as he went about his business. The elephants for their part, seemed to pay him little attention. They grazed on about him with that deep rumbling so typical among a large herd.

"Weren't you scared of the elephants?" I asked him when he returned.
"They are my friends," was his reply. "They know me. If they come near, I talk to them and they listen."

It struck me then how much modern humans had become disconnected from the biosphere and our thought, speech and actions, we have become like those poor baby elephants that find themselves in a concrete cell in China, dislodged from our own wild nature. This old man instead belonged to an ancient African way of living that was bodily attuned to the wild world. Here he was, in the midst of, and communicating and engaging with, one of the most dangerous

animals on earth, without fear or detachment. He moved effortlessly in the natural world using soothing tones and body language, or at least a language they could understand, that explained to the elephants that they had nothing to fear from him. The old man was able to speak their language and, in doing so, integrate effortlessly with his living surroundings by using forms of bodily and voice expression that could be 'read' or interpreted by the elephants. Detached from wild nature, I, the outsider from a civilized world, had developed a fear for the wild environment because I had lost the vital principle of my own development and function as a human animal, the ability both to speak and to hear the language of the wild.

On chatting further with the old man around the fire later that night, he explained that his ability to speak the language of elephants was because of an entrenched part of his traditional culture. He called it *Ukama*, a Shona word that implies the 'interdependence of all that exists.' According to the old Shona tradition, *Ukama* is the reality that all things are closely related and depend on one another for existence. Humans exist in a community that depends, not only on other humans, but also on the natural world of animals, plants and other elements in the universe, including the community of ancestors and future generations to come, which is basically everything. Similar to the idea of Western philosopher Merleau-Ponty, in the strict sense of *Ukama*, there are no inanimate things in the universe. All things, including rocks, rivers, mountains, trees, animals and humans are carriers of the same life principle in various degrees, and they all speak the language of being.

Back then, when I first heard this term around a fire surrounded by elephants under a starry African night, the notion of *Ukama* was largely unheard of beyond the Shona culture. However, the concept has begun to enter the realms of philosophical discourse, especially among African scholars. It is particularly relevant when it comes to philosophical issues of the environment and conservation. It must be noted that *Ukama* is not to be confused with a related southern African term, *Ubuntu*, which only focuses on human relationships with other humans. *Ubuntu* is a South African ethical ideology focusing on people's allegiances and relations with each other. A rough translation of the principle of *Ubuntu* is "humanity towards others". Another translation could be: "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity" (*Ubuntu*: Official Documentation, 2013).

Philosopher specialising in African Ethics, Munyaradzi Felix Murove, is one of the thinkers who works in this tradition, and he points out that *Ukama* is concerned about the environment

and human relationship with the biosphere, as the concept affirms human relatedness with the earth and all life (Murove, 2009: 316). Since humans are dependent on the biosphere – the air, soil, water, and (other) animals – for their survival, and their means of communication, it stands to reason they ought to protect it in its natural form. This is because, in the final instance, *Ukama* understands that the well-being of humans and the well-being of the rest of the natural world cannot be separated out. This obligation to protect crucially includes communication with all living bodies. It is another example of chiasm in that one relies on the other, not just a one-sided (?) anthropocentric version of protection. Any tampering with the air, the soil, the water and the animals, or loss of the language of the wild, will negatively impact on the natural environment, the wild animals and ultimately also on humans. Being human, therefore, is intricately connected with being-wild. What is more, Murove insists that *Ukama* is not just a Shona concept, but one that supports a traditional (sub-Saharan) African worldview (Murove, 2009). In fact, some scholars have gone as far as to say that in fact all indigenous and ancient cultures across the globe support a concept of interdependence with the wild environment (Ikeke, 2015).

5. Conclusion

Ukama strongly echoes the kind of ecological phenomenology or eco-phenomenology that Merleau-Ponty has pioneered in Western thinking. Brown and Toadvine in the introduction to *Eco-phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself* (2003) write that::

> … an eco-phenomenology offers a methodological bridge between the natural world and our own or rather the rediscovery of the bridge that we are and have always been but thanks to our collective amnesia have forgotten almost irretrievably. It is not enough to diagnose our forgetting; there is also a matter of remembering the earth (Brown & Toadvine, 2003: xx).

This alternative experience and account of the wild environment, like *Ukama*, is potentially revolutionary. It is a reconceptualisation that circumvents the problems concerning both intrinsic value moral consideration of individual animals or privileged species, as well as simple (strong and weak) anthropocentrism. In the final chapter, I shall show some important examples of just how revolutionary this reconceptualisation is by looking into practical policy implications. These illustrations serve as ideas on how an eco-phenomenological approach can

be put into practice. They by no means exhaust the potential of phenomenology as a new conservation policy, but point toward a process that includes hundreds, perhaps thousands, of new approaches. The illustrations also bring into the fold other environmental philosophical fields such as eco-centrism, biocentrism and deep ecology – disciplines that all eschew anthropocentrism but can benefit in terms of rigorous analysis from the groundwork laid down by Merleau-Ponty.

As discussed in the opening paragraphs of this dissertation, the world is faced with an ecological crisis. Confronted by anthropogenic destruction of wild animals and the wild environment, some of us feel an unease about the extent of destruction wrought by human animals. This unease is a moral one at its base, a moral urge that calls for changes in our behaviour. As I have shown throughout this chapter, the intersection of ecology with phenomenology begets a new cross-disciplinary enquiry, namely eco-phenomenology. This is an extension of the radical phenomenology pioneered by Merleau-Ponty, and illustrated in practice by the studies of Von Uexküll and the observations of Leopold, that points to a fresh way of looking at the interrelationship between living organisms and the wild world in an axiological dimension. Eco-phenomenology lends support to the hope that there could actually be a viable and productive response to the ecological crisis of modern times, a response that finally overcomes the excesses and distortions of anthropocentrism. Of course, humans dwelling in modern societies, as previously mentioned, have lost touch with the wild environment. Environment philosopher Holmes Rolston III sums it up best:

> We modern humans, increasingly competent about making our way through the natural world, have been decreasingly confident about its values, its meanings. The correlation is not accidental. It is hard to discover meaning in a world where value appears only at the human touch, hard to locate meaning when we are engulfed in the sheer instrumentality, whether of artifacts or natural resources (Holmes Rolston III, 1988: xi).

One possible solution of many then for modern human well-being and survival as well as the conservation of other animals in the Anthropocene is to rediscover *Ukama* and begin a process called 'rewilding'. Rewilding is not just about restoring ecosystems that have been under plow, or cement, but instead a "re-involvement", an "opportunity for people to engage with and delight in the natural world" (Monbiot, 2013: 11). It is equally important that humans learn to

re-wild themselves and alter their perception of the world. The natural environment is not simply a collection of species (including humans) but, in the spirit of *Ukama* and a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, "of their ever-shifting relationship with each other and the natural environment" (Monbiot, 2013: 9). In short, by rewilding ourselves we are respecting and sustaining the life-giving relations among us and rewilding our Umwelt and vice versa.

It is with this notion of rewilding in mind that I now turn to the final chapter. Here I shall flesh out some possibilities of beneficial co-existence between humans, wild animals and the wild environment (biosphere/Umwelt) where new possibilities of a conservation ethic will be conveyed.

CHAPTER SIX: ECO-PHENOMENOLOGY AS CONSERVATION

Populations of species that were dangerously small will have space to grow. Rare and local species previously doomed by development will escape their fate. The unknown species will no longer remain silent…People will have closer access to a world that is complex and beautiful beyond our present imagining….
Living Earth, all of it, can continue to breathe.
(E.O. Wilson's concept of Half Earth, December 2016)

In this the final chapter, Merleau-Ponty's ontological endeavour is transmuted into an applied one. It moves from the field of ontology via a reform of language onto action because, in order to be effective in wildlife conservation, the discipline has to migrate from the theoretical to the practical.

It may seem surprising that phenomenology – especially from the perspective of the theoretically-weighted enquiries of all the principal phenomenologists – can play a crucial practical role in reorienting our approach to wildlife conservation. This is especially true when it comes to nebulous philosophical notions of 'consciousness' and 'being'. And yet, as we have seen, the discipline of phenomenology is particularly well-suited as a *practical alternative* to anthropocentrism and its resultant riders of instrumentalism and other economic-centred paradigms. The reason, as I have mentioned so often before, is because phenomenology takes its starting point in the world as we experience it. No matter the differing versions of phenomenology, its cornerstone is on the primacy of direct, immediate and sensory experience. A Merleau-Pontian style of phenomenology facilitates a move toward practical endeavours, such as the conservation of wildlife and through that the preservation of the natural environment.

As I hope to have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, phenomenology, particularly how Merleau-Ponty developed it with his notions of chiasm and intertwining, suggests a fundamental alternative to the myopic obsession with anthropocentrism and other legacies of Cartesian dualism in wildlife conservation and resultant policies. Brown and Toadvine state that from its roots in experience "phenomenology provides an open horizon for the exploration of all facets of our relationship with nature outside of narrowly prescribed disciplinary boundaries." (Brown & Toadvine, 2003: xii) They maintain that throughout its development,

phenomenology seems "to promise a methodological route toward the disclosure of an 'alternative' conception of nature" (Brown & Toadvine, 2003: xi-xii), one that would avoid the reductionism of economically-centred anthropocentrism.

