



# MULTISPECIES FUTURES

New Approaches to Teaching  
Human-Animal Studies

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Neofelis

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Jobst Paul

## The Philosophical Animal Deconstructed

### From Linguistic to Curricular Methodology

During the campaign for the regional parliamentary elections in Eastern Germany in October 2019, the right-wing nationalist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) also focused on a few hundred wolves that at that time had begun returning to their former habitats in Germany from across the Polish border. As early as in April 2019, Katrin Bennhold was explaining to the readers of *The New York Times* that AfD politicians had warned voters that they were “facing an invasion” and observed that this rhetoric “[was] strikingly similar to how [these politicians] talk about immigrants, turning the wolf into an object of terror – and the discussion into an allegory for the nation’s culture wars.”<sup>1</sup>

Bennhold’s analysis of right-wing political campaign slogans brilliantly sums up the linguistic underpinnings of political, demagogical rhetoric that uses animals as an analogical *machine*. While the “rhetorical animal” has very little to do with animals in the real sense, it has a long history that can be traced back at least some 2,350 years to Aristotle. Later on, the Christian Church Fathers and Thomas Aquinas in particular incorporated the concept into the moral teachings of Christian theology, which laid the foundations for the “rhetorical animal” to play a key role in the writings of virtually all traditional Western philosophers. This is why Jacques Derrida coined the term *philosophical animal*,<sup>2</sup> which I will use throughout this essay.

1 Katrin Bennhold: A Fairy-Tale Baddie, the Wolf, Is Back in Germany, and Anti-Migrant Forces Pounce. In: *New York Times*, April 23, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/23/world/europe/germany-wolves-afd-immigration.html> (accessed: July 2, 2021).

2 Jacques Derrida: *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. by Marie-Luise Mallet. New York: Fordham UP 2008, p. 23.

However, the somewhat solemn image of this animal concept and its popular, political, and demagogic functions are closely intertwined. Deconstructing the philosophical animal may therefore, among other things, allow us to reconsider several disastrous cultural practices and habits related to that concept.<sup>3</sup> For example, humans who have embraced this kind of thinking have treated nonhuman animals and other humans as enemies or slaves, or as mere resources to be exploited at whim. Meanwhile, we now have a better understanding of the final consequence of these dehumanizing modes of human, economic, and natural exploitation: climate change.<sup>4</sup>

Against this background it is necessary for teachers and educators to develop teaching interventions that reflect the emotional and dramatic nature of the subject, but that also transform it into a cognitive procedure. For this purpose, we can define the philosophical animal as a set of interrelated stereotypical narrative motifs that can be – as shown at the beginning – submitted to discourse-analytical and philological analysis. This approach, as I argue, can be a powerful method for both teachers and students eager to understand and challenge different iterations of the philosophical animal. In the following, I will discuss the need for this kind of intervention and explain its basic theoretical and pedagogical framework. I will conclude by discussing how this approach could be used in different educational settings, suggesting that it is possible to affect change for the better, even in current curricular settings.

3 See Catherine M. Quinsey (ed.): *Animals and Humans: Sensibility and Representation, 1650–1820*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation 2017; Peter Arnds: *Wolves at the Door: Migration, Dehumanization, Rewilding the World*. London: Bloomsbury 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781501366796> (accessed: January 24, 2022); see also the instructive writings on this matter by Boria Sax, e. g., *Animals in the Third Reich: Pets, Scapegoats, and the Holocaust*. New York: Continuum 2000. In contrast to the historiographical accounts, however, my focus is on linguistic analyses and related teaching interventions. For further reading in animal studies, see the ongoing online bibliography: Linda Kalof / Seven Mattes / Amy Fitzgerald: Animal Studies Bibliography. In: *Animal Studies Program, Michigan State University*, o. D. <http://animalstudies.msu.edu/bibliography.php> (accessed: July 2, 2021).

4 See Thomas Fleischman: *Communist Pigs: An Animal History of East Germany's Rise and Fall*. Seattle: U of Washington P 2020. Fleischman in his study demonstrates how East Germany's excessive pork production barred the development of environmental reflection.

