

Humanizing the Animal, Animalizing the Human: Husserl on Pets

Christian Ferencz-Flatz^{1,2}

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Abstract In several of his research manuscripts from the 1930s, Edmund Husserl considers the concrete life-world to be a world essentially determined by both humans and animals, or a “humanized” and “animalized” world. Husserl bases this claim on two observations. First, in his view, the surrounding objects of the human world are as such marked by cultural practices. Second, he considers that there is a corresponding animal world that similarly bears the existential traces of the animal. The following paper attempts to lay bare the various forms of interplay between these two processes, as they come to the fore in several analyses, especially in Husserl’s reflections on pets. Although Husserl’s treatment of this issue remains rather unilateral and elliptic, the paper attempts to draw from his reflections several consequences that might also be relevant for current debates in animal ethics.

Keywords Husserl · Uexküll · Animal-worlds · Humanization · Animalization · Pets

Of course, Husserl did not write extensively about pets. The following is merely an attempt to sketch out a certain strain of problems in his thinking, which on several occasions tentatively touches upon the issue of domestic animals in general and animal companions in particular. To be more precise, I will focus on the interplay between two categories that Husserl uses in this context, namely humanization and animalization; categories that also hold some relevant consequences for the contemporary ethical and philosophical debates concerning animal companions. I will start out with a general discussion of humanization and animalization. Next, I

✉ Christian Ferencz-Flatz
christian.ferencz@phenomenology.ro

¹ Institute for Research in the Humanities, Bucharest, Romania

² Husserl Archives, Cologne, Germany

will collect some of Husserl's scattered remarks on pets and domestic animals and identify therein some correspondences with the theories of Jacob von Uexküll. Finally, I will conclude with a brief attempt to situate all of this in a broader historical perspective.

Humanization

On several occasions in his later writings, Husserl explicitly designates the concrete life-world as “a humanized [...] world, in which [...] all worldly objects have a human meaning”.¹ For sure, when reading such a claim, one is most likely led to think of a conception that has become, at least since the end of the nineteenth century, something of a philosophical common place, namely the idea that the environment in which contemporary humans live and dwell is not properly speaking “nature,” but rather an artificial, fabricated milieu, a man-made creation that has in time come to replace nature proper and even to shield humans from it. Such reflections can be frequently encountered precisely around the 1920s and 1930s, when Husserl himself wrote his reflections, either in the writings of conservative cultural critics warning about the ethical and existential consequences of abandoning our traditional closeness to nature for the sake of mere convention and artifice, or similarly in the manifestos of radical artists and utopians celebrating this as a sign of our final emancipation from nature. As an interesting variation on such positions, one can also think of Peter Sloterdijk's (2001) more recent essay *The Human Glasshouse*, which attempts to depict human evolution in its entirety as a process conditioned by the creation of tools and the arrangement of living spaces, in brief: by an artificial environment in which alone beings unfit for natural existence like humans could thrive. Emmanuel Levinas' notion of the “home,” which in his view has the double function of shielding off the human being from the elemental forces of nature and of allowing it to “constitute” a world, offers a similar variation from within the phenomenological camp (1991: 152f.). In any case, one would not be inclined to add Husserl's name to this list as well, and while it is indeed true that Husserl's own argument concerning humanization does not actually follow along the lines of such reflections, they are nevertheless not entirely unrelated to them either.

To illustrate this, it must be made clear what Husserl actually means by humanization in the first place. The notion as such is for sure a later formulation of a distinction Husserl had already established by the time of his *Ideas II* between the world considered as a sheer object in the perspective of natural science and the concrete life-world as it is marked through and through by subjective and intersubjective sense investments, that is by a human meaning that from the onset determines how we encounter it at first glance. What does this imply exactly? *First of all*, this implies that most of our surrounding objects, which appear to us as weapons, houses, vehicles and so on, are man-made and thus apprehended from the onset as purposeful products of purposeful subjective activities; in other words: our

¹ Husserl (1973: 317): “Die humanisierte [...] Welt, in der [...] alles Weltliche humanen Sinn hat”. Unless explicitly noted otherwise, all translations from German presented below are my own.

environment is predominantly made up of artefacts and not simply objects of nature. But Husserl's concept of the humanized world reaches further than that as it also implies, *secondly*, that the objects in our life-world more generally bear sedimentations of subject-related predicates or "predicates of meaningfulness," as he also terms them, while this latter aspect applies not only to man-made artefacts, as was the case with the previous determination, but also to so-called natural objects, which are in their turn grasped as edible, useful, valuable, pretty or rare when encountered in various human activities. Moreover, *thirdly*, Husserl argues that humanization affects human beings as well in addition to the non-human surrounding world, consisting of both artefacts and natural objects. Thus, he even coins the baffling notion of "self-humanization" (*Selbsthumanisierung*) (1973: 391 et al.), to which I will return in short. In brief, Husserl sees *all* worldly objects—humans and unmitigated nature included—and not only artefacts and man-made fabrications impregnated with human meaning and thus humanized.