As one important avenue to be explored within eco-phenomenology of many, I will begin this final chapter (Section Two: *Reforming Anthropocentric Language*) by exploring how language applies to the human orientation in the natural world. Just as feminism did to affect a major paradigm shift in Western thinking against sexism, a change in how we use language is the first and most fundamental of tools in tackling anthropocentrism. As shown in the previous chapter, language originates from our chiasmic relationship with wild nature. Language is not on the side of an abstract Cartesian mind lording it over 'mere matter', as held by a dualistic approach to language. Here I will provide some concrete examples of how eco-phenomenology breaks down that construct following on from the discussion of language in Chapter Five. Some radical adjustments to our common lexicon, which is heavily weighted in anthropocentric Cartesian binaries, are crucial if we want to make progress towards alternative praxis .

The alternative practical approach to wildlife conservation, once the desk has been cleared of linguistic pitfalls, will then begin to take shape. Recall that the fundamental tenet of economically-centred weak anthropocentrism is to provide meaningful (economic) benefits solely for human animals. It will be demonstrated here that a Merleau-Ponty style phenomenology succeeds in providing that sought-after human well-being, but obviously without the anthropocentric exploitation and dominance of wild animals in order to do so. The new approach to wildlife conservation is about applying a Merleau-Pontian view of an intertwined acceptance and relationship with the natural world and the wild animals that share the space with us. It is one that paves the way to a healthier, happier being, both for animal and human species.

As this dissertation has progressed, a development of an alternative pragmatism has already begun to form. I have shown that the alternative conservation approach must be a non-instrumental valuation of wild animals. As I hope to have demonstrated, a wild animal loses some of its essence when it is taken from the wild. This is true of humans too, and in the second section of the chapter I will demonstrate how important our interconnection with our wild environment really is.

Ultimately, though, this dissertation focuses on the conservation of wild animals. As shown in the previous chapters, the focus is on the ontological importance of being wild rather than commodifying (some) wild animals simply to maintain their numbers. The latter, dominant aim is achieved often at the expense of the well-being of the conserved animals themselves, but also of other, economically unvalued, wild animals (such as insects, amphibians and other lesser- or unknown beings) as well as of the natural environment itself. Conservation, therefore, needs to focus, not just on individual animals, but instead always on their chiasmic relationship with other beings and their surrounding environment. From this, the Merleau-Pontian construct progresses to elucidate the inextricable and intertwined human and (other) animal setting within wild nature, all sharing in the primordial, relational element that he calls 'flesh'. In the third section of this chapter (*Rewilding Land, Sea and Human Life*), I shall introduce the notion of 'rewilding' – an applied concept that to my mind encompasses the phenomenological ethos as set out by Merleau-Ponty. Critically, I will show that without the wild environment, not only are most wild species doomed, but the human species will be too, and no amount of economically-centred pragmatism would be able to prevent that.

The point of this final chapter then is to provide some practical examples of a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology and to expand on the idea that *all* living beings are not stand-alone entities to be taken individually but must instead be understood a belonging together in a chiasmically interconnected web of life that depends on each other for their species being and well-being. At the heart of it is the wildness-of-being. It is the natural environment that drives the very existence of all life on Earth. Ultimately, if humans are to successfully conserve species in the Anthropocene, we need to preserve that which keeps us all alive and thriving – wildness.

1. Preparing the ground for a paradigm shift

Aldo Leopold wrote: "Ethics, so far studied only by philosophers, is actually a process of ecological evolution" (Leopold, 1970: 238). He states that, philosophically, an ethic "is a differentiation of social from anti-social conduct" while, ecologically, an ethic "is a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence" (Leopold, 1970: 238). The two versions, according to Leopold, amount to the same thing in that a being "has its origin in the tendency of interdependent individuals or groups to evolve modes of co-operation. The ecologist calls these 'symbioses'" (Leopold, 1970: 238). Merleau-Ponty calls it 'chiasm'. In short, any ethic ultimately has its roots in an ontological chiasmic interrelationship between a living body and

its surrounding environment. This includes all living bodies. Developing his idea further, Leopold writes that the single premise on which any ethic rests is simply that "a human is a plain member – a citizen – of a co-operative land community" (Leopold, 1970: 239-240). In other words, rather than being detached and aloof from the natural world, humans are a part of and a member of a co-operative community of the land. This is Leopold's famous notion of a 'land ethic', one that is extended, not just to all other humans and all other animals, but to also include things like soil, rocks, water, air and plants. In a 'land ethic', humans have moral obligations towards the larger 'cooperative community of the land'. As we saw in the second chapter, preserving some animals at the expense of others (limited, instrumentally inspired conservation) has caused irreparable harm to the natural environment. This I highlighted again in the previous chapter when it was demonstrated how crucial wolves are to the entire ecosystem. Similarly, when humans remove grass cover and plough the surface of the land to plant vast mono-crops for human consumption, or burn down great swathes of rainforest to make space for livestock, the nutrient-rich soil either is destroyed (through excessive chemical fertilisation) or it disappears as run-off into the oceans because the crops are not as effective as grasslands or forests in holding it in place. A land ethic, therefore, is one that is based on a moral compunction to preserve the entire biosphere – soils, water, air, plants – and the complex interdependent relations it consists of, since any harm to the land and all its natural elements is ultimately a harm to wild animals and humans too.

This importance of the natural environment in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is the primary aspect in forming an alternative concept to wildlife conservation. This is the point where phenomenology becomes eco-phenomenology. Brown and Toadvine state that eco-phenomenology is:

> based on a double claim: first, that an adequate account of our ecological situation requires the methods and insights of phenomenology; and second, that phenomenology, led by its own momentum, becomes a philosophical ecology, that is, a study of the interrelationship between organism and world in its metaphysical and axiological dimensions (Brown & Toadvine, 2003: xii-xiii).

This quote captures the heart of this dissertation's contribution too. Only phenomenology gives us an adequate (non-anthropocentric, accurate, and fair) description of 'our ecological situation', of our fleshly existence immersed in dynamic interaction with a fleshly world. That

is, only phenomenology overcomes the disastrous distancing dichotomies established by Western philosophy and shows us the richly textured nature of our wild human existence. This is how, in the quote above, phenomenology 'led by its own momentum' naturally becomes or results in an ecology. Eco-phenomenology, therefore, recognizes that the axiological qualities of the natural world are inherent and ineliminable, and by allying itself with the science of ecology, which is a study of in-field experience of the natural world, it offers a (practical) return to a world that humans have tried very hard to alienate themselves from. This is achieved through a Merleau-Pontian reconceptualisation of the human and (other) animal position and role in nature without which, as I shall demonstrate shortly, we threaten the very existence of all life.

Furthermore, phenomenology is adaptable to a range of other pragmatic disciplines, both inside and outside academia. The environmental philosophical disciplines as formulated by bio-centrists Paul Taylor and Albert Schweitzer, holists or eco-centrists such as J. Baird Callicott and Holmes Rolston III and the deep ecologies of Arne Naess and Warwick Fox can be augmented and strengthened through a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology. Broadly, bio-centrism is an ethical point of view that extends inherent value to all living things (Derr & McNamara, 2003: 21). It is an understanding of how the earth works, particularly as it relates to biodiversity. In this sense, it shares in eco-phenomenology's negation of anthropocentrism. The related eco-centrism extends inherent value to the whole of nature. Deep ecology is an ecological and environmental philosophy promoting the inherent worth of *all* living beings regardless of their instrumental utility to human needs. It also considers a restructuring of modern human societies in accordance with such ideas. I will not go into detail on these notions. Instead, I would like to focus on more specific practical procedures that can benefit from an eco-phenomenological approach to wildlife conservation.

One of the fields is linguistics, which, if reformed, could be one of the most effective pragmatic tools in wildlife conservation.

2.   Reforming anthropocentric language

Since Cartesian dualism and its resultant anthropocentrism is, as I have argued, the root cause of human alienation from the natural world and the resultant decline of wild species, one of the first jobs of an eco-phenomenology is to reform the anthropocentric dominance within our

every-day lexicon. Joan Dunayer in her book, *Animal Equality: Language and Liberation* (2001), argues that every-day language is 'speciesist':

> Deceptive language perpetuates speciesism, the failure to accord non-human animals equal consideration or respect. Like sexism and racism, speciesism is a form of self-aggrandizing prejudice. Bigotry requires self-deception. Speciesism can't survive without lies. Standard English usage supplies these lies in abundance. Linguistically the lies take many forms, from euphemism to false definition. We lie with our word choices. We lie with our syntax. We even lie with our punctuation (Dunayer, 2001: 1).

I will attend to those lies a little further on in this section but would like to first defend the claim that language is a powerful tool that can intensify biases towards ethnic groups, genders or minorities (Keeley 2011). This is something early feminist philosophers identified and endeavored to reform. Certainly, until the 1960s there was a widespread sexist attitude in Western society which found wide and enduring expression in linguistic conventions. Feminist philosophy has been effective in dismantling this attitude by discarding sexist aberrations in language. The main focus of feminists was to have society acknowledge the unconscious ways that language both silences and emphasises gender in negative ways. A major part of the language reform focused on when words or phrases make one gender, typically women, subjugated or invisible compared to the other. The most popular examples are the pronoun 'he' or the word 'man' to refer to both genders taken together. These usages have become anachronistic thanks to feminist reform of language. Notice how often in this dissertation I have interchanged the feminine and masculine forms of pronouns when describing an individual animal that is otherwise genderless in the discourse – the rhino in *her* embodied world, the baby elephant in *his* concrete cell. Common usage of such descriptions where the gender is not clear, would always be referred to in the masculine (Saul & Diaz-Léon, 2017). Feminist language philosophers have argued, therefore, that these words participate in rendering women invisible. The fact that the pronouns or words for the male gender can be also be used to refer to the female gender shows how maleness is dominant and femaleness is subjugated (Saul & Diaz-Léon, 2017).