## The narrative setting

In the *New York Times* article mentioned at the beginning, Bennhold quotes Silke Grimm, a local AfD politician, who warns of an “invasion of wolves” from Poland, which she says “are dangerous” and “breed explosively.”<sup>5</sup> Grimm’s description has, of course, little to do with the actual behavior of wolves. However, interpreting this description as a philosophical animal, i. e., as a set of interrelated stereotypical narrative motifs, we have a first clue here, as the term “invasion” – in combination with “explosive breeding” – points to one of the core properties of the philosophical animal – or, as I have termed it: the *animal construct*.<sup>6</sup> The property in question here is, of course, (pure) sex: the monster-*animal* is a sex machine, multiplying its forces against *us*.<sup>7</sup> However, as part of a set, the sex-motif regularly points to or even triggers additional narrative motifs that together form the philosophical animal: a dangerous monster-*animal* wandering around, multiplying its forces against

5 Bennhold: A Fairy-Tale Baddie.

6 For a first sketch of this analysis see Jobst Paul: Zur Erinnerung: Tier-Metaphern und Ausgrenzung – Anmerkungen zur sogenannten “Singer”-Debatte. In: Idem / Siegfried Jäger: *Von Menschen und Schweinen*. Duisburg: Duisburger Institut für Sprach- und Sozialforschung 1990, pp. 30–43. I first presented this analysis as a comprehensive tool in: Jobst Paul: “Erinnerung” als Kompetenz: Zum didaktischen Umgang mit Rassismus, Antisemitismus und Ausgrenzung. Duisburg: Duisburger Institut für Sprach- und Sozialforschung 1999. I presented an in-depth approach in: Jobst Paul: *Das “Tier”-Konstrukt – und die Geburt des Rassismus: Zur kulturellen Gegenwart eines vernichtenden Arguments*. Münster: Unrast 2004. This was a revised version of my dissertation: *Das “Tier”-Konstrukt als Grundprinzip in Ausgrenzungsdiskursen: Eine diskursanalytische Studie*. Dissertation, University of Duisburg-Essen, 2003. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/29800083\\_Das\\_‘Tier’-Konstrukt\\_als\\_Grundprinzip\\_in\\_Ausgrenzungsdiskursen\\_eine\\_diskursanalytische\\_Studie](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/29800083_Das_‘Tier’-Konstrukt_als_Grundprinzip_in_Ausgrenzungsdiskursen_eine_diskursanalytische_Studie) (accessed: July 2, 2021). I lay out the aspect of self-praise and self-exaltation in dehumanizing speech practices (with special reference to traditional philosophy) in: Jobst Paul: Reading the Code of Dehumanisation: The Animal Construct Deconstructed. In: *Polifonia: Estudos* 33 (2016), pp. 149–178. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304676369\\_Reading\\_the\\_code\\_of\\_dehumanisation\\_the\\_animal\\_construct\\_deconstructed](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304676369_Reading_the_code_of_dehumanisation_the_animal_construct_deconstructed) (accessed: July 2, 2021). I present a comprehensive guide to the analysis of degrading speech in: Idem: *Der binäre Code: Leitfaden zur Analyse herabsetzender Texte und Aussagen*. Frankfurt: Wochenschau 2019. A short summary of the guide can be found in: Idem: Handlungsfähigkeit zurückgewinnen – Die Rhetorik der Herabsetzung unter der Lupe der Sprachkritik. In: *Demokratie gegen Menschenfeindlichkeit* 1 (2019), pp. 130–139.

7 Compare this narrative to, for example, the aggressive comments by Clemens Tönnies, CEO of one of Germany’s largest meatpacking companies and (now former) chairman of a renowned German soccer club. Tönnies called on Africans to stop “producing children” (transl. J. P.). See Mitschnitt von Tönnies’ Rede beim Paderborner “Tag des Handwerks”: Originalaufnahme von Tönnies’ Afrika-Aussage. In: *Westfalen-Blatt*, August 6, 2019. <https://www.westfalen-blatt.de/owl/kreis-paderborn/paderborn/originalaufnahme-von-tonnies-afrika-aussage-987274> (accessed: July 2, 2021).

*us* and lying in wait for (our) food and (our) supplies can also and easily be read as a creature with a (total) lack of any rational capacities, with a (total) lack of the concept of work, and characterized by its (total) inability and unwillingness to put together supplies for “tomorrow” or to feed its offspring. In short: the wolf evoked by Grimm is not only a wandering animal, but also a “stupid” one. In fact, the degrading motif of stupidity (as the inability to work for the common good) is a stereotypical feature of the philosophical animal, which can be observed in, for example, sexist jokes about women or ableist comments about people with disabilities, or in many racist slurs, particularly those referring to migrants.

