

## HUMANISM AND SOLIDARITY

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Anti-humanism isn't what it used to be. When I was younger, anti-humanism was associated with names like Heidegger, Althusser, and Foucault, especially the Foucault of *The Order of Things*. It was a reaction against the privileging of the human perspective, a privileging that placed the human at the center of experience, or gave the human a particular and elevated role to play in shaping the world, or ascribed to the human subject a transparency that allowed it to know itself and determine its future and world according to that knowledge. We might see this, a bit overly simply, as a reaction against the existentialist privileging of subjectivity and the subjective formation of experience. For Heidegger, humanism was the privileging of the human over Being, and the task of thought was to return the human from the lord of Being to its shepherd. For Althusser, as for other structuralists, centering analysis on the human mistakenly ascribed a central role to human or perhaps conscious human control. What was required was an analysis that saw the human as product rather than author of the world's processes. For Foucault, the human was simply a passing historical category, one that, as he announced, "would be erased, like a face drawn at the edge of the sea."<sup>1</sup>

More recently, anti-humanism seems less a reaction against humanism and more an attempt to place the human in a wider field. I am tempted to say that this new arena of thought is less an anti-humanism than an a-humanism. Since anti-humanism has been around for a generation or so—that is to say, from when I was younger—it is a less urgent task to push back against the human. What has taken the place of anti-humanism are forms of thought that instead see the human as a something that occurs alongside or within more encompassing perspectives. We might say, again in an overly simple way, that the task of current a-humanist thought is not to displace the centrality of the human but to diminish its theoretical size, or that the new a-humanism does not so much *displace* the human or its significance as *dissolve* it.

Two currents of thought exemplify this. One, with which you will all be familiar, is the fashionable theoretical prominence of evolutionary thought. Evolutionary thought sees the human as the product of a long and contingent history, one that did not aim to produce us, and will undoubtedly produce something else eventually

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as the result of changing ecological conditions or even perhaps of our own environmental ineptitude. Moreover, in effacing the animal-human distinction—by showing, among other things, that other animals are much smarter than we once thought and that we are much dumber than we once thought—the human is placed back into nature as one biological category alongside others.

At first glance the a-humanism of evolutionary thought might seem similar to Foucault's anti-humanism in *The Order of Things*. After all, don't both see the human, or in Foucault's case "man," as a passing phenomenon, one that emerges out of a pre-human history and will dissolve into a post-human one? This superficial similarity dissolves, however, when we recognize that Foucault is talking here about the category of "man" as a conceptual element of an epistemic formation, while evolutionary thought is talking about actual human beings. Otherwise put, Foucault displaces the significance of human subjectivity through historicizing the category of "man," while evolutionary thought sees human beings themselves as historical phenomena that emerge and dissolve through a particular history. The concept of "man" will not be dissolved; it will be displaced by other concepts in the next epistemic formation.

The other current of thought, not entirely divorced from the first, we might call loosely a kind of systems thought. It places the human within a larger material system that sometimes operates at the sub-human, sometimes at the human, and sometimes at the supra-human or group level. We can find the roots of this perspective in the thought of Gilles Deleuze on the one hand and Donna Haraway's seminal "Cyborg Manifesto" on the other; two interesting contemporary versions of it are to be found in John Protevi's *Political Affect* and Jane Bennett's *Vital Matter*.

Protevi's interest is in how affect works in politics. It is a challenge to theories of politics that are too intellectualist. But his claim is not simply that affect plays an important part in our political behavior. He doesn't want only to say, for instance, that the affect mobilized into white anger played a huge role in my home state of South Carolina's embarrassing itself by voting for Newt Gingrich in the recent primary. His has bigger fish to fry than that. Protevi places the entire concept of affect in a systems view that recognizes affect to operate both beneath and beyond the conscious subject, and in the relations between beneath and beyond. Borrowing not only from Deleuze, but also from biologists like Francisco Varela and cognitive theorists like Antonio Damasio, he develops the concept of *bodies politic*, a concept that can refer to individual bodies, pre-individual parts of bodies, and groups of bodies, whether small-scale or civic. "The concept of bodies politic is meant to capture the emergent—that is, the embodied and embedded—character of subjectivity: the production, bypassing, and surpassing of subjectivity in the imbrications of somatic and social systems."<sup>2</sup>