The same process of language reform needs to occur in order to tackle anthropocentrism. In the last section of her book, Dunayer provides comprehensive style guidelines and a thesaurus

to counter and provide alternatives to prevailing anthropocentric terms (Dunayer, 2001: 179-202). I will explore some of them, but will add a little more philosophical flesh in what follows.

2.1. 'animal'

The biggest obstacle (or lie) to overcome has to do with the noun 'animal'. Derrida was one of the first to highlight this particular problem:

> Animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give. These humans are found giving it to themselves, this word, but as if they had received it as an inheritance. They are giving themselves the word in order to corral a large number of living beings within a single concept: "The Animal", they say" (Derrida, 2008: 9).

As is evident throughout this dissertation, the word 'animal', following the Cartesian bias in our common lexicon, has come to represent all beings that are *not* human, or it represents humans that act like wild animals (supposedly). The original Latin word is 'animalus', which means 'having breath'. Humans, as we discussed at length, also breathe. They too have flesh and participate in the world as every other living being does, but my computer's dictionary (Apple Dictionary, Version 2.2.1, 2005-2016) shows how much we lie in using the word 'animal' (my highlighted points in *italic*):

- any such living organism *other* than a human being;
- a mammal, as opposed to a bird, reptile, fish, or insect: the snowfall seemed to have chased all birds, *animals*, and men[37] indoors;
- a person whose behavior is regarded as *devoid of human attributes* or civilizing influences, esp. someone who is very cruel, violent, or repulsive: those men are animals — what they did to that boy was savage.

According to the dictionary, to be human is to be un-animal; to be animal is to be sub-human or inhumane. Animal traits are only ascribed to humans if they are seen as having aberrant

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[37] Note also the archaic use of the gender specific.

behavior. The online thesaurus similarly captures our anthropocentric usages of the term. Animals are described as:

- endangered animals, creature, beast, living thing; informal critter, beastie; (animals) wildlife, fauna.
- the man was an animal brute, beast, monster, devil, demon, fiend; informal swine, bastard, pig (Apple Thesaurus, Version 2.2.1, 2005-2016)

The adjective describes animals as: "Carnal, fleshly, bodily, physical; brutish, beastly, bestial, unrefined, uncultured, coarse." (Apple Thesaurus, Version 2.2.1, 2005-2016) Those first three words are telling in that in spite of their detachment from the human, they reflect Merleau-Ponty's description of every living being, including humans.

To counter this, as I have done throughout this dissertation, one can use brackets around the word (other) when referring to non-human animals. By doing this, I have exposed the lie and demonstrated that humans are animals too. Commonly, progressive writers attempting to avoid an anthropocentric discourse would use the term 'non-human animal' This, however, remains anthropocentric. The dualistic nature of the binary is retained, and the hierarchy enforced with the use of the negation or absence of the salient norm – human versus *non*-human.

In his defiance of the use of the word 'animal' Derrida wrote:

I avoid speaking about animals in general, for me they are not 'animals'. When one says 'animals', one has already started to not understand anything and has started to close the animal into a cage (Derrida, 2008: YouTube).

As Derrida points out, our use of the term is designed to lump all other animals into a class outside our own, to put them into a linguistic cage that excludes them from the anthropocentric club of creatures with moral standing.

We use derogatory words to entrench the hierarchical dichotomy and the word 'animal' is such a word. By removing the animal from the human, and placing a Cartesian abyss between them, we have successfully set ourselves apart and above all other animals. Once it is accepted that

humans are also animals, only then will there be a reconfiguration of our thoughts to accept we are just one species amongst hundreds of thousands.

2.2. Pronouns and punctuation

As with masculine-centred language used against women, the use of pronouns weighs heavily against (other) animals. An individual animal in English is commonly referred to as 'it'. Unless the relationship is personal, like a pet that has a name, then 'he' or 'she' is used when referring to the animal. This also applies to using 'who' and 'whom.' If the animal has a personal relationship with the person, then "who" or "whom" tends to be used. In most cases, though, the standard rule is exclusively to use 'which' or 'that' as follows:

Personal: "My cat *whom* I call Hyena, is twenty years old. *She* requires a lot of attention."

Generic: "The lion, *which* was stalking a buffalo, had a limp. *It* seemed to be in pain."

This sort of language designates object or 'thing-like' status' to animals. (Other) animals in our language are not to have feelings or emotions, or a subjective point of view. Due to this objectification in language humans easily ignore the sentience and interests of other animals and a switch to seeing them as pure objects that may be instrumentally utilized, is easily made.

Let us take trophy hunting as another example. This is the activity that many proponents, as we saw in *Chapter One*, laud as a successful weak anthropocentric approach to conservation, but our language systematically hides the violence and destruction meted out on wild animals hunted as trophies. Hunted animals are referred to as 'game', as if the activity was a sport, which, in fact, it is often described as. By using 'game' and 'sport' instead of 'victim' and 'murder' the language implies that there are two contestants in a game of equals pitted against each other. This may have been the case in prehistoric days when the only weapons the human hunter possessed were his bare hands, a sharp stick and some rocks to throw. Nowadays, with sophisticated long-range high-caliber weaponry complete with telescopic sights propped on the cross bar of an equally sophisticated vehicle with air-conditioning, it is a grossly one-sided contest, hardly worthy of being called a sport. Sport is also a form of entertainment, a source of amusement and pleasure, which may be true for the hunter but not so much for the hunted.

The objectification in hunting language continues. When a trophy-hunter shoots a wild animal, he 'bags it', he doesn't say 'murder her' or even 'kill her'. When we read about an animal's 'feelings', they are normally written with quotation marks, as I have just done. Punctuation shows that humans do not believe wild animals really have feelings, at least not 'developed' feelings in a human sense (note the quotation marks again), which in line with our anthropocentric habits simply translates into treating them as morally irrelevant. 'Game farms' or 'game ranches' are euphemisms for 'death camps', 'places of slaughter' or 'killing areas' while 'wildlife management' should really be 'promoting death' or even 'exploiting wild animals for slaughter' or 'for money'; 'carcasses' should be 'corpses' and, most significantly, 'conservation' simply ought to be 'regulated killing'.

At a public stakeholder meeting at Skukuza, Kruger National Park's main camp, in March 2017, park officials were attempting to justify their decision to cull (another euphemism for 'killing') a few hundred buffalo. In her attempt to explain that buffalo meat will cover some of the food-shortage needs of impoverished school children living alongside the park, SANParks Social and Economic Scientist, Louise Swemmer, kept replacing the word 'buffalo' with 'protein' (recorded personally, March 2017). Her intention was to convince the assembled stakeholders to regard the value of the animal as a consumable (?) entity rather than as a living being. That is until I spoke up, stating: "I had seen a herd of hundred protein as I entered the park earlier today. The herd had dozens of newly born proteins and there was an old male protein with the largest horns I had seen." It was only then that the assembly saw the folly of the term. The buffalo had been reduced from a great heaving phalanx of breathing, snorting, grazing, nurturing bodies of tough scarred hides and sweeping horns, sharing in our fleshy existence, to a nitrogenous compound of long-chain molecules.

It is obvious, therefore, that language hides the violent intent that humans have toward (other) animals. To reduce animals to molecular entities or automata in our descriptions of them is denying that animal's true being and opens the door to a limitless exploitation and violence.

2.3. Terms of conflict

Another problematic term, especially as it relates to conservation, is 'human-wildlife conflict' or HWC – a buzzword (or buzz-anagram) that stems from its simplicity and ease of usage to describe a diversity of situations involving wildlife (Davidar, 2018). Throughout South Africa

(and indeed Africa and the rest of the world), as humans expand deeper into the wilderness, they come into more contact with wild animals. Humans describe all these forms of contact as 'conflict'. The term comes up frequently in all conservation literature from the IUCN and CITES to the World Bank and individual governments.

A typical case of HWC would be elephants 'raiding' crops and lions 'attacking' livestock. The term is defined by the IUCN World Parks Congress as: "when the needs and behavior of wildlife impact negatively on the goals of humans or when the goals of humans negatively impact the needs of wildlife" (Madden, 2004). At first glance, it seems like a balanced statement until one reads the following line: "These conflicts may result when wildlife damage crops, injure or kill domestic animals, threaten or kill people" (Madden, 2004). With the latter part of this statement, the culpability of such conflict lies entirely with elephants or lions with connotations of them consciously and deliberately initiating the conflict. This implies that a human retaliation for their misdemeanors is justified.