In the following I will sketch an application of this concept to an analysis of the human-animal relationship as explicitly suggested in some of Husserl's later research manuscripts. However, since such a reading of the term would obviously go against at least two significant points in Husserl's conception, I will first like to address these issues so as to show why they can be disregarded in this context. *First of all*, one could point here to the fact that Husserl himself most often interprets humanization in a *teleologically biased perspective*, such that, when speaking of the "incessant process" (1973: 391f.) of self-humanization and humanization of the world he tends to see this as an (albeit infinite) historical progress leading to the full accomplishment of authentic humanity and its universal worldly correlate (see for instance 2013: 478). Although this is indeed a predominant perspective especially among the reflections one finds in volume XLII of Husserliana, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, it is nevertheless by no means determinant *throughout* Husserl's considerations on humanization, which on occasion allow for a less prescriptive reading. Thus, it is not only *unnecessary* to understand humanization in this teleological vein, since we can very well and legitimately use it simply to designate the process by which life-worldly phenomena acquire subject-related characters as does occasionally Husserl himself, but it would even be *more fruitful* not to interpret it this way, since we could thus broaden the scope of this concept to include processes wherein traces of human investment are inversed, effaced, overwritten, etc. Such processes are, as will be shown below, particularly relevant for our current subject. Incidentally, the notion of self-humanization would also benefit from a more flexible reading of the concept along these lines. For, if this concept is indeed often used by Husserl to designate the process by which human individuals and societies teleologically fulfil their own true rational being, the concept can nevertheless also be interpreted in a more applied phenomenological fashion when fastened down to two complementary issues, which are implicit in Husserl's treatment of the issue: (1) the various acts of self-determination like self-discipline, self-cultivation, self-government and self-control, which are extensively described by Husserl in the first of his *Kaizo*-essays (see 1989: 20–29), to which one might feel tempted to add some more contemporary versions like: self-improvement, self-enhancement or self-care; and (2) the various "meaning predicates" (like "police officer," "professor," "beautiful," "poor" and the like)

which qualify individual subjects, just like worldly objects, in view of their situation within the social world (see 2008: 517)—Husserl himself explicitly addresses such aspects, which he calls “meaning predicates,” on several occasions in his reflections on intersubjectivity, while Heidegger in some of his early lectures goes so far as to claim that one primarily grasps even oneself in such characters of meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeit*). Thus, self-humanization in this narrow sense would itself refer simply to the manner in which human beings acquire—in virtue of their own intentional activity or that of others—a human meaning in the life-world; one that impregnates them through and through.

A second possible objection could originate from the fact that Husserl himself elaborates his reflections on humanization from the onset in the systematic perspective of a transcendental account of world-constitution by conceiving these subject-related predicates of meaningfulness or “human predicates” in contrast to the grounding constitutive stratum of the “natural object,” understood as a sheer spatial and material thing. This is a perspective one can already find at work in Husserl’s *Ideas II* or in his lecture series *Natur und Geist* (see 2002: 127), and it still determines his account of humanization in the later research manuscripts from the 1930s. Thus, for instance, in a manuscript from 1931, Husserl describes two stages of world-constitution: the experiential constitution of the nature-world (*Welt-Natur*), understood as a world of sheer things, on the one hand, and on the other the constitution of the “humanized practical world” (1973: 317), while Husserl considers that we can at any time reach the former layer of sheer nature by simply abstracting from the latter predicates of human meaningfulness. Now, this contrast between sheer and humanized nature regarded as mere abstract constitutive layers of course doesn’t overlap immediately with the concrete human-animal relationship implied in phenomena like say domestication and its ethical implications. Nevertheless, the concept can offer a substantial tool for understanding this relationship once it is properly mundanized, and one can indeed find several instances in which Husserl himself seems to use the term in a more straightforward mundane context (some of the passages I will quote further on will be a clear proof of this). Moreover, it is important to note that the very two aspects that Husserl usually points out in his treatment of humanized predicates—namely: meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeit*) and functional purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*)—are themselves charged with mundane implications when regarded in this perspective. Thus, it is certain, for instance, that a world humanized through and through as Husserl conceives it—in the sense that it is comprehensible and familiar (that is: meaningful) through and through and adjusted to man’s needs and requirements (that is: invested with human purposiveness) through and through—would tend both to thrust aside all that is humanly meaningless and unresponsive to human intentions *and* to inevitably delude us with regard to its subject-relativity; thus, it would become what is called “second nature”. While this is of course a point that one often encounters in the theoretical discussions surrounding the artificiality of the human environment in the 1920s and 1930s—say in Georg Lukács, who emphatically coined the notion of “second nature” in the early 1920s,²