The structure of Protevi's system is a rich one, and I can only gesture at it here. Roughly, it asks us to stop thinking of our world as a set of discrete elements in interaction, but rather as a dynamic system of processes in which what appear to be discrete elements are in fact emergent properties arising from the unfolding of the system itself. This dynamic system is not an utter chaos of interaction. There are certain virtual points of the system, called attractors, that draw the process toward them. However, this drawing-toward does not guarantee that the system will arrive there. And even when it does, that arrival does not result in a state at rest. As Deleuze reminds us, the actual is always inhabited by a virtual that can de-stabilize—or in Deleuze's term "deterritorialize"—the system.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, systems do not exist in isolation. They are connected to other systems in a variety of ways. This means that any particular system, for example an embodied human being, is subject both to systems exterior to it, for example other human beings, as well as systems in which it is itself an element, for example various bodies politic.

In this approach, it is not difficult to see the role affect might play. At the simplest level, a political leader can appeal to the affective level as well as the cognitive one. But Protevi's systems approach allows for much more sophisticated operations of political affect, such as the contagion of affect across various bodies politic, a contagion that can spread more easily if there are attractors in the system (or systems within the system, system here being a relative term) that are receptive to it. In his book, Protevi offers the example of the case

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of Terri Schiavo, whose apparent responsiveness to external stimuli, a responsiveness that in fact was only the random expressions associated with her persistent vegetative state, can induce an affect of concern across a body politic, one that in her case had nothing to do with her actual biological condition.

The a-humanism of Protevi's approach can be seen in his placement of the human inside the dynamic system, and in his claim that the human is subtended and, if I may be allowed the term, supertended by forces that not only make it what it is but that operate across it, at times effacing its ontological integrity. The same can be said of Jane Bennett's recent *Vibrant Matter*, a book that, like Protevi's, embeds the human in a system that not only questions the primacy of human action over matter but more importantly seeks to lend the concept of action to matter that is usually considered inert.

Borrowing Bruno Latour's term *actant*, Bennett sees matter as possessing an efficacy that has often been missed in discussion of the relation of human to environment. The model she criticizes characterizes this relation as one in which the human acts, most animals simply behave (although some act more or less), and the rest of the environment is acted upon. Bennett finds this model to be inadequate on two levels. First, it does not adequately characterize what happens in an environment: that is, it falls short descriptively. There is much more activity that takes place than just that ascribed to the human. Second, it is politically inadequate in that it does not point the way forward toward a proper environmental ethic. That is to say, it is also normatively insufficient. She writes, "to begin to *experience* the relationship between persons and other materialities more horizontally, is to take a step toward a more ecological sensibility."<sup>4</sup>

With regard to description, Bennett borrows Deleuze's concept of assemblage in order to show that environments are processes of interaction among disparate acting elements. "Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant matter of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within."<sup>5</sup> She offers as an example of such assemblages the 2003 blackout, which was the product not only of human error or a freak weather event—a thunderstorm that struck the electric grid—but an intersection of these with many other elements, including the character of electricity as involving both active and reactive power.

Another example, on which she spends a chapter, is eating. We think of obesity as the product of human decision. In fact, she argues, things are more complex. Fatty foods are of different types. As they enter our bodies they do different things. Omega-3 fatty acids work differently on the body from saturated fats. They may produce improved human moods, which in turn affect how humans act. Saturated fats, since they aren't nutritional, may not sate human hunger, provoking more eating behavior. In short, food is "an actant in an agentic assemblage that includes among its members my metabolism, cognition, and moral sensibility. Human intentionality is surely an important element of the public that is emerging around the idea of diet, obesity, and food security, but it is not the only actor or necessarily the key operator in it. Food, as a self-altering, dissipative materiality, is also a player."<sup>6</sup>