The third stereotypical narrative motif evoked by Grimm’s portrait of the “wolf” is the *gorging and robbing motif* referring to the beast’s excessive gorging, devouring, eating, tearing into pieces, and biting to death not only food, prey, and flesh, but also anyone of *us* who might be standing in the beast’s way. In many racist texts, the gorging and stealing motif is accompanied by a whole range of secondary stereotypical narratives, for example, about crime, which have proliferated in Germany, especially since 2015. (A common trope in xenophobic attacks on migrants in this period have been claims of *Flüchtlingskriminalität* or “refugee criminality.”) Notably, the gorging and stealing motif can also easily be combined with the sex motif to warn of the *invaders’* appetite for raping (*our women*).

From a rhetorical standpoint, another narrative motif, which I will refer to here as the *excremental motif*, seems to be the most inflammatory one. Once the wolf or, for that matter, any other beast has devoured its prey, it will fall asleep immediately, lying down in its own excrement. While this implies that the beast has a super-vitalistic immunity to viruses and contaminants, the tacit, inflammatory part of the story becomes clear when we ask what happens once the beast has passed the border to *us*, to *civilization*. Like “trash animals,” such as rats or pigeons,<sup>8</sup> the philosophical animal is thought to be a carrier of diseases and the cause of epidemic outbreaks, a charge that has also been leveled at many marginalized groups<sup>9</sup>: from anti-refugee to war propaganda and racist hate speech – virtually any variant of dehumanizing speech will take up, in one way or another, the excremental motif in order to stir up resentment and justify violence and hate against imaginary enemies.

8 See Kelsi Nagy / Randy Malamud / Phillip David Johnson: *Trash Animals: How We Live with Nature’s Filthy, Feral, Invasive, and Unwanted Species*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P 2013.

9 See Art Spiegelman: *The Complete Maus: A Survivor’s Tale. Part 1: My Father Bleeds History; Part 2: From Mauschwitz to the Catskills*. 1 CD-ROM. New York: Voyager 1994.



There is one detail within the concept of the philosophical animal – or: the body / mind binary – in particular that betrays its origins in Aristotelian philosophy: it is the faculty of *instrumental* reason, which Aristotle – in his analogical reasoning about the human soul<sup>10</sup> – conceded was part of the *animal* realm, while he reserved *pure* reason for *man* alone. We find this variant, which can be called the *mastermind* motif, in Grimm’s statement above, as well, when she refers to wolves as *collective* enemies: animals living in *packs* – such as wolves – serve as preferred metaphors in right-wing and extremist propaganda and as a means of depicting the *enemy* as a sinister collective planning its bestial attacks with utmost sophistication and brutality. Consequently, the *mastermind* motif can be used to accuse the enemy of all kinds of conspiracies. Antisemitic speech in particular very much relies on this trope.

However, in order to realize the full potential of the philosophical animal as an inflammatory tool, Grimm, in her statement reprinted in *The New York Times*, adds a final narrative turn that one could refer to as a *traitor* component – that is, the suggestion that someone in the *we*-group’s own ranks is secretly colluding with the enemy. Referring to an “invasion” of wolves (from across the border to Poland), Grimm implies that official statements intended to calm the public have been deliberately misleading and are meant to assist the wolves as they make inroads into German territory. Conflating wolves and refugees, she says, “We know that line from the refugee crisis. No one believes a word of it.” In other words, Grimm uses the philosophical animal as a point of departure for a firmly established right-wing narrative that combines the racist stereotyping of migrants with conspiratorial talking points about ruthless political elites shamelessly lying to their constituents.

As noted earlier, wolves do not, of course, breed explosively, and there is no conspiracy, there are no traitors aiding or abetting the “enemy”; the several hundred wolves do not pose any serious threat to lives or livelihoods. However, what is obviously quite real and powerful is the narrative itself, which, however wrong and misleading, eventually enters political discourse and other public debates. In this way, it has real-life effects that sway public opinion, provoke affective responses, provide support to discriminatory ideologies and practices, and, perhaps, trigger violence against minorities.<sup>11</sup>

10 See Jobst Paul: “Geist” vs. “Tier”: Rassismus und Gewaltästhetik. In: *Osnabrücker Beiträge zur Sprachtheorie* 46 (1992), pp. 210–228.