² As is well known, the concept of “second nature” was first introduced by Lukács in his *Theory of the Novel* (1920) to designate the “world of convention,” that is: a world of estranged human creation and

or in Heidegger, who regards the “readiness-at-hand” of artefactual “equipment” as a primary and irreducible character of being (1996: 62–67)—the consideration of such aspects clearly shows that the concept of humanization can well be used beyond its limited scope in Husserl’s transcendental theory of world constitution, and it proves particularly relevant, as I want to show in what follows, when applied to the human-animal relationship in a mundane sense.

Animalization

Husserl’s notes on humanization touch upon the issue of pets more or less directly in two significant aspects, and I would like to start with the one that is less obvious. In several of the passages that address the concept of humanization, Husserl not only speaks of the humanized world, but he more specifically addresses a “humanized and animalized world,” thereby introducing the peculiar parallel notion of *animalization*. This parallelism is most notably hinted at in paragraph 66 of the *Crisis*-work: “Among the lifeless things, humanized things are distinguished, things that have signification (e.g. cultural meaning) through human beings. Further, as a variation on this, there are things which refer meaningfully in a similar way to animal existence” (1976 [1970]: 230/227). Now there is indeed a certain hesitation or ambiguity in Husserl’s attempts to tackle the notion of animalization. On the one hand, he tends to regard it as a process that fully *parallels* humanization; to be more precise: a process by which the animal-subject constitutes for itself a world of its own marks and traces. On the other hand, however, it is conceived merely as a *complement* to humanization, that is: a process by which the *human world* is enriched not only with signs pointing to the activity of other humans, but also with ones pointing to animals. See, for instance, a reflection from the early 1930s, in which Husserl actually begins discussing the “animal world” in the sense of “the world as it is given to animals,” but finally arrives at the following discussion of animalization: “*The world is a humanized and animalized world* [...]. It is a world of culture. The objects of this world present themselves in the concrete experience of the life-world as weapons, as houses, as purposeful objects of all kinds, as footprints in the grass [...]. But it is the same with animals. By seeing ‘animal traces’ we can ‘intuit’ that animals were present and what sort of animals they were”.³

Footnote 2 continued

artifice that has become rigid and almost meaningless to the human subject, just like nature proper, in virtue of its habitual erosion (1988: 63f.). It was later adopted by Adorno, Benjamin and others to designate the second degree immediacy of cultural determinations and conventions in general, which are taken for granted and go unquestioned with regard to their artificial nature. As such, the term of course has a certain similarity to Husserl’s notion of “secondary passivity” (see 1999 [1973]: 336/279), which Husserl defines as a modification of an original subjective activity that has now become a mere passive, habitual acquisition. However, while Husserl insists on the fact that secondary passivity essentially indicates its activity of origin, the concept of “second nature” hints at precisely the effacement or at least a certain impairment of this indication.

³ Husserl (2008: 510): “*Die Welt ist humanisierte und animalisierte Welt* [...]. Sie ist Welt der Kultur. Die Weltobjekte geben sich in der Lebenswelt selbst, in konkreter Erfahrung, als Waffen, als Häuser, als

As is well known, the notion of “animal worlds” tentatively discussed by Husserl in these reflections was a key concept in the research of Jacob von Uexküll, an author with whose works Husserl was well familiarized.⁴ In Uexküll’s view, the life-worlds of animals are not in themselves directly accessible to human experience, but they can nevertheless be construed on the basis of their physiological constitution and their observable behavior. According to Uexküll, we can thus draw certain conclusions both with regard to the *sensory qualities* that are accessible to different species of animals *and* to their corresponding *possibilities of action and movement*. Following these reflections, he establishes his well-known distinction between the perceptual-marks (*Merkmale*) of the animal, that is: the sensory traits which are generally observable for it, and its *action-marks* (*Wirkmale*), that is: the marks that it impresses on its surrounding world by following its specific possibilities of response. Together, these two aspects build up what Uexküll calls the “animal world” or the “lived environment” of the animal, and Uexküll insists upon the fact that since “every action-mark erases the perceptual-mark prior to it” (1956: 27),⁵ action-marks create new perceptual-marks, which in turn offer new stimulation for action and so on.