Another glance at my online dictionary, shows that the word 'conflict' is defined as a serious incompatibility between two or more opinions, principles, or interests; or a prolonged armed struggle (Apple Dictionary). This implies that wild animals are consciously asserting their interests to undermine human goals and assuming the role of combatants. Such implications promote human antagonism towards wildlife that can exacerbate the problem further, hinder resolution and can result in people directing their anger and frustration on wildlife with potentially adverse conservation outcomes for endangered species (Peterson et al., 2002; Brook et al., 2003; Redpath et al., 2015 in Davidar, 2018). But even more importantly and more fundamentally, as phenomenology teaches us, this type of language use distorts both the lives and life projects of the other animals, as well as our experiences of them and our interdependencies within the land community (Leopold).

One of those outcomes, especially in South Africa, is the labelling of a wild animal as a 'damage-causing animal' or 'problem animal'. If an animal (say a leopard) gets labelled thus, even if endangered and otherwise not allowed to be hunted, it may be legally 'removed'. *The National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, (10/2004): Norms and Standards for the management of damage-causing animals in South Africa* defines a damage-causing animal as:

an individual animal or group of animals, as the case may be, that, when in conflict with human activities, there is proof that it causes substantial loss to livestock or to wild animals, causes substantial damage to cultivated trees, crops or other property; or presents an imminent threat to human life (Government Gazette, 2016: 7-8).

Again, the blame lies with the wild animal, not the humans and livestock who encroached onto his or her natural habitat. The leopard is really just going about her normal leopard-business just as her species has done for tens of thousands of years. The delinquency in behavior rests entirely with the human animal who can and should know better and should investigate alternative approaches in order to respect the whole land ethic.

The other intriguing part of the above definition is the part where a wild predatory animal, who causes substantial loss amongst other wild animals, is also labelled a problem. The hidden implication here is that many 'wild animals' in South Africa are, in fact, 'ranched animals' meaning that a predator that normally would hunt wild buffalo and impala is, in these situations, eating the prized quasi-domesticated buffalo and impala, and thus the ranch owner's profits. The onus is again placed on the predator to make a conscious distinction between her natural wild food and quasi-domesticated livestock of the same species. The law implies that the leopard ought to know the difference between animals she may hunt and those that strictly belong to the human rancher, animals she may not hunt. Once a wild animal, such as a leopard, is identified as a 'problem animal', methods to manage her include translocation, or the use of cage traps, poison collars, darting, call and shoot, foothold traps, hounds, poison firing apparatus and denning. (Government Gazette, 2016: 16) In other words, apart from the option of translocation, the leopard is most likely to be killed with impunity.

However, often in fact the 'problem animal' is the solution, if only humans would allow their conservation efforts to be directed by a broader perspective, stemming from respect for the longer-term well-being / flourishing of the whole, interdependent, land community. Research has shown that in many cases the removal (killing or relocation) of an individual predator may in fact exacerbate the problem at hand, as we have so clearly seen in the example of the wolves of Yellowstone Park. A livestock farmer's resident predators can be his best allies, because dominant territorial predators actually prevent outsiders and (sometimes) other predators from entering and operating in their territories. Research by the Cape Leopard Trust shows that in areas where a dominant predator prevails, there is the lowest incidence of predation, because

other more opportune predators are limited territorially. Stable predator population densities are lower and more manageable than ones where predators are persecuted. Removal of the dominant predator results in an influx of many more predators competing for the vacant territory (Cape Leopard Trust: website).

Conflict terminology, therefore, is provocative and emotional and often creates more problems than it solves, because it isolates single animals or single species from the whole in which they function, and thereby distorts our understanding of the living system. In most cases, it is the humans that are problematic; i.e. human lack of respect for wild land communities lead to land degradation and all the associated problems. Human agricultural and livestock farming, human-on-human conflict and urban expansion into wilderness areas are the root causes of HWC. For example, I have often heard conservationists and villagers lament that there are 'too many elephants' in Botswana. Consequently, they all cry foul over the increase of HWC incidents especially when elephants 'raid' crops. Yet, overall elephant numbers are declining in Botswana (Chase et al., 2016). In reality, this means if there is an increase in wildlife-related incidences, it is because there has come to be far less space for elephants to range and forage than in the past. In short, it is the crops that have 'raided' or rather 'invaded' the habitat of elephants, not the other way around. Davidar makes the point that in the Anthropocene:

> where the rate of species extinction is accelerating there is a growing realisation that humans need to move beyond their past history which has framed the narrative regarding wildlife… This term [HWC] which is problematic, semantically incorrect and which masks the underlying complexities of particular situations, needs to be avoided (Davidar, 2018).

Davidar maintains that more precise description than HWC would lead to better solutions. For example, the antagonism with elephants in Botswana is mostly over them raiding crops. When crop-raiding is described as 'crop-raiding' instead of 'conflict' then better solutions to mitigate crop-raiding may emerge. Already, better mitigation techniques are being successfully deployed, like the use of beehives and capsicum hedges encircling a crop. Elephants, it has been discovered, are terrified of bees and wholly detest the smell of chili peppers (King et al., 2011). Davidar did not draw on phenomenological insights explicitly, but her point is valid and can also be deduced and enriched from a phenomenological perspective. By taking into account how elephants meaningfully live their world, their subjective likes (crops) and dislikes (bees

and capsicum), their long term interests can also be better served and new ways of living together, even cooperating within the land community, can start to open up. The conflict paradigm is clearly not the only game in town.

2.4. Raiding crops

If we go further and accept that the situation is really about the raiding of crops and not crop-raiding *elephants*, then we acknowledge that the problem is of human rather than elephant origin. The solution to the problem would be to acknowledge the Merleau-Pontian chiasm between elephants and their natural environment. The idea is to maintain as much of the natural environment for elephants (and other wild animals) as possible for them to roam freely and to find alternatives where agricultural expansion into the last vestiges of their natural environment is minimised or scaled back.

However, with rapidly expanding human populations and increasing concerns over food security, one would think that notions of reducing available agricultural land are improbable. This is not the case, according to a French sustainability think-tank called the *Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations* that recently conducted research into what level of food production is actually required to meet the nutritional demands of Europeans (Poux and Aubert, 2018). They discovered that even if Europe cuts its crop yields by 30% on average, reduces the production of animal products by 40%, and replaces pesticides and fertilizers with sustainable farming methods, the region would *still* produce enough food to feed the 530-million people who will live there by 2050 (Poux and Aubert, 2018: 11).

Much of this comes down to the study's more realistic assessment of how much food humans *really* need. By comparing official recommendations for a healthy diet with actual food consumed in European countries, the researchers showed that there is a huge excess of unnecessary production on the continent, which could be curtailed to limit agriculture's environmental impact. Part of this decline would be owing to the reduction in animal-based products, because Europe would therefore import much less soybean-based livestock feed, reducing the extent of global deforestation that is driven partly by soybean farming. Greener farming methods within Europe itself, such as restoring natural soil health in place of synthetic fertilizers, and incorporating trees, hedges, and ponds into farmland, would also boost the regional biodiversity of insects and birds, which have declined rapidly in recent decades in

Europe (Poux and Aubert, 2018: 11). The model of course can easily be applied elsewhere, in fact, everywhere, thus freeing up much needed space for the natural environment to thrive.

3. Rewilding land, sea and human life

Freeing up more space for the natural environment is referred to as 'rewilding'. At face value, rewilding may seem like a focus of environmental rehabilitation of once wild spaces and wild beings. However, rewilding is not just about creating more natural spaces from agricultural land, or allowing nature to regrow (although it is that too), but it is a matter of *rediscovering the human involvement with the wild environment*. Part of a Merleau-Ponty-style conservation ethic is about humans rethinking the concept of wilderness and understanding the necessity to participate in the "ever-shifting [wild] relationship with each other and the natural environment" (Monbiot, 2013: 9). Prior & Ward (2016) maintain that 'rewilding' acknowledges "the implicit entanglement of non-humans and humans in conservation endeavors" (Prior & Ward, 2016: 134). In other words, rewilding does not mean anti-human fortress-like conservation. Dutch philosopher, Martin Drenthen, who has written extensively on rewilding in the European context, points out that the notion of rewilding may seem like an anti-human discourse, because the term seems to imply rewilding only those things that ought to be wild, which discernibly excludes humans. However, he stresses that rewilding "is not just a conservation practice and a discourse, but also implies a non-anthropocentric perspective on landscapes and the role of humans in nature" (Drenthen, 2018: 2), as I shall now discuss.

3.1 Ecological rewilding

From an ecological perspective, rewilding is not about keeping ecosystems in a state of arrested development, like preserving a jar of pickles, because wild life is dynamic, fluid, becoming, evolving and changing. Neither is it about forcibly restoring environments that have already been degraded into a human crafted area – manipulated to suit their aesthetic needs such as the construction of an African-themed safari park, complete with African wildlife, in China. Instead, rewilding is an approach that permits ecological processes to resume by themselves, like allowing trees to naturally repopulate deforested land; or assisting mangroves, salt marshes and seagrass beds to grow back after being destroyed (Monbiot, 2013: 10). Prior & Ward state that 'rewilding' is indeed an ecological restoration, but not to restore a landscape to an original state, but rather to 'bring back' *natural processes* and thus to highlight and foreground non-

human autonomy" (Prior & Ward, 2016). Drenthen's understanding of rewilding entails that "rewilding is not presented as 'pristine' or 'original', but still as 'genuine nature'…because it results from the workings of autonomous natural processes" (Drenthen, 2018: 3). Rewilding, therefore, is a concept that fundamentally recognises that the ecosystem restores itself, and that when left to their own devices, other living beings will tend to creating conditions for the flourishing of biodiversity. It is thus clearly not simply adding a collection of animals and plants to an area, as is often the case with private reserves and game ranches in South Africa, but rather, following Merleau-Ponty's notion of chiasm, of allowing their shifting relationships with each other and their surrounding environment to re-develop autonomously. Rewilding would thus be an example of showing respect for the encompassing land community to which we intrinsically belong.