11 For further details, see Paul: Code, pp. 34–37.

We should, however, be aware that the (ab)use of philosophical animals in political rhetoric not only has a wide range of adverse social effects but also tends to harm real animals. The stigmatization of, for example, wolves as a species has led to centuries of violence. In general, Western philosophy and its recourse to animals has made a considerable contribution to today's environmental crisis. The disastrous social and environmental aspects of the concept of the philosophical animal are, as I stated earlier, two sides of the same coin.

### **Plants as animals**

In the previous section, I showed how philosophical animals can function as vehicles for human ideologies and, in the specific case of the 2019 AfD election campaign, for stereotypical right-wing propaganda and its use of animal constructs to justify violence and the oppression of nonhuman animals. In the following, I will continue by expanding my argument regarding philosophical animals to include plants (“plants as animals”) and, in a next step, by considering how the processes described thus far are facilitated by the media.<sup>12</sup> An article in *GEO*, a renowned German-language periodical covering nature and the environment, begins as follows:

In order to obtain nutrients, some plants have become carnivores over the course of evolution. They do not need teeth, their “mouths” are the smooth edges of the pitchers, in the digestive juice of which animals die. However, some pitcher plants also ally themselves with potential victims – for mutual benefit.<sup>13</sup>

Obviously, this hint at carnivorous plants (“*fleischfressende* Pflanzen” or “predatory, meat-eating plants”) functions as an “appetizer” for potential readers, although “meat” is nowhere to be seen in the series of photographs accompanying the article. However, the editors seem to be keen to emphasize this very

12 For an in-depth discussion of the aesthetics of violence, see Paul: “Geist” vs. “Tier”; and Jobst Paul: Von Gladiatoren, Grenzschützern und Collateral Murder: Zur psychosozialen Dynamik medialer Gewaltästhetik. In: Rolf van Raden / Siegfried Jäger (eds): *Im Griff der Medien: Krisenproduktion und Subjektivierungseffekte*. Münster: Unrast 2011, pp. 179–200.

13 Klaus Bachmann: Fleischfressende Pflanzen: Die Fallensteller. In: *GEO*, n. d. <https://www.geo.de/natur/naturwunder-erde/die-fallensteller-30169026.html> (accessed: September 20, 2021; transl. J. P.).

dimension and the related motifs of *gorging* and *biting* as the photographs accompanying the article obviously show the metaphorical meat (i. e., flies or ants), presumably right before or in the moment of expiration. At first glance, this is also the case in a close-up photograph of a squirrel (the supposed victim) approaching a carnivorous plant (the supposed killer). Instead of being swallowed by the plant, however, the squirrel is there to demonstrate a surprising, i. e., “vegetarian,” exception to the rule in the world of predatory plants:

In addition to ants, the Rajah Brookes pitcher plant has opened up a new source of nutrients: animal droppings. The *Nepenthes* species, which grows in the Borneo rainforest, attracts small mammals such as the highland squirrel with plenty of nectar. These then climb around on the large pitcher and dispose droppings into it.<sup>14</sup>

While this caption aims to set the record straight, albeit by also invoking what I referred to earlier as the excremental motif, there is evidence that descriptions and photographs such as the ones included in *GEO*, even if framed accurately, have had unexpected and, for the plants, negative consequences. For example, the advisory desk of n-tv, a major German news station, decided in October 2017 to change the way it covered carnivorous plants. Readers were now warned not to feed carnivores:

“The worst mistake that is made again and again is to put dead insects, meat, or even cheese in the traps of the carnivores,” says the expert. “The carnivorous plants cannot do anything with such food. On the contrary, the wrong food starts to rot and grow mold, which causes the plant’s pitcher to decay, and in the worst case, causes rot and mold to spread, with the result that the entire plant dies.