Of course, Uexküll’s descriptions of how animals actively mark their surrounding world with recognizable traces can be easily put into relation with Husserl’s concept of animalization. Interestingly, however, Uexküll goes a step further than this in his analysis of the *perceptual* world of animals. In his view, the sensory qualities of objects are themselves already endowed with a certain “tone of action,” which Uexküll illustrates through the example of a crab displaying three different patterns of behavior in relation to a water lily: the object receives a protective tone when the animal is in danger, a home-tone when it serves as dwelling, or a food-tone when the animal feels hungry. Thus, the perceptual-image grasped by the animal is from the onset impregnated through and through with a certain quality of action. Moreover, in Uexküll’s view, this observation also sheds light upon the manner in which humans themselves apprehend their surrounding objects as specific objects of use: “How is it possible that we actually see the act of sitting when regarding a stool, or the act of drinking when regarding a cup, or the act of climbing when seeing a stair [...]?” This is due to the fact that “we have worked out, for all the activities that we exercise upon our surrounding objects, an action-image (*Wirkbild*) that we melt into their perceptual image (*Merkbild*) [...] with such necessity [...] that they receive a new quality, which reveals their meaning for us and which we

Footnote 3 continued

Zweckobjekte jeder Art, als Fußspuren im Gras [...]. Ebenso aber auch schon für die Tiere. An ‘Tier-spuren’ und ihrem Typus ‘ersehen’ wir, dass Tiere und welche Art Tiere da waren”.

⁴ In Husserl’s private library one can find two of Uexküll’s works: (a) “Der Organismus und die Umwelt,” in: *Das Lebensproblem im Lichte der modernen Forschung*, Leipzig 1931: pp. 189–224 (signature in the Husserl Archives, Leuven: BQ 248). The work is heavily underlined, which proves that Husserl studied the essay. On the cover of the book, Husserl has added as a possible intention for further reading: “J. v. Uexküll Streifzüge durch die Umwelten der Thiere u. M. (J. Springer Verständliche Wissenschaft Bd. 21) 1934”. (b) *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere*, Springer, Berlin, 1921 (Signature in the Husserl Archives, Leuven: BA 1751–1752). The author wishes to thank Thomas Vongehr at the Husserl Archives in Leuven for pointing him to these references.

⁵ The booklet was first published in 1933.

would like to designate [...] as their *tone of action*" (1956: 67). Put in Husserl's terms, humanization as the constitution of "a world in which all worldly objects have a human meaning" could itself be seen as a particular form of animalization among others and even *in competition* with others. I will return later to the consequences that arise out of this perspective in Uexküll's reflections on the interrelations between the human world and that of pets, more specifically: dogs.

Mutual Attunement

Humanized Animals

I return now to the second, more obvious point in which Husserl's theory of humanization intersects the question of pets. Animals in general and pets in particular are, in Husserl's view, certainly not simply *subjects* of a process running parallel to humanization—namely animalization, the constitution of animal worlds; they are also *objects* of humanization themselves, insofar as they are in one way or another part of the environment of humans. This obviously holds true in multiple senses, since animals are today raised, bred, mutated, kept, sold and eaten in various human institutions like zoos, industrial farms, slaughter houses, research labs, pet shops or restaurants, while our everyday experience of them is marked by representations of the toy industry, cartoons, cinema, video games, magazines or TV shows, which essentially adapt them to our human world by conferring upon them predicates of human meaning and interest.

Husserl himself explicitly addresses this issue in two of his later research manuscripts. The first one refers to the distinction between animals of the home-world (*Tiere der Heimwelt*) and animals of the alien-world (*Tiere der Fremdwelt*), or exotic animals as we might also call them:

Animals of the home-world, that is: animals that are widespread in Europe, etc. In our own home-area in a narrow or in a wider sense we do not experience animals as alien creatures; rather, we apperceive them from the onset according to familiar types: oxen, horses, swallows, etc. In contrast to these animals of the home-world, we then find animals that are alien to us.⁶

In this context, Husserl explicitly notes that exotic animals are themselves regularly apperceived on the experiential background of familiar home-animals, while the underlying idea here is that animals are always, one way or another, experienced in the perspective of a specific human world.

The second quote relates to the distinction between domestic and wild animals, both categories being explicitly considered here as mere supervening human predicates that can be abstracted away from our concrete experience of such animals:

⁶ Husserl (1973: 622f.): "Haustiere, Tiere der Heimwelt, in Europa verbreitete Tiere etc. In unserer engeren, und weiteren und weitesten Heimat erfahren wir Tiere nicht als fremde Lebewesen, sondern als solche in bekannter Typik, Ochsen, Pferde, Schwalben etc. Gegenüber den heimatlichen Tieren dann wieder Tiere, die uns Fremd sind".