Essentially, the notion of rewilding is about 'setting nature free' to reproduce landscapes that resemble those that existed before human agricultural and urban construction. Often rewilding projects "include the removal of human artefacts and structures – dykes, levees, wooded banks, canals and other cultural artefacts – that are thought to impede ecological processes" (Drenthen, 2018: 4). Once this is done, then nature is left to run its own course. In other words, an ecosystem is not understood as a finished, static product, but instead as a growing, continuously shifting, dynamic and relational process that must be left to evolve and adapt to changes over time. In essence, rewilding:

> is about resisting the urge to control nature and allowing it to find its own way. It involves reintroducing absent plants and animals (and in a few cases culling exotic species which cannot be contained by native wildlife), pulling down the fences, blocking the drainage ditches, but otherwise stepping back. At sea, it means excluding commercial fishing and other forms of exploitation. The ecosystems that result are best described not as a wilderness but as self-willed: governed not by human management but by their own processes. Rewilding has no end points, no view about what a 'right' ecosystem or 'right' assemblage of species looks like. It does not strive to produce a heath, a meadow, a rainforest, a kelp garden or a coral reef. It lets nature decide (Monbiot, 2013: 9-10).

The mention of the idea 'self-willed' is clearly important in a phenomenological sense. This is not an objective landscape but one that consists of a multitude of living bodies all with their

own goals and purposes, their own meaningful interaction with their Umwelt, who are yet intertwined and co-dependent.

In the previous chapter, I wrote of the re-introduction of wolves in the Yellowstone Park and how they rewilded the landscape to its former glory. There are hundreds of such cases where similar aspects of rewilding have occurred. A particularly good example of an ecosystem rewilding itself is the 4,700 square kilometer Chernobyl disaster zone between the Ukraine and Belarus. Here, rare and endangered animals have thrived since it had been evacuated by humans in 1986. In a report for *The Guardian*, travel and environment writer, Tom Allen, who visited the site recently, says that it is possibly Europe's largest rewilded area, and "the unlikely beneficiaries of nuclear disaster have been the wolves, bison and bears that now roam the depopulated landscape" (Allen, 28 May 2019). About 100 wolves have taken up residence on the Belarus side, and because there are no human hunters, they have lost their fear of humans. Allen notes that:

> We see the familiar creatures of town and farm dwindling, and animals long since pushed to the wild edges of Europe taking their place: the sparrows, rooks and white storks are giving way to white-tailed eagles, lynx and wolves (Allen, 28 May 2019).

The writer also spotted one of Europe's rarest birds, the greater spotted eagle. According to Allen, Chernobyl is the only place where their numbers are rising. A local bird expert told Allen that the fields in the disaster zone are not the eagles' typical habitat as they usually favour marshland. But the expert also said he is starting to wonder if it's the other way around. The birder believes the eagles originally adapted to wet areas to avoid people (Allen, 28 May 2019). The raptors are particularly shy of humans, but now without people to harass them, they have 'rewilded' themselves by coming back to the fields.

Anthropogenic disasters aside, it is important to point out that it would be an injustice if land consciously set aside for rewilding was taken away from humans who depend on that land or when rewilding projects take place in old cultural landscapes (Drenthen, 2018:4).

In terms of the latter, rewilding projects have often encountered "stark opposition" especially in Europe when such projects have removed many cultural artefacts and identities (Drenthen,

2018: 4) Sheep farming in Britain is one such example where traditional and cultural practices of sheep farming, together with the old stone walls, mills and drainage canals associated with sheep farming are being dismantled to allow for rewilding (Monbiot, 2013). According to Dolly Jørgensen, in her critique of the rewilding projects in Europe, rewilding "seeks to erase human history and involvement in the land of flora and fauna". This, she maintains, implies a "split between nature and culture [that] may prove unproductive and even harmful" (Jørgensen, 2015: 482). In response, Drenthen states that "many traditional European cultural or half-natural landscapes are under threat because they depend on land use practices that are rapidly disappearing due to economic and demographic developments such as urbanisation, growth of infrastructure, changes in land use such as intensification of agriculture, but also land abandonment in places with poor soils and low yields. Yet, these human cultural spaces are valued as part of a cultural or historical heritage and identity" (Drenthen, 2018: 5). Europe is littered with old and ancient cultural structures that are valued by archeologists, writers, historians and local communities. Rewilding, therefore, needs to include these human cultural and historical aspects too. Drenthen points out that "there is no prima facie reason why these different values of landscape [ecological and traditional human landscape structures and uses] could not be conserved at the same time (Drenthen, 2018: 9). Rewilding could certainly work "in places where traditional and cultural features have already been disrupted beyond repair", such as "occasions where agricultural land use practices have become unsustainable due to the demands of the current global food market" (Drenthen, 2018: 9). Drenthen concludes that rewilding includes a movement that situates the history of human involvement together with the natural landscape (Drenthen, 2018: 26). These interwoven approaches are clearly in line with the eco-phenomenological insights that insist on breaking down the Cartesian hierarchical opposition between humans and nature.

Recall in *Chapter Two* when I cited Brandt and Spierenburg's research (2014) into former agricultural areas in the Karoo region of South Africa that were converted into wildlife ranches. Viewed from an African perspective, no eco-phenomenologically inspired project of rewilding can ignore people such as these who had been farm labourers before they were displaced and fenced out in the name of conservation. I mentioned earlier examples when rural communities were removed from the land of their ancestors to make way for national parks. In the new conservation ethic, this process must be avoided. Rewilding is about interconnectedness of *all beings*. Monbiot himself stresses that rewilding land should only take place with the consent of those who work on the land and one must be careful that it does not threaten the livelihoods

of impoverished communities who work or otherwise depend on that land. There is also a current school of thought that posits that indigenous and rural communities are best placed to protect and enhance rewilding processes (IPBES, 2018). I will deal with this last point in detail a little further on in this chapter.

Ultimately, the main aim of rewilding is to take what land and sea one can get without coercive expropriation and dispossession and …

> to restore to the greatest extent possible ecology's dynamic interactions. In other words, the scientific principle behind rewilding is restoring what ecologists call trophic diversity … enhancing the number of opportunities for animals, plants, and other creatures to feed on each other … expanding the web both vertically and horizontally, increasing the number of trophic levels (top predators, middle predators, plant eaters, plants, carrion and detritus feeders) and creating opportunities for the number and complexity of relationships at every level to rise. (Monbiot, 2013: 84)

One can see how this description in many respects echoes a Merleau-Pontian eco-phenomenology, in that restoration of an ecosystem and conservation of wild animals go together, are interdependent on each other and ultimately rely on each other for their very being. So, instead of attempting to 'manage wildlife' for the benefit of some prized wild animals – as is prevalent in South African wildlife conservation practices[38] – conservation ought to think in terms of the chiasmic relationship of animals in their wild environments where every animal from dung beetle to elephant functioning in a self-willed way within its wild environment ought to be considered.

3.2 Human rewilding

Monbiot stresses that rewilding from a human perspective is not a romanticised and unrealistic return to a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. He rightly points out that the modern human "without farming, sanitation, vaccination, antibiotics, surgery and optometry would be dead by now." (Monbiot, 2013: 7) Certainly, it would be easy to predict the outcome if I was suddenly thrust naked, rudimentary spear in hand, into the depths of the Kalahari Desert. I would be in among

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[38] Such as erecting fences, removing predators or elephants or vegetation and feeding wild animals.

the lions without the safety of my Land Cruiser laden with jerry-cans of fresh water (and some wine), crates of pre-packaged food, matches and firelighters, my ever-trusted potjie-pot and the protection of my tent at night. In the modern era, abandoning our civilized lives, especially our high agricultural yields to feed the seven-billion plus humans on the Planet, would be disastrous for humanity. Monbiot warns that any idea of going back to a hunter-gatherer lifestyle "would first require the elimination of almost all human beings" (Monbiot, 2013: 11). Given that much land still requires to remain under the plow or belong to livestock grazing, the land available for rewilding is quite modest, but Monbiot believes it would still constitute an important ecological and existential resource (existential in that it will be enough to support the food and water needs of all life). As I demonstrated with the Poux and Aubert study, agricultural land can be reduced quite effectively and still feed the millions of humans decades into the future.

As mentioned, rewilding does not exclude humans. Neither is it about conflict between humans and a natural environment. Anthropocene-era humans can participate in a renewed, meaningful way with the natural environment while still enjoying the benefits of technology and civilization. Monbiot and others stress that humans need to relearn how to connect with the natural environment, the source of vitality, by doing activities that bring humans in bodily contact with it. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, maybe we could say Monbiot calls for activities that would activate and concretise for humans their fleshy existence as part of the 'flesh of the world'. This could include a walk along a trail, a swim in a lake or ocean, a ski down a snowy slope, a climb up a mountain, a safari or a camping trip into a desert. Many humans in fact do this.