If you want to do something good for the plant, you should focus on things other than feeding. Like all other plants, they form chlorophyll in their green leaves with the help of sunlight. A carnivorous species should therefore be placed in [...] very sunny locations.”<sup>15</sup>

While the case of carnivorous plants might be a curious or even funny one, it is important to realize that the stereotypical narrative motifs related to the philosophical animal might be activated even without obvious political intent

14 Ibid.

15 Jana Zeh: Muss man fleischfressende Pflanzen füttern? In: *n-tv*, October 24, 2017. <https://www.n-tv.de/wissen/frageantwort/Muss-man-fleischfressende-Pflanzen-fuettern-article20075838.html?ntvDuo=true> (accessed: July 2, 2021; transl. J. P.).

but with real-world consequences, both in the case of animals and plants. In the latter case, it is possible to argue that *philosophical plants* have been used like philosophical animals.<sup>16</sup> For example, discourses about native and invasive plants overlap, as in the case of native and invasive animal species, with those of immigration, especially nativist or xenophobic political rhetoric.<sup>17</sup>

### **Discursive entanglements**

As noted above, the philosophical animal often functions as a projection for those who evoke it. If the *they*-group can be conflated with a threatening animal construct using one or more of the motifs described above, the *we*-group, by default, appears to be benign, reasonable, disciplined – in short, *human*. In other words, *we* appear to be the complete opposite of *them*; *we* appear to be altruistic, industrious (from dawn to dusk), committed to the common good (that is, to gathering and accumulating supplies); *we* appear to be ascetic and to despise bodily pleasures. Consequently, as is often the case in authoritarian or fundamentalist ideologies, even activities like sex, starting a family, having children are defined as a service to community – and denying them or being unable or unwilling to perform them is construed as treasonous. Of course, the superlative self-representations that speakers create of themselves when degrading others need not have anything to do with reality. As a rule, these representations work as long as audiences are willing to accept the speakers' empty claims. It would be easy to dismiss the self-exaltation and posturing were it not for the fact that these discursive acts, including (*bestial*) portraits of minorities or opponents,<sup>18</sup> produce discursive realities. These acts even tend to establish rules for fundamentalist social programs that political subjects

16 See Michael Marder: *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*. New York: Columbia UP 2013.

17 See Richard Mabey: *Weeds: How Vagabond Plants Gatecrashed Civilisation and Changed the Way We Think About Nature*. London: Profile 2010; Jobst Paul: *Wir gegen Sie – zu den Abgründen sprachlicher Grenzziehungen*. Lecture, May 16, 2019, Kunstverein Heilbronn. In: *DISS Duisburg*, n. d. <http://www.diss-duisburg.de/download/onlinebibliothek/Wir-gegen-Sie-Referat.pdf> (accessed: July 2, 2021). For more literature see Bibliography. In: *Literary and Cultural Plant Studies Network* (University of Arizona / Department of Medienwissenschaft und Neuere Deutsche Literatur, Universität Dresden), o. D. <https://plants.arizona.edu/bibliography/> (accessed: July 2, 2021).

18 See Jennifer Sclafani: *Talking Donald Trump: A Sociolinguistic Study of Style, Meta-discourse, and Political Identity*. London: Routledge / Taylor & Francis 2018; Marco Morini: *Lessons from Trump's Political Communication: How to Dominate the Media Environment*.

and speakers' supporters are expected to live by while those ignoring or violating these rules will be branded as traitors and threatened with punishment. In other words, the philosophical animal, as a rhetorical device and a vehicle for ideologies, can be used not only to degrade and exploit minority groups but also to discipline society as a whole.

Two cultural and normative traditions are also relevant here because they are closely related to these disciplinary aspects: firstly, a rigorous work ethic and its objective of amassing wealth have been associated with the capitalist principle.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, the expectation that one is willing to sacrifice oneself for the common good (against attackers) has been associated with certain – and quite aggressive – interpretations of the doctrine of *Christian love*.<sup>20</sup> These traditions and their consequences – for example, the unconditional willingness to obey, to work, and to fight – come very close to what the philosophical animal script defines as its *animal* opponent.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps we will only fully grasp the formidable impact of the philosophical animal script if we review and reconsider Western philosophy and Christian moral theology. Starting with Plato, both traditions have, in one way or another, resorted to representations of nonhuman animals as beasts in order to create a flattering portrait of *man* as a rational subject and to dream of the ideal state as that of *ants* and *bees*.<sup>22</sup> As a result, it may well be that the bulk of Western anthropology would evaporate without the suggestive, nonsensical, and yet powerful philosophical animal.<sup>23</sup>

Basel: Springer 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-39010-5> (accessed: January 24, 2022); Viktor Klemperer: *LTI: Lingua Tertii Imperii: The Language of the Third Reich*. London: Bloomsbury 2013, esp. ch. 30: "The Curse of the Superlative."