[I]f, in the case of animals, I abstract from the fact that they are domestic animals and the property of humans, or in the case of other animals, from the fact that they live freely, I remain with the pure experience of their being as an animal, just like in the experience of humans, when I abstract from the fact that they are clerks, officers, tourists and the like, and I thus finally obtain their pure experience as humans, as they are before all predicates of meaning as ultimate substrates of such predicates.⁷

Therefore, it is certain that pets are from the onset humanized in this very broad sense that reflects upon all animals in general. What is more interesting here is that, in several accounts in his late research manuscripts, Husserl speaks more distinctively of pets as “humanized animals” (*vermenschlichte Tiere*) (1993: 304) or even as “analogues of humans” (*Analoga von Menschen*) (1973: 185), whereas in such contexts “humanization” seems to also acquire a different and more specific meaning.

Pets as “Analogues of Humans”

Now, it is true that the German term used by Husserl in these considerations, *Haustiere*, actually designates “domesticated animals” in general, and not just pets, which are nowadays often referred to as *Heimtiere* (home-animals). In contrast, Husserl himself most often seems to somewhat reverse these two notions by understanding *Heimtiere* in a wider sense as “animals of the home-world,” and *Haustiere* in a narrower sense. Thus, when he says of *Haustiere* that: “insofar as they have been raised and educated by humans, they have acquired certain traits of humanity,”⁸ this certainly does not refer to oxen and pigs, but rather to animals that live in a closer companionship to humans, most poignantly pets. Such terminological questions aside, however, Husserl himself is not very explicit as to what exact traits of humanity are in fact acquired by pets as opposed to other animals to justify their designation as “analogues of humans” in this specific and eminent sense. In sifting through his writings, one can only find reference to two such aspects:

1. the fact that, due to their association with humans, pets alone share a certain, albeit rudimentary consciousness of norms, of what is allowed and what is forbidden (1973: 421), and
2. the fact that pets alone are capable of a certain, albeit rudimentary form of prospective planning (*Vorhaben*) (1993: 304).

In the absence of a more detailed explanation, one could easily dismiss such claims both by referring to the lack of proper ethological research to support them—for how does Husserl know that other animals don’t display a similar

⁷ Husserl (2008: 517): “[A]bstrahriere ich bei Tieren davon, dass sie Haustiere und Eigentum von Menschen sind, oder bei anderen davon, dass sie ‘frei’ lebende sind, so verbleibt in reiner Erfahrung ihr Sein als Tier, ebenso wie ich in der Erfahrung von Menschen unter Abstraktion davon, dass sie Beamte, Offiziere, Ausfühler und dergleichen sind, schließlich in reiner Erfahrung sie rein als Menschen gewinne, so wie sie ‘vor’ allen Bedeutungsprädikaten und als deren letzte Substrate sind”.

⁸ Husserl (1973: 626): “[des Haustieres,] das freilich menschlich erzogen wirklich Züge der Menschlichkeit angenommen hat”.

- behavior?⁹—and by ascribing those specific patterns of pet behavior solely to the conditioned responses of dressage, that is: to human programming. This is precisely the reason why I think one should, following Husserl’s footsteps a bit more from afar, also add here at least three other aspects, which incidentally also come up in contemporary more “humane” approaches to animal training, that oppose dressage in the traditional sense of conditioned. These aspects are:
3. The fact that, due to their close companionship to humans, pets are most intimately adjusted to the courses and rhythms of human activity. First, this means that animal companions adapt to the daily schedule of humans, while humans in turn include the needs and activities of the animal in their routines, which can be seen most obviously with feeding, walking the dog, etc. Secondly and more significantly, this implies that the bodily activities and behaviors of animal companions are to a large extent responsively attuned to those of humans, which ranges from the mere possibility of joint attention—of simultaneously focusing on the same object or event—to actually doing something “together,” like playing, running (dogs are indeed often used as jogging mates), or even just resting in an explicit sense of companionship. Thirdly, of course, all of this leads to the larger problem of common habit formation, and this is presumably what ultimately also finds its expression in the well-known cliché of pets, especially dogs, resembling their masters in character, rhythm, or even physiognomic expression.
 4. The fact that this primarily implicit, inter-corporeal form of mutual adjustment is often completed by a certain degree of *explicit communication*. This is from the onset enabled by both the animal’s grasp of specific human gestures and interpellations, with their particular tone and accent, *and* by the human’s grasp of certain expressive gestures of the animal, which are in their turn adapted to the animal’s relation with humans. Significantly, recent empirical studies have shown that the level of communication one can attain with dogs highly resembles our level of communication with infants. This pertains both to the general capacity for understanding communicative pointing gestures (Lakatos et al. 2009), which dogs share with 3-year old children, and to the specific form of language communication they allow, since talking to dogs and infants both involve “communicating with a limited and inattentive addressee, controlling the addressee’s attention and behavior by focusing on an object or activity, and expressing friendliness and affection” (Mitchell 2001: 183). For sure, such discoveries put Husserl’s constant parallelization of the human-animal relationship with the intersubjective relation to infants in a meaningful light.
 5. The grounding fact that pets share with humans a larger extent of their significant life-world, thus co-constituting an intersubjective context of sorts for their common activities. Significantly, Husserl himself hints at this latter point with regard to dogs in several of his research manuscripts from the 1930s on world-constitution. For, while Husserl generally only ascribes a marginal role to