Activities like these bring peace of mind, adventure and risk, as well as a psychological escape from the humdrum of the built environment of stress, pollution and noise. How many of us come back from such experiences feeling revitalized? It is no coincidence that almost all major cities have set aside bits of nature for human well-being. One only has to think of Central Park in New York, Hyde Park in London and, best of all, Table Mountain National Park in Cape Town. The latter is a perfect example of how human civilization remains interconnected to the wild environment. Almost half of the city remains natural thanks to the wisdom of the early town planners not to build above a certain altitude. Today thousands of people access this natural environment either hiking up and along the hundreds of trails; or, for the more sedate, by road or cable way. All do so to benefit from the spectacular views and to breathe in the fresh

fynbos-scented air. Most of Cape Town is surrounded by ocean and much of it has recently been set aside as a marine reserve. Again, humans gravitate toward this wild environment in the form of bathers, surfers, kayakers, sailors and scuba divers. All of these are examples of humans rediscovering and reconnecting with their own wildness by immersing themselves in wild nature.

The benefits are even more tangible than simple aesthetics. The abstract of a new study in *Behavioral Sciences*, entitled *Levels of Nature and Stress Responses* (2018) states:

> Findings suggest that visiting natural environments can be beneficial in reducing both physical and psychological stress levels, with visitors to a natural environment reporting significantly lower levels of stress than their counterparts visiting a more urbanized outdoor setting or indoor exercise facility (Ewart and Chang, 2018).

This study examined the question of human well-being from the perspective of what the authors call 'levels of nature'. That is, data on levels of stress were collected from three sites, one site having wilderness-like characteristics, a second site representing a municipal-type park, and a third site representing a built environment (indoor exercise facility) within a city. Data were generated using biophysical markers and a psychological measure within a pre- and post-visit format. In addition to the other mentioned benefits, visitors to the wilderness areas had increased levels of joy; and significant decrease in cortisol levels. A similar study in Korea saw greater improvements in insulin sensitivity, pulse rates, stress hormone levels and oxidative stress in women who spent a half-day in a 'wild forest' compared to a 'tended forest' (Ju Lee et al., 2017).

It is no wonder then that humans need the natural environment in terms of psychological, physical and even spiritual well-being, quite apart from our physiological dependencies upon natural processes. Our expression and communication of lived meanings as discussed in *Chapter Five* with Merleau-Ponty's theory of language, are dependent on the natural world. Our basic physical needs from fresh air, clean water, healthy soils and lush rainforests are crucial for our survival. Our psychological well-being and spiritual stimulation are important too, as we saw with this 2018 study, and also when I provided the example of *Ukama* that speaks of the interdependence of all that exists. *Ukama* and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology both link to Leopold's notion of thinking like a mountain, in that we need to consider the value

of all aspects of an ecosystem and how everything co-exists and interconnects in mutual dependencies. In fact, mountain landscapes feature prominently in human belief structures. Countless beliefs and religions have found something deeply spiritual in mountains. Robert Pirsig, author of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974) writes on numerous occasions that mountains are the "high country of the mind". The Jewish Bible features Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments, and successive cultures over the centuries in south-western Zimbabwe found the giant granite outcrops of the Matobo Hills a deeply spiritual place (I myself had a deep sense of déjà vu when I visited, so apparently did Cecil Rhodes, who asked to be and was buried there). Even the unassuming Tsodilo Hills that seem to rise from nowhere in the Kalahari Desert are sacred to the San and Bantu peoples living in the vicinity. Mountains are so prevalent in human spiritual culture I could fill a dozen pages listing peaks around the worlds that humans revere in some form or another.

Yet, preserving the natural environment goes much further than psychological, spiritual and physical well-being. The wild environment is essential for the survival of all life. It is imperative we set enough space aside for biodiversity to thrive. Failing to do so will not only doom wild animals, but all life.

4. The imperative of increasing space for biological diversity

Critically, and given that a phenomenological enquiry as purported by Merleau-Ponty insists on the chiasmic nature of species within their natural *Umwelt*, the successful conservation of wild species – and humans – comes down to just a single notion: increasing the space for biodiversity. And because this is a phenomenological pursuit, that notion is not a reduction to a single 'thing', because the very word biodiversity explodes into a myriad of beings – animate and inanimate – collectively known as 'Earth'. Thus, an eco-phenomenological ethic based on Merleau-Ponty's concepts of being interdependent with one's surroundings is one that aims to conserve biodiversity above all else. Once achieved, the conservation of wild animals naturally follows.

Sadly, we are reaching a point where it may be too late. The latest report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Service (IPBES, 2019) found that one million species are currently threatened with extinction and that humans are undermining the entire natural infrastructure on which our modern world depends.

Significantly, the report found a strong interrelationship between climate change, the loss of biodiversity and human well-being.

Sir Robert Watson, chair of the IPBES, and former chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), states the report shows that governments and businesses are nowhere close to doing enough and that the world is on track to miss the targets of the Paris Climate Agreement and the Aichi biodiversity targets (Watson, 6 May 2019). Climate change has been identified as the primary driver of biodiversity loss, but as Watson points out, the loss of biodiversity also contributes to climate change (Watson, 6 May 2019). When we destroy rainforests, we emit carbon dioxide, the major human-produced greenhouse gas. Crucially, the world needs to recognize that the loss of biodiversity and anthropogenic climate change are not just issues of the natural environment but human social, economic and moral issues as well. The future of humanity depends on the future of all life.

In this current section, I will show some applied methods of preserving the wild space, and the resultant conservation of wildlife. Section 4.1 will deal with non-instrumental justifications of wildlife that will include, in two sub-sections, the importance of preserving indigenous human languages in part of wildlife conservation (and vice versa) as well as the importance of increasing the natural space. The latter will be an assessment of how much of the wild environment we need to preserve in order to support the billions of lives currently and in the future of Planet Earth.

4.1. Axiological (non-instrumental) justifications for preserving wild space

Try as we may to remain apathetic, without the oxygenating force of vegetation, the insects, birds, plants and mammals that are vital for global food production, clean water and carbon sequestration it is quite conceivable humans will be joining the many other endangered species in dying out during the Anthropocene. Biodiversity is the variety of life on Earth, in all its forms and all its interactions and is the most complex feature of our planet, and it is the most vital.

At the Sixth Global Environment Facility Assembly held in Vietnam in June 2018, the United Nations Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Christiana Paşca Palmer issued a sobering warning:

Biodiversity and ecosystems – nature – supports all life on earth. It's not just about the wildlife and the mammals, it's about all of us. Without biodiversity we will not exist on the planet (Paşca Palmer, June 2018: Vimeo).

In an article in *The Guardian* in November 2018 Paşca Palmer reiterated her warning, stating unequivocally that with the current rates of biodiversity loss, humans could be the first species to document their own extinction (Watts, 3rd November 2018).

Watson warns we have limited time to turn things around and it will not be easy. He points out that the turn-around requires "massive changes" like removing subsidies that lead to the destruction of biodiversity and continued warming of the Earth, enacting laws that encourage protection of biodiversity, reducing fossil fuel energy, consumption of natural resources and, following the notion of human rewilding, to "rethink the definition of a rewarding life" (Watson, 6 May 2019). In line with the Poux and Aubert study, Watson believes we have enough food to feed the global population, but our current agricultural practices are wasteful and destructive. He notes that in 2019 815-million people go to bed hungry, 38-million more than in 2015. Watson writes further: "If food waste were a country, its emissions would rank third in the world, after China and the US, producing 8% of manmade emissions" (Watson, 6 May 2019).

His solution is to direct government subsidies towards regenerative farming that absorbs carbon and reduces the emissions of greenhouse gases. This means reducing the great monocrops, especially those like soy production on the Amazon rainforest basin for livestock feed; and non-essential crops like tobacco that are so prevalent yet so unprofitable and blanket vital arable land in countries like Malawi and Zimbabwe. Of course, ending or limiting livestock farming itself, as suggested by Poux and Aubert, would greatly reduce greenhouse emissions. Humans need to turn more toward a plant-based rather than a meat-based diet. Becoming vegan is probably one of the best contributions to biodiversity and climate stability.

Inadvertently deploying a Merleau-Pontian reversal or chiasmic scenario, Monbiot in an article entitled *The Natural World Can Help Save Us from Climate Catastrophe* (3 April, 2019), stated that biodiversity affects climate and in return climate affects biodiversity. Currently, the

world's governments discuss the climate crisis and the ecological crisis as separate entities, when both disasters should be addressed together.

The question is how does one effectively do this?

As we have seen, the simple answer lies in *allowing* and supporting nature to do its thing. This is especially the case if wild animals are allowed to live and flourish autonomously within their wild environments. Wild elephants and rhinos in Africa and Asia, and tapirs in Brazil are natural foresters, maintaining and extending their habitats, as they swallow seeds of trees and spread them across many miles in their dung. White rhinos are adept at preventing runaway fires in African savannahs since their grazing prevents dry grass build-up and predators like lions and wolves would stop as much carbon being released every year as 30 to 70 million cars, simply by doing what they do best, namely controlling herbivore populations (Monbiot, 3 April 2019). This is not to mention all the multitudes of little creatures, like dung beetles that aid in seed germination from elephant dung, or predatory crabs and fish in salt marshes and estuaries controlling herbivorous snails and crabs from wiping out all the plants that keep the system together. By allowing wild animals to function as they should – self-willed and free – the wild environment is enhanced, and global warming is reduced. Mangroves, salt marshes and seagrass beds absorb carbon forty times faster than rain forests (Monbiot, 3 April 2019). For Monbiot, allowing nature to expand and restore itself is a no-brainer – not only is this a simple solution but it is also ridiculously cost effective (Monbiot, 3 April 2019). Conservation of wildlife, therefore, cannot exist without expanding the natural environment in which wildlife thrives. Of course, it is not just animals that preserve biodiversity but indigenous humans too, sometimes in surprising ways.