19 For an overview of the literature on this issue, see the reading list: Rassismus und Kapitalismus – Literaturliste. In: *DISS Duisburg*, n. d. <https://www.diss-duisburg.de/disslit/rassismus-und-kapitalismus-literaturliste/> (accessed: July 2, 2021).

20 The relevant literature on this topic is included in the following reading list: Rassismus und Christentum – Literaturliste. In: *DISS Duisburg*, n. d. <https://www.diss-duisburg.de/disslit/rassismus-und-christentum-literaturliste/> (accessed: July 2, 2021).

21 I refer to this phenomenon as the *authoritarian paradox*. See Paul: Code, pp. 63–68.

22 For a discussion of ant and bee metaphors in traditional political thought, see Jobst Paul: The Human Construct and the Morals of Collectivism: Social Insects and the Sacrifice of Intelligence. In: Idem: *Reading the Code*, pp. 162–164.

23 See Jobst Paul: Appendix (Reading the Code of Dehumanisation: The Animal Construct Deconstructed): The Human-Animal Analogy in Philosophy. In: *Research Gate*, January 2020. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338406848\\_Appendix\\_Reading\\_the\\_code\\_of\\_dehumanisation\\_the\\_animal\\_construct\\_deconstructed\\_The\\_Human-Animal\\_Analogy\\_in\\_Philosophy](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338406848_Appendix_Reading_the_code_of_dehumanisation_the_animal_construct_deconstructed_The_Human-Animal_Analogy_in_Philosophy) (accessed: July 2, 2021).

## Curricular methodology

Having explained the use and the discursive power of the philosophical animal and the function of (stereotypical) narrative motifs, I will now address pedagogical interventions that can be used to examine these issues at different levels and in different contexts. This is all the more urgent as the philosophical animal has become a common discursive currency, or “empty signifier,”<sup>24</sup> employed and exchanged at different levels, from the sciences to everyday usage, not only as a shorthand for what is right and wrong, for *us* and *them*, but also for what is *human* and what is *animal*. While animal studies have worked toward deconstructing philosophical animals in different disciplinary contexts, it is, particularly in light of the cultural and moral pervasiveness and the social power of this script, necessary for educators to develop approaches that empower students to engage with philosophical animals (and plants) in a critical and transparent manner in and outside the classroom.

As we have seen, the starting point for analysis can be words or texts as they are the basic data commonly used in linguistic or social psychological inquiries. This kind of data can be examined empirically with the help of the philological methods explained above. Basic analyses do not necessarily require extensive prior knowledge or advanced skill sets. Sequences can start with relatively short text units and can become more and more challenging. The deductive steps following the first insights can be applied to increasingly complex texts and matters that have been, for example, picked from the daily news or from extended historical case studies. These steps may involve basic analytical tools or the use of quite sophisticated linguistic methods. While students can interrogate the philosophical animal rather quickly, educators can expand upon curricula or adjust them to the age and learning curve of students.

It is important to note here, however, that such curricula can – for students and educators alike – be fraught with psychological strain. Of course, the focus should and will always be on empirical findings and transparency. That said, both students and instructors are unlikely to have a completely disinterested or “objective” perspective on the subject matter they have chosen to investigate, in part because it is not possible for them to ignore “the world out there,” their social roles, their personal experiences, or personal values or beliefs. This is the case regardless of whether they have been witnesses to or victims of abuse, whether they are engaging in questionable social behavior

24 See Ernesto Laclau: *Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter in Politics?* London: Routledge 2000.

or not, or have been confronted with controversial and emotionally fraught issues, especially in the context of human and nonhuman animal relations. As they ask their students to engage with these difficult issues, instructors should keep in mind that this very strain might be crucial for students to engage in long processes of reflection and critical questioning. Although instructors should always be prepared to assist and to engage in dialogues with students, they should also be prepared to take a step back and leave it to the students as they seek to make sense of all of this in the long run. In my experience, young students (aged twelve or older) in particular may be concerned once they begin to reflect on their own verbal use or behavior, or that of their peers or families. They may not be prepared or able to communicate their concerns and emotions immediately. This does not mean, however, that they should be spared the experience of being somewhat embarrassed. Choosing appropriate introductory materials for the very beginning of the curriculum (for children aged twelve or older) may considerably reduce the stress experienced by students.

Perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, this very much applies to the material with which children are bound to become familiar very early on – material that reflects the simple and yet very influential and powerful application of the philosophical animal script: name-calling. Although different modern languages have different idiomatic practices, linguistic analyses of offensive terms such as *pig*, *idiot*, or *jackass* show that these terms can be easily attributed to the narrative traits I mentioned at the beginning, namely the motifs of stupidity and sex, as well as the devouring and the excremental motifs.

Younger children with whom I have worked tend to be highly motivated and greatly enjoy participating in the “breaking of the taboo”<sup>25</sup> and in the analysis. One possible explanation for this level of involvement seems to be that analysis reveals the cultural dimensions of name-calling, which offers some relief from personal responsibility. Students also discover that they have a choice, namely, to abstain from this practice. In addition, the analysis of name-calling in class can have empowering effects on those students who have already experienced discriminatory language, and it may have sobering effects on those students who tend to use or enjoy it.

It is possible to allow students to develop a more distanced perspective by asking them, in a next step, to interpret aspects of well-known literary traditions,

25 For the outlines of the classroom-experiment, see Paul: “*Tier*”-Konstrukt als Grundprinzip, pp. 64–76. It must be said, however, that in similar crash courses with adults, reactions were nearly identical.

of fables and fairy tales. Both genres are populated by stupid, greedy, devouring, dirty animals, and it is here that we find many of the narrative motifs that I discussed earlier, such as, to mention just one example, the wolf as a devouring mastermind. In addition, by also dealing with the drawings and illustrations that often make fables and fairy-tales so appealing to younger readers, instructors can offer first insights into the repetitive repertoire of visual stereotyping as well.

The latter can serve as a cognitive bridge to the analysis of other visual materials for students aged fourteen and older, who may be particularly fond of, for example, action, horror, or fantasy video games. Here, the focus will not only be on the *animal* character of many of the *enemies* presented in these games but also on the perspectives of the first-person *shooters*. Students are encouraged to consider what the moral and physical properties of these characters are and why they could have become role models, given human rights, and *Western* liberal traditions.

Students aged fourteen and older can quickly develop the skills needed to conduct more systemized analyses of verbally dehumanizing statements. To do so, they need to learn how to verbalize the stereotypical story behind smaller text fragments, for instance, behind the following statement given by Donald J. Trump on June 16, 2015: “When Mexico sends its people [...] they’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.”<sup>26</sup> Mexico here can easily be identified as a mastermind sending drugs to Americans to sedate them and thus to gain access to, to rob, and to consume their goods (gorging plus excremental motifs) but also to rape (white) American women (sex motif).<sup>27</sup> In the same way, studying just a few samples picked from aggressive internet blogs that reveal their mostly simplistic repetitive make-up (the excessive use of the philosophical animal script) can be quite revealing to students: as (online) *hate speech* is often related to current public, political, and ethical issues, students are bound to become more aware of their own civil involvement and the need to take sides.

26 See Amber Phillips: “They’re rapists.” President Trump’s campaign launch speech two years later, annotated. In: *The Washington Post*, June 16, 2017. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/06/16/theyre-rapists-presidents-trump-campaign-launch-speech-two-years-later-annotated/> (accessed: September 20, 2021).

27 More advanced students can be guided to analyze the latter motif in the *King Kong* character, see Gail Dines: King Kong and the White Woman: Hustler Magazine and the Demonization of Black Masculinity. In: *Violence Against Women* 4:3 (1998), pp. 291–307, which can be followed by courses dealing with the ape stereotype more broadly; see Charles W. Mills / Silvia Sebastiani / Wulf Hund (eds): *Simianization: Apes, Gender, Class, and Race*. Münster: Lit 2015. <https://doi.org/10.15446/achsc.v44n2.64029> (accessed: January 24, 2022).