This view leads to a wider conception of politics than one centered in human activity. Invoking and modifying Dewey's view of a public, Bennett writes, "A public is a cluster of bodies harmed by the actions of others or even by actions born from their own actions as these trans-act: harmed bodies draw near each other and seek to engage in new acts that will restore their power, protect against future harm, or compensate for damage done."<sup>7</sup> A public, then, is a community of actants modifying one another in transversal and often unpredictable ways. Both Protevi's and Bennett's a-humanisms are politically sensitive. In fact, they take politics as a goal of their analysis. They seek to offer an understanding of politics that opens possibilities that a more humanist politics would not have recognized. The question I want to raise here, which will take the form of a dilemma, is that of what kind of politics can be enacted with an a-humanist understanding. Ultimately, I will claim that a-humanism has its limits, and that much of what we would like to promote under the banner of politics will require an inescapably humanist approach. It is not that we can or must ignore the lessons of contemporary a-humanism. Far from it. Rather, the claim will be that the kind of politics many of us would want to endorse

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cannot emerge as directly from contemporary a-humanism as we might like, but must instead take it on board in a more indirect fashion.

In order to approach the question of the relation of a-humanism to political activity, let's leave anti-humanism and a-humanism to the side for a moment, and turn toward politics. Most traditional political thought can be classified as falling under the liberal tradition. This tradition, as Iris Marion Young helpfully reminded us, cleaves to the distributive paradigm, which, in her words, "defines social justice as the proper distribution of social benefits and burdens among society's members."<sup>8</sup> The question for such a politics is, What is owed to whom and why? This owing, of course, does not need to be material. It can be, for instance, the owing of protection for certain rights. So someone like Robert Nozick, for whom any redistribution would be anathema, is still a card-carrying member of the liberal tradition and the distributive paradigm that characterizes it. One might ask here not only what is owed, but to whom it is owed and, in addition, who does the owing? The first question has different answers. For Nozick, for instance, it is everyone who is equally owed liberty. For John Rawls, by contrast, while everyone is owed basic liberties, those who are the least advantaged are also owed whatever resources might assist them in such a way that societies must be arranged to their greatest benefit. The question of who is owed is, of course, inseparable from that of what is owed. If one owes resources to those who need them, then one does not owe anything to those who don't. However, when it comes to who does the owing, everyone in the liberal tradition is agreed. It is the state or one of its aligned institutions that does the owing. The state owes the protection of liberty, the resources or opportunities that are required, the goods that are to be shared or distributed. This should not be surprising. After all, in a society of any size, there will a whole lot of owing going on. And if there is, this places a burden on whatever entity it is that is doing the owing. And in most societies, the natural entity that fills the bill here is the state. Therefore, the liberal tradition, the distributive paradigm, and the focus on the state are of a piece.

The distributive paradigm need not, however, be tied to the state and the liberal tradition. For instance, inasmuch as one takes on board in a political fashion Levinas' ethics of unpayable debt to the other, one would have the makings of a theory of something like distribution. This distribution would not be of anything that could actually be given. That is the point of Levinas' ethics; one is never quits with the other. Instead, it would be a theory of infinite owing, of the kind one sees in moments of Derrida's political thought, for example in his discussions of hospitality or democracy-to-come.

The distributive paradigm as a theory of owing is in one sense of a piece with a-humanism, and in another in tension with it. The way it is of a piece with a-humanism is that it can meet some of the specific demands posited by a-humanist theories. For instance, it appears in evolutionary theory in the question of what is owed to non-human animals. In an intriguing and hopeful development, Spain is considering offering basic rights of protection of life, liberty, and against torture, in keeping with Paola Cavalieri's and Peter Singer's Great Ape Project. This is a classic liberal political strategy, continuous with the history of liberal enfranchisement of previously marginalized groups.

Bennett's a-humanism asks of us that we conceive our relation to ourselves and our environment differently, and act toward the environment out of that conception. Rather than seeing ourselves as stewards of the environment, we should see ourselves as entire environments—of microbes, worms, and organs—nested within other environments. "If [traditional] environmentalism leads to the call for the protection and wise management of an ecosystem that surrounds us, a vital materialism suggests that the task is to engage more strategically with a trenchant materiality that is us as it vies with us in agentic assemblages."<sup>9</sup> This creates a set of duties for us, but from within the complex we inhabit.