4.1.1. Preserving indigenous languages preserves biodiversity (and vice versa)

The 2018 IPBES report highlights the fact that indigenous people and local communities have created a successful diversity of polyculture and agroforestry systems, which, in turn, have increased biodiversity and shaped landscapes. In the previous chapter I have already provided the example of *Ukama*, the African worldview that sees everything in the world as interdependent. However, the decoupling of lifestyles from their local environments and landscapes has eroded, for many, their sense of place, language and indigenous local

knowledge, including knowledges of how to live within a land ethic. For example, more than 60% of the languages in the Americas, and the cultures associated with them, are dying out (IPBES, 2018).

Considering Merleau-Ponty's views of language, it is interesting to discover that languages decline as biodiversity decreases. This is according to researchers from the Zoological Society of London and George Wright Society who have established a correlation between the extinction of species and the disappearance of languages spoken by communities who had inhabited the wild environment along with those species. (Loh & Harmon, 2014) One in four of the world's 7,000 languages are now threatened with extinction, and linguistic diversity is declining as fast as biodiversity – about 30% since 1970 (Loh & Harmon, 2014).

Of the 7,000 languages spoken worldwide, half now have fewer than 10,000 speakers, and these 3,500 languages are spoken by only 0.1% of the world's population. At the other end of the spectrum, because of colonisation, globalisation and the worldwide move to cities in the last 30 years, a handful of global languages increasingly dominates: 95% of the world's population speaks one of just 400 languages, each spoken by millions of people, and 40% of us speak one of just eight languages: Mandarin, Spanish, English, Hindi, Portuguese, Bengali, Russian and Japanese (Loh & Harmon, 2014). Languages do not usually go extinct because an entire population of speakers dies out, but because the speakers of a minority, usually indigenous, go through a language shift to a more dominant language and, typically within a few generations, lose their mother tongue. Migration, urbanisation and national unification policies have been the primary drivers of language shift and language loss in Africa, Asia and Europe. In the Americas and Australia, the primary driver has been migration, but in reverse – where the migrants, mainly European, greatly outnumbered the indigenous populations (Loh & Harmon, 2014).

Along with the languages, the traditional knowledge of these cultures is being forgotten. The names, uses, and preparation of medicines, the methods of farming, fishing and hunting are disappearing, not to mention the vast array of spiritual and religious beliefs and practices, often rooted in the land, which are as diverse and numerous as the languages themselves (Loh & Harmon, 2014). This shows how important Leopold's concept of local land ethics and co-operative land communities is in preserving the wild environment. Loh and Harmon maintain that if the world wants to save nature it may be vital to conserve cultures too. "The vast store of knowledge that has evolved and accumulated over tens of thousands of years could be lost

in the next 100 years," says one of the report's researchers, David Harmon. "While linguists have made efforts to archive as many of the endangered languages as possible, and ethnobiologists have attempted to record the traditional use of plants, the most important conservation takes place on the ground as part of a living culture"(Vidal, 8th June 2014). The report found that both biodiversity and linguistic diversity are diminishing as a result of human population growth, increasing consumption and economic globalisation which are eroding the differences between one part of the world and another – the link between human culture and biodiversity is clear, because it is the indigenous peoples of the world who have mostly conserved nature through intimate knowledge of local biospheres (Loh & Harmon, 2014).

As one of the researchers, biologist Jonathan Loh told *The Observer* (8th June 2014): "If you fell the trees then you destroy human culture as well as the birds of paradise. People depend on the forest and the forest has always depended on us. We are as one" (Vidal, 8th June 2014).

4.1.2. Half-Earth

Giving nature enough space to function, and ultimately avert humanity's mass suicide, is essentially the only answer.

Amid dawning concerns among policy-makers, in 2010 the world's nations at the Tenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP10) to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya, Japan, promised to at least halve the loss of natural habitats, ensure sustainable fishing in all waters, and expand nature reserves from 10% to 17% of the world's land by 2020. (CBD, 2010) But many nations have fallen behind, and those that have created more protected areas have done little to police them (Watts, 3rd November 2018). The issue remains low on the political agenda. Compared to climate summits, few heads of state attend biodiversity talks. The United States refused to ratify the treaty and only sent an observer. Along with the Vatican, it is the only United Nations state not to participate (CBD, a.).

Even if the goals of 17% of the land mass set aside for wild nature are achieved by 2020, which is unlikely, there is still an argument that it is not nearly enough. Many leading biologists maintain that at least half the planet's surface must be set aside for wild nature. One of the world's leading biologists, Edward O. Wilson, argues that the situation facing us is too large to be solved piecemeal:

There is just so much water left for fracking, so much rainforest cover available for soybeans and oil palms, so much room left in the atmosphere to store excess carbon. The impact on the rest of the biosphere is everywhere negative, the environment becoming unstable and less pleasant, our long-term future less certain (Wilson, December 2016).

Wilson maintains that only by committing half of the planet's surface to nature "can we hope to save the immensity of life-forms that compose it" (Wilson, December 2016). The rich language of the biologist's Half-Earth proposal is less that of a scientist and more that of an eco-phenomenologist:

Each ecosystem — be it a pond, meadow, coral reef, or something else out of thousands that can be found around the world — is a web of specialized organisms braided and woven together. The species, each a freely interbreeding population of individuals, interact with a set of the other species in the ecosystem either strongly or weakly or not at all. Given that in most ecosystems even the identities of most of the species are unknown, how are biologists to define the many processes of their interactions? How can we predict changes in the ecosystem if some resident species vanish while other, previously absent species invade? At best we have partial data, working off hints, tweaking everything with guesses (Wilson, December 2016).

By dedicating half the earth's space to wild nature, Wilson argues "life on Earth enters the safe zone. Within that half, more than 80 percent of the species would be stabilized."

What does knowledge of how nature works tell us about conservation and the Anthropocene? This much is clear: To save biodiversity, it is necessary to obey the precautionary principle in the treatment of Earth's natural ecosystems, and to do so strictly. Hold fast until we, scientists and the public alike, know much more about them. Proceed carefully — study, discuss, plan. Give the rest of Earth's life a chance. Avoid nostrums and careless talk about quick fixes, especially those that threaten to harm the natural world beyond return (Wilson, December 2016).

Eco-phenomenology is also about unlocking new (and old) forms of knowledge, of new approaches in understanding and therefore preserving the biosphere. The declining world of

biodiversity will certainly be mostly lost if conservation continues to be treated as a luxury or an anthropocentric item in national and international policy. Wilson insists that the ongoing mass extinction of species, and with it the extinction of genes and ecosystems, ranks with pandemics, world war, and climate change as among the deadliest threats that humanity has imposed on itself. Most wildlife is destroyed by land being cleared for cattle, soy, palm oil, timber and leather. Most of us consume these products every day, with palm oil being found in many foods and toiletries.

5. Saving South Africa's biodiversity

Despite their continued persistence with sustainable development policies, South African policy makers have in fact recognized that an increase in the natural space will benefit both wildlife and humans. By the close of the 20th century, there was a growing awareness by South African legislators in a White Paper presented by the Department of Environment and Tourism (May 1997) that indigenous forests in the country had declined by half, and an estimated 25% of South Africa's land has been transformed from its natural state. Riverine habitats were fundamentally changed, and very few naturally functioning freshwater systems remained. Half of South Africa's wetlands have been lost completely through transformation to other land uses and virtually all ecosystems in South Africa have been modified or transformed by human activities (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, May 1997). The government, realising that this needed to be reversed, stated an objective of increasing the natural area.

5.1. Transfrontier Conservation Areas

One of the more positive, if not ambitious programs to expand wilderness areas is the development and partnership with neighbouring countries in establishing what is known as a Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA). TFCAs encompass transboundary ecosystem management, and integrate into conservation programmes, local human communities as part of a cultural (non-instrumental) heritage. South Africa has six TFCAs that it shares with all six of its neighbours – Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

The posterchild of the TFCAs is the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park which united the Gemsbok National Park in Botswana and the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park in South Africa into a

single ecological unit of 3.7 million hectares. Here is the somewhat phenomenological description of it as described by the South African Department of Environment:

> Spectacular parallel dunes of both red and white sands, separated by grassy dune valleys, characterise much of the landscape. Shrubby dune bushveld of scattered shrubs of grey camel thorn, grasses, sparsely scattered trees of camel thorn, shepherd's tree and false umbrella thorn predominate. The vastness of the conservation area allows the nomadic herds of herbivore populations and their predators to maintain themselves in perfect balance with their desert environment with little need for human management intervention… (Department of Environmental Affairs, website)

The interesting thing about the creation of this TFCA is the successful inclusion of humans in the conservation of the natural area. The Khomani San have long occupied this region as did a mixed-race group that referred to themselves as 'Basters' (literally meaning 'Bastards' in Dutch). This latter group were made up largely of runaway slaves, illegitimate offspring of their Dutch masters, renegades and outlaws that escaped the Dutch colonial yolk at the beginning of the nineteenth-century. They established an independent state called Mier in what is now the South African side of the transfrontier park (Cruise, 2016). They and the San practically lived off the land without any agriculture, despite its inhospitable nature, simply because wildlife somehow thrived in the area. However, when the park was proclaimed in the 1930s, both the San and the Basters were forcibly removed (Cruise, 2016). Essentially, the new TFCA, which was launched on 12 May 2000 by President Festus Mogae of Botswana and President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, aimed to restore these peoples' place in the wild landscape. It is an effective South African version of rewilding humans and desert ecosystems. This draws together many of the ideas put forward in this dissertation, in that both the indigenous human way of life and the conservation of wildlife are effectively brought together. This is a good practical example of Merleau-Ponty's idea of living bodies (human and other animal) immersed in and interdependent with the wild environment.