⁹ Indeed, both aspects mentioned by Husserl have been recently addressed in relation to social animals, while Husserl himself does on occasion mention Wolfgang Köhler’s research on communication among apes, especially stressing their “polite” salutations; see Husserl (1973: 478).

animals as co-constitutive subjects of world constitution in comparison to the sphere of normal inter-human intersubjectivity, he nevertheless considers that animals, as well as children, the insane or primitives do bring about complementary horizons of experience that need to be taken into account for a full understanding of the concrete world (see for instance 2008: 479f.). Thus, he explicitly writes in the early 1930s: “Here, among the ‘marginal problems’ we must not forget the constitutive function of animals. As intentional modifications of humans, involved in the first degree of normal world constitution, they are themselves still engaged in the further constitution of the world”.¹⁰ Of course, the degree to which animals can be regarded as at least partial co-subjects of our concrete world experience, with whom we can share a common context, depends upon the specific forms of communication and interaction engendered between humans and those animals, as Husserl shows in another manuscript from around the same period: “they [Husserl is here speaking of the human inhabitants of an alien world, my observation: CFF] can serve as co-subjects of our world experience only to a little extent, as far as our successful and reliable communication with them reaches, as this happens similarly, although to an even lesser extent, in the case of higher animals (for instance dogs)”.¹¹ However, insofar as such forms of communication are generally possible, animals can even have a substantial contribution as co-subjects of world-constitutions by broadening our normal world experience, as in the case of hunting dogs who expand the experiential world of the hunter by following the scent of the game (Husserl 1973: 167) (Husserl’s example), specialized police-dogs, or guide-dogs who complement the wanting orientation of the blind (Üexküll’s example).

Mutuality

Now, especially when considering the latter three points discussed above in more detail, it becomes fairly obvious that they are in fact by no means just a matter of the animal—for instance: the dog—being assimilated into the human world; rather it is simultaneously, at least to some extent, also a matter of the human letting him or herself be assimilated into the animal world. In order to fully grasp the meaning of this observation, it is helpful to again briefly return to Uexküll’s reflections on the relation between dogs and men.

For, in Uexküll’s view, the world of dogs is fundamentally different from that of men, even though the two might indeed partially coincide. Thus, the title of one of Uexküll’s articles from the mid-1930s explicitly states: *Der Hund kennt nur Hundedinge* (the dog is only familiar with dog-things) (1935). This is due to the fact

¹⁰ Husserl (2006: 395): “Hierbei ist unter den ‘Randproblemen’ die konstitutive Bedeutung der Tiere nicht zu vergessen. Als intentionale Modifikation der in der ersten Normalstufe weltkonstituierenden Menschen fungieren sie für die weitere Weltkonstitution noch mit”.

¹¹ Husserl (2008: 172): “Dagegen nur in einem kleinen Umkreis, dem der schon gelungenen und bewährten Verständigung mit ihnen, können sie uns als Mitsubjekte für die Welterfahrung dienen—wie Ähnliches, obschon in noch engerem Kreis, für höhere Tiere der Fall ist (z.B. Hunde)”.

that dogs develop a world of their own markings, which is intuitively inaccessible to men and which Uexküll analyses in his article from 1932, *Das Duftfeld der Hunde* (the odor field of dogs) (Uexküll and Sarris 1931). In this context, Uexküll shows that—most notably due to their use of urine marks—the lived spaces of dogs are fundamentally structured by fragrances. This entire grounding dimension of odor spaces runs completely parallel to the world of humans, who can only acknowledge it through the exterior behavior of their pets. Moreover, even the objects that humans and animals actually seem to share are invested quite differently in a humanized or in an animalized world. Thus, Uexküll argues, a dog apprehends the furnishing of an inhabited house quite differently than a human being: “We know from [...] experiments that a dog trained to sit on a stool when hearing the instruction ‘stool’ will, when absent the stool, immediately look for some other possible seating, that is: for a seating proper for a dog, which may not suit humans at all [cabinets, tables, boxes etc.]. All these possible seats have, as bearers of meaning, exactly the same seating-tone for dogs, [...] as the dog will make use of them indistinctively when hearing the word ‘stool’. Thus, we see that a house viewed by a dog as its inhabitant will contain numerous things that are endowed with a seating-tone. Similarly, it will contain numerous things that are endowed with a dog-food-tone or dog-drink-tone. The stairs will certainly still have a sort of climbing-tone, but most of the furniture will only have an obstacle-tone for the dog—especially doors and closets, regardless if these contain books or laundry—while all household effects, like spoons, forks, matches, etc., will be ignored as mere debris” (1956: 107).