More advanced undergraduate and graduate students can be introduced more systematically and with greater disciplinary scaffolding to the philosophical animal and to a wide range of themes, genres, and disciplines. More specifically, they can be introduced to the discursive strands involved in *them-and-us* rhetoric in contrast to strands that are presumably or definitely not employed in that rhetoric or are employed to a lesser degree. Consequently, more advanced analyses of the philosophical animal will have to deal with discursive, cultural, and political conflicts past and present, and even wars in the broadest sense possible, turning (among others) to racist, sexist, ableist text sources<sup>28</sup> but also to the stereotyping in pop lyrics<sup>29</sup> and in world literature,<sup>30</sup> in addition to some of the philosophical sources already mentioned. However, the specific challenge here is refraining from aiming at any kind of positivistic completeness. The real challenge is coping with the present and future power of binary human / animal discourses, whether in populist speech, in the medical realm,<sup>31</sup> or even in animal studies.<sup>32</sup> The philosophical animal

28 See, for example, Jeffrey Kaplan (ed.): *Encyclopedia of White Power: A Sourcebook on the Radical Racist Right*. Walnut Creek / Lanham / New York / Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield 2000, p. 373; Salvador Jimenez Murguía (ed.): *The Encyclopedia of Racism in American Films*. Walnut Creek / Lanham / New York / Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield 2018; Kristina Fennelly / Erica Joan Dymond / Salvador Jimenez Murguía (eds): *The Encyclopedia of Sexism in American Films*. Walnut Creek / Lanham / New York / Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield 2019.

29 See Annie Carl: *My Tropey Life: How Pop Culture Stereotypes Make Disabled Lives Harder*. Portland: Microcosm 2020.

30 Consider, for example, the human-animal binary (as a split personality) in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), E. T. A. Hoffmann's criminal novel *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* (1819/21) dealing with a jeweler turned beast, or Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum: Die Geschichte eines Mörders* (1985) about a young perfumer turned beast. But see also Franz Kafka's anti-binary interpretation of an ape (named Red Peter) turned scholar in *Ein Bericht für eine Akademie* (1917).

31 See the role of the *plant* (not *animal*) stereotype in terms such as PVS (persistent vegetative state) or the *bare body* stereotype in the present Harvard definition of human death (with a view to transplantation medicine) in: Ben Sarbey: Definitions of Death: Brain Death and What Matters in a Person. In: *Journal of Law and Bioscience* 3:3 (2016), pp. 743–752. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5570697/> (accessed: July 2, 2021).

32 For a discussion of the idea to counter the human abuse of (real) animals by conferring human rights on some species, see, for example, Paola Cavalieri / Catherine Woollard (eds): *The Animal Question: Why Nonhuman Animals Deserve Human Rights*. Oxford / New York: Oxford UP 2004. This contribution to the debate seems to ignore that this would not be the end but rather a continuation of the binary category of the human. More or less the same principle applies vice versa to the sociobiological polemic declaring all humans to be animals (with the exception of the sociobiologists, of course).

script has developed a narrative potential that goes far beyond crude bashing in the form of online hate speech. More often than not, binary messages are clad in fine ironic allusion, in solid scientific claims, in sophisticated propaganda, and in secretive conspiracy theories that twist and intertwine with the narrative motifs mentioned above in novel and complex ways. In other words: it may take a lot of practice to perform the simple, the only real task, namely verbalizing the one stereotypical story at the core of it all.

### **Moral and social learning**

Having discussed options for and personal experiences using this approach to teach the philosophical animal, I would like to conclude by addressing one question regarding the analysis as a whole, namely, that of its exact psychological and ideological contexts. In his article *Learning from Negative Morality*, the Swiss pedagogue Fritz K. Oser describes *negative morality* as something based on the

[...] supposition that knowledge and experience of negative behaviour protects right or positive behaviour. Because of experienced *mistakes* the subject remembers this experience and thus more strongly resists a new moral trap. The question of indignation about injustice and shame about *real* unfair or hurtful behaviour will be stressed in a more cognitive and discourse-orientated way.<sup>33</sup>

As Oser rightly points out here, what we call justice, equality, or human rights cannot be defined or grasped positivistically. What these norms or values really mean only becomes clear due to the pain caused by violations and by disregarding said norms and values. Analyzing the philosophical animal, one of the most obvious linguistic manifestations of these violations and of moral disregard, can be a means for students to engage with what we share as values, including those not yet universally applied to nonhuman others. Providing students with the skills to interrogate the binary constructions at work in all kinds of relations between humans, nonhuman animals, and the natural world can be a crucial step. Learning to see, to experience, to analyze, to deconstruct the philosophical animal can help students to create non-binary fields of experience and practice, perhaps even a culture not defined by rigid binary structures and thinking. This openness is urgently required.

33 Fritz K. Oser: Learning from Negative Morality. In: *Journal of Moral Education* 25:1 (1996), pp.67–74.