5.2. Biosphere Reserves

Another interesting move forward is the government-led expansion of 'Biosphere Reserves'. Biosphere Reserves in South Africa are generally formed around an existing core conservation area to include greater expanses of biological diversity in partnership with human communities.

The first one was created and registered with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 1998. This was the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve near Cape Town. This 100,000-hectare reserve has high floral diversity, endemism and spectacular scenery, and is an important water catchment area for Cape Town. The core area is Kogelberg Nature Reserve, and the biosphere includes an important wetland, five towns, various settlements and resorts, agricultural land (particularly fruit orchards) and commercial forestry plantations. The 376,900 hectares Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserve is another example, which includes a number of threatened vegetation types and important bird breeding sites such as the Langebaan Lagoon (West Coast National Park), the Berg River, Rietvlei Nature Reserve and a coastal area.

Another is in the north of the country, the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve. This covers 1.4 million hectares, with the core conservation area being the Marakele National Park. Surrounding this is an additional 28,000 hectares of state land which is being converted into a private community venture, three provincial reserves, private game fames and a 5,000 hectare 'tribal reserve' owned by the Masebe community.

And finally, the belle of the ball, is the Kruger-to-Canyons Biosphere Reserve. This huge biosphere reserve covers more than 3.3 million hectares, spanning across two provinces. The core areas consist of thirteen declared protected areas, with a major portion of the Kruger National Park as the largest core area.

5.3. Marine Protected Areas

On Thursday, 23 May 2019, the government declared twenty new Marine Protected Areas. (South African Government Gazette, Issues 42478 and 42479). This represents a giant leap for ocean protection in South Africa. According to the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), this "will considerably advance South Africa's efforts to protect our ocean

heritage for future generations. They will help fisheries resources to recover, contribute to food and job security, help maintain resilience in ecosystems that are under stress from climate change and support marine tourism" (SANBI, 24 May 2019).

The new Marine Protected Areas add approximately 50 000 km$_2$ to South Africa's protected area, an area more than twice the size of Kruger National Park. Still, it remains just 5% of South Africa's coastline, but will concentrate on sensitive areas like the muddy ecosystems on the west, south and east coast, and protection of the marine environment around South Africa's iconic Robben Island.

As one can see from the creation of these TFCAs, biodiversity and marine reserves, that humans and nature are included together in the process – another sign that government policy is recognizing the imperative of preserving biodiversity, including human diversity. TFCAs and biodiversity reserves provide sound eco-phenomenological alternatives to the conservation practices based on weak anthropocentrism that are currently prevalent in South Africa. Eco-phenomenology highlights the *necessity* of including all humans and all wild animals within a wild environment. Ethically and ontologically, this overrides the flawed concepts of instrumental valuation and sustainable development in conservation (as demonstrated in *Chapter Two*) that preserves *some* wild animals purely for the limited well-being and gratification of *some* humans.

6. Conclusion

This last chapter demonstrates what can measurably be done with a Merleau-Ponty-constructed eco-phenomenological concept to conserve wildlife. This chapter offers practical solutions to the phenomenological insight that everything on the Planet is chiasmically intertwined and interdependent. Wild species cannot be successfully conserved singularly or treated instrumentally for anthropocentric benefit and well-being, without resulting in the destruction of other species and the wild environment as a whole. Conservation of wildlife, as has been demonstrated, includes conserving every animate and inanimate link in the chain of life, and that includes humans immersed among them. Break any link in that chiasmic chain and the entire biosphere begins to collapse. As is now palpably clear from the latest IPBES report, centuries of anthropocentric exploitation have broken so many of those links that a million species are on the brink of extinction, a process that will soon include our own.

In *Chapter One* I discussed the currently dominant utilitarian view that wildlife and the natural environment is taken as a store of consumable goods that meet human needs and desires. This view underlies the mainstream conservation ethos. I also deliberated on a second, ostensibly opposing notion of moral consideration of wild animals – more particularly, the view of animal rights theorists such as Peter Singer who insist that animals' moral consideration is paramount when it comes to conserving them. Both these notions were found in *Chapter Two* to be foundationally flawed and wholly inadequate in conserving wildlife. It is a third notion, the one developed from *Chapter Four* onwards, using a Merleau-Pontian version of phenomenology, that finally provides the best approach to wildlife conservation. This view takes human and wild animals as actively, dynamically and physically integrated and inseparable from the wild environment. Eco-phenomenology sets itself apart from other theoretical and philosophical disciplines by its unique capacity for bringing *active expression* to the human interrelationship with the wild world as well as to the relation between (wild) animals and their meaningful worlds. This new position is neither anti-human nor is it human-centred. It is a view that the natural environment's health must be protected at all costs, because it supports all life on Planet Earth, including human life. As Holmes Rolston III points out:

> Humans depend on airflow, water cycles, sunshine, photosynthesis, nitrogen fixation, decomposition, bacteria, fungi, the ozone layer, food chains, insect pollination, soils, earthworms, climates, oceans, and genetic materials. An ecology always lies in the background of culture, natural givens that support everything else. Some sort of inclusive environmental fitness is required of even the most advanced culture (Holmes Rolston III, 1988: 3).

Ultimately, the conservation of wildlife is not about attaching instrumental value or moral consideration to wild animals or species, but of staving off a crisis that threatens every living one of us from a microbe to a blue whale, by conserving as much of the natural world as possible in its vast, complex, chiasmic entirety.

CONCLUSION

Since phenomenology is about being-in-the-world as we experience it in real-time, it automatically is an applied concept. Phenomenology is the study of experience, action, activity and physical acts. An eco-phenomenology follows this process too, as we saw with Merleau-Ponty's later work in *The Visible and Invisible*. Merleau-Ponty's insights into and descriptions of the intersubjective interrelatedness of living bodies with the world were in fact based on the in-field studies of wild animals by the biologist Jakob von Uexküll. But perhaps what makes Merleau-Ponty's concepts most appealing is that they lend themselves directly to the formation of both a land ethic and an applied approach to conservation. The formulation of this ethic we could already discern in Aldo Leopold's descriptions of a functioning ecosystem and the human involvement and attachment to that ecosystem. Even our linguistic capacity, , as described by Merleau-Ponty and later phenomenologists, such as Jacques Derrida, as well as traditional belief systems like the Zimbabwean worldview of *Ukama*, speaks of a practical approach to and the human interconnection with the natural environment in a real world.

Most importantly, the successful conservation of wild species comes down to just a single notion: recreating the space for all biodiversity to thrive. Eco-phenomenology therefore is about the commitment toward and the protection of the entire system, which includes all living beings (plants, wild animals and humans) and even non-living entities (water, soil and air). Eco-phenomenology is a new conservation approach in that it wholly abandons any anthropocentric constructs based on instrumental value and Cartesian dualism in conservation. Consequently, it avoids all the resultant pitfalls of anthropocentrism (as discussed in *Chapter Two*). Eco-phenomenology is instead ontological in that it concerns itself with the existence and well-being of the entire natural environment. Thus, it is the protection of 'wildness' that is key to an eco-phenomenological pursuit.

Crucially, the governments and other policy-makers need to recognise that the loss of biodiversity will not only harm the natural environment, but will cause human social, economic and cultural collapses as well. The future of humanity depends on the future health of the natural environment. Such practical strategies are to expand the space for biodiversity to thrive, not by removing humans entirely, but by rewilding land over-exploited through agriculture. Cutting down space that feeds livestock like cattle (soybean farming in the Amazon basin) and thinking of better ways to feed humanity (eating less meat and avoiding biodiversity-harmful

products like palm oil is one such strategy. Reforming our language, much as feminism did, is another. Language reform helps humans think of (other) animals as essential members of the biotic community in which humans too are an integral part. Language conservation, as I hope to have shown, is also crucial to those impoverished communities around the world that rely on the natural environment for their own survival and well-being.

Ultimately, eco-phenomenology based on the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty recognises that *all* living beings are not stand-alone entities to be taken individually (either as instrumentally or intrinsically valuable), but together as a great interconnected web of life that depends on each other for their existence. At the heart of an eco-phenomenology is the wildness-of-being. It is wildness that drives our existence and keeps us alive. Ultimately, if humans are successfully to conserve species in the era of the Anthropocene, we need to preserve the house that keeps us all alive – the wilderness.

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