One may at this point question Uexküll’s remarks regarding doors and closets. My own dog was, to give a personal example, extremely attentive each time we approached one of two drawers: the one where we held his leash and the one where we kept the treats. Even if the animalized and the humanized life-world do indeed diverge initially and to some extent—and Husserl himself seems to basically agree to this when stating in a very Uexküllian tone that “our world is different from that of a bug, of a bee or of a dove, and even from that of our pets”¹²—what is perhaps most challenging to note here is the fact that the continuous animalization of the human world, as described by Uexküll in relation to dogs, and the corresponding humanization of the animal world, as pointed out by Husserl, do not remain strictly distinct processes running in parallel as both Uexküll and Husserl seem to suggest at times. Rather, they permanently and inevitably interfere with each other and affect one another, even though they may indeed not enter a full blown synthesis as between different human cultures in Husserl’s analyses. The humanization of pets is thus from the onset more than just the mere labeling of an animal with human predicates; it is also a process of the animal “intersubjectively” accommodating to the commerce with humans. In a similar way humans are animalized in their relation to pets not just insofar as they are generally invested with a meaning-tone in the animal world—Uexküll mentions the “magical” role that the owner acquires in the life-world of the dog (1956: 89)—but also in the sense that they attune themselves

¹² Husserl (1973: 626): “Unsere Umwelt [...] ist nicht die des Käfers, der Biene, der Taube, auch des Haustiers”.

to the behaviors and needs of the animal. This is perhaps most visible in the “doggyish” way humans play with their dogs or in the extent to which a home shared with pets strikes the external observer who enters it to be as much impregnated by animal life as it is by humans.

Context and Implications

The essential phenomenological problems arising at this point, namely the specific forms of human-animal interaction, common habit formation, or the constitution and sedimentation of shared worldly landmarks, certainly all require a much more thorough research and discussion. However, in the completion of our considerations following Husserl’s reflections on the human-animal relationship, it is only possible to suggest some ways in which they might be situated within a broader historical context. This attempt will eventually also allow us to indicate some ways in which such an approach can offer relevant implications for current issues in animal ethics.

Origins

First of all, as concerns the difference between *Heimtiere* and *Haustiere*, or between pets and domestic animals, it is worth mentioning that, if domestication is generally considered an immemorial process with prehistoric origins—some theorists even claim that men and dogs evolved simultaneously in a process of mutual domestication (Groves 1999)—pets are on the contrary a more contemporary phenomenon. I quote from a recent paper on the history of the animal welfare movement in early twentieth century Germany:

In the course of urbanization, the century-old living and work-communion between man and animal was destroyed. The need for nature, for living alongside animals found a rudimentary equivalent in the urban habit of keeping pets. For modern urbanites, the pet became the symbol of their missing connection to the countryside and to nature as such. The decisive difference to the human-animal relationship in the countryside is, however, to be found in the fact that, in a world of industry and technology, pets were now being kept purely out of sentimental reasons. The animal companions were, contrary to farm animals, taboo as food, they received a name and—when they died—a proper funeral. They were humanized. This was a basic condition for the empathy that is till nowadays shown towards animals. (Zerbel 1998: 35)

This perhaps somewhat too blunt assessment is nevertheless quite telling not only because it shows that, within the early animal welfare movements, pets were the first animals to be treated as subjects of ethical concern, but also because it sets the precise historic context within which the specific interfusion of humanization and animalization described above first originated.

Present-Day Context

Secondly, it seems clear that the entire question of animalization and humanization is posed today in a context simultaneously characterized by two contradictory yet also complementary tendencies that make the entire problem radically more complicated:

1. We can thus note the increasing tendency to blur the formal boundaries between the human world (including domesticated nature) and wildlife proper due to what we may call, with a slightly Heideggerian touch, the general superintendence of humans over the entire spectrum of their natural environment. Husserl himself certainly had little reservations in still straightforwardly distinguishing between the cultural territory of humans and the external realms of nature (see for instance 1973: 206), although this is of course not entirely consistent with his idea of the humanized world understood as a world “in which all worldly objects have a human meaning”. Instead the point here is not just that the human territory has today advanced further into the realms of nature than ever before, but that nature has been in its entirety engulfed by the human world in a completely novel fashion. One can perhaps already grasp this difference, symptomatically, when contrasting traditional zoos or circuses, which introduced wild animals into the human world by forceful imposition of human characters (think of the humanized décors of early zoos or the human gestures that circus animals like the dancing bears were required to perform) with contemporary versions of such institutions, which claim to reproduce the “animal world” proper (in the case of so called ecological zoos) or offer full access to life situations in the wilderness (in the case of nature channels on TV). In any case, the crucial difference here concerns the fact that wilderness and the human world no longer simply persist one outside the other. The former was as such and without actual domestication integrated into the latter both *legally*, in the form of institutionalized “natural reservations” that practically encompass the whole of our non-human environment, and *factually*, insofar as this environment has today become the object of various practices of caretaking encapsulated by the comprehensive notion of “wildlife-management” (see also Sandøe et al. 2008: 153–164).
2. In this way we can notice today an ever increasing tendency of the human world to engulf wild nature within its sphere of practical mastery. However, we also witness today the similarly strong tendency to reverse this process and to reinstate nature, as it were, just as it presumably was prior to humanization. This is accomplished through a variety of practices ranging from the mere diminishing or gradual retreat of human intervention, as in the case of ecological agriculture, to the various proceedings of what is now termed “de-domestication”—another telling contemporary concept designating the attempt to restore by means of engineering species of animals and plants, which were at some point modified through domestication, back to the state of wilderness in biospheres intentionally detracted from human control.¹³

¹³ On the concept of de-domestication, see also: Gamborg et al. (2010).

For sure, both aspects—wildlife-management and de-domestication—imply a certain blurred relation between intervention and retreat, between animal-oriented humanization and human-led animalization. What is more important to note here is that this double relativization of the boundaries between wildlife and domesticated nature has, alongside the now popular view of the “Anthropocene,” led to a widespread need for overcoming the traditional dichotomies between nature and culture, or domestication and wilderness in the anthropological discourse concerning man’s relation to his environment, and to a persistent cry for new theoretical concepts better suited to address this. Husserl’s terminology might well be an important asset at this point. Further, this relativization also holds some stringent ethical consequences—and with this I come to the implications arising out of this strain of considerations for some of the contemporary debates in animal ethics.

Ethical Implications

To be more precise, there are two major ethical consequences derived from these historical considerations: first of all, the fact that wild animals have now themselves become subjects of an ethical responsibility being viewed as a human duty to preserve them; secondly, the fact that domesticated animals have in turn become an issue for ethical qualms as victims of human interventions that as such demand their reversal. These two developments of course also charge the contemporary ethical situation of pets with ambivalence, and one can perhaps best grasp this moral ambivalence in our current relation to animal companions when sifting through the websites of some of today’s animal welfare associations championing moral awareness in our treatment of animals. Thus, for instance, the German website of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) reads under the heading “animal companions”: “In a perfect world, all animals would live freely, raise their offspring, follow their inclinations and live in a natural environment”.¹⁴ However, since we don’t live in such a perfect world, the question of captivity and constraint inevitably looms over the very notion of animal companionship, regardless of the fact that keeping animal companions in itself implies a tender and empathic relation to animals which is not an issue for ethical incrimination.

Now, these assessments are no doubt important in the perspective of Husserl’s reflections sketched above, not only because, by circumscribing such specific moral ambiguities, we pinpoint an essential aspect in our actual contemporary relation to pets, but also and foremost because these complications in our moral stance towards pets inevitably also reflect in the precise dosage of humanization and animalization that we not only allow but ethically *demand* in our relationship with them today. This aspect is for instance symptomatically illustrated in the following advertisement of a contemporary German training school for dogs: “Man and dog learn *together* how to reach a harmonious co-habitation. But this does not mean solely that the dog should learn how to adapt to our life-style and how to live up to our expectations; man should learn in his turn to respect and fulfil the dog’s specific

¹⁴ http://www.peta.de/themen/Tierische_Mitbewohner (last accessed on 04.12.2016).

needs whenever this is possible”.¹⁵ What this advertisement basically calls for is of course nothing else than precisely that form of mutual attunement between humans and animals that I tried to highlight above by speaking of the possible interplay between “humanization” and “animalization”.

Certainly, such historical considerations are not directly in line with Husserl’s more general philosophical reflections, but they nevertheless allow us to point out a series of nuances and complications of the subject matter that he himself was still unaware of by using his phenomenological descriptions as tools. Moreover, if one recalls the fact that, in many of Husserl’s later research manuscripts, the human-animal relationship is but one example of a fundamentally asymmetrical intersubjective relation—in line with other examples like the relationship to infants, to the insane or to the “primitives”—it is clear that similar forms of mutual attunement, as described here in relation to animals, can be described and considered ethically with regard to all of these cases as well. On the other hand, such reflections allow us, at the same time, to lay bare the precise constellation of ethical constraints and historical circumstances within the context of which phenomenological analyses should be generally situated in order to fully clarify their object.

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