Protevi's case is more complex, since he does not posit particular demands to be met. However, at least one of the elements of his analysis would be amenable to the distributive paradigm, and even state action. The conception of attractors posits certain areas that attract forces to particular structural arrangements. Inasmuch as one can detect those attractors, there could be a duty to shuttle things toward certain attractors and away from

others. For instance, in his discussion of Hurricane Katrina, Protevi traces a convergence of environmental conditions, historical immigration, and racialized fear. One can imagine here a duty to intervene against the racialized fear that, in the case of the hurricane, motivated so many of the false stories about violence and reinforced the efforts of national authorities to obstruct the practices of mutual aid that were rife among those stranded during the days after Katrina struck.

While the liberal conception of owing or of duties may be consonant with contemporary a-humanism, the structure of distribution is not. The distributor is an entity that is in a relation of hierarchy to the distributed. The state gives, the people receive. One might object here that the people also give, in the form of taxation. However, the point of taxation is to allow the state to give. Taxation helps states pay what they owe, whether it be to those in need, the military, or, in contemporary practice, for protection for well-heeled corporations. By contrast, a-humanism conceives a much more nearly egalitarian structure, one that does not privilege any particular entity but instead sees all entities as emergent properties of a system, a system conceived not hierarchically but, in Bennett's term, "horizontally."

This horizontality is in keeping with the goal of a-humanism, which is to undermine the privileges associated with humanist thought. By placing the human, or elements of what is usually associated with the human, into a system, a larger process, hierarchies are flattened out. It is the dynamic system, rather than any particular element in it, that is the object of analysis. This flattening out runs counter to the structure of a distributive approach toward politics, and to that extent counter to the traditional liberal view.

Recently, however, and alongside—although not in tandem with—contemporary a-humanism is an approach to politics that is more horizontal. I should note in passing that this approach is not entirely new. Anarchist thought as it existed in the nineteenth century and has been recently revived as a non-hierarchical approach to politics. However, traditional anarchism is not our concern at the moment. What I am interested in here is the emergence of what might be called a politics of solidarity, one that stresses more egalitarian moments in politics rather than distributive ones. This approach can be seen, although a bit ambivalently, in the work of Alain Badiou. It appears much more clearly in the political thought of Jacques Rancière. It is to him, then, that we turn in order to seek a more horizontal view of politics, one whose structure converges more closely with the structure of contemporary a-humanism. It is also in his thought that we will see mostly clearly the limits of this convergence.

For Rancière, the central element of politics is collective action out of the presupposition of equality, a presupposition that inheres in the action if not in the conscious reflection of those engaged in it. "Equality is not a given that politics then presses into service, an essence embodied in the law or a goal politics sets itself the task of attaining. It is a mere assumption that needs to be discerned within the practices implementing it."<sup>10</sup> We must ask then what it is to act out of equality. But preliminary to that, we must ask what kind of equality is to be presupposed. If people are to act out of the presupposition of equality, what exactly is the equality out of which they act? Here Rancière's answer may seem surprising. The equality out of which they act is the equality of intelligence.

The idea of the equality of intelligence may sound strange to many of us. It certainly did for me the first time I read Rancière. But when he writes of the equality of intelligence, he does not mean that we are equally capable of scoring the same on SAT exams or getting the same scholastic grades (although he does argue that we are all much more capable of that than current social arrangements might lead us to believe). He does not mean that we can all understand advanced quantum theory, thank goodness. What he is after is more pedestrian. We can all talk to one another, reason with one another, and construct meaningful lives on the basis of this reasoning and our own reflections. While our specific intellectual skills may differ from one another, we are all equally capable of using those skills to communicate, to discuss, to make decisions, to take account of the world around us, and to act on the basis of all this. The presupposition of the equality of intelligence is the starting point for all politics. "[O]ur problem," he writes, "isn't proving that all intelligence is equal. It's seeing what can be done

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under that supposition. And for this, it's enough for us that the opinion be possible—that is, that no opposing truth be proved.”<sup>11</sup>

The obstacle, of course, is that societies are not arranged on the presupposition of equality. In fact, they are arranged on the contrary presupposition. Social arrangements fall into various hierarchies of inequality. There are those who make decisions governing the lives of others and those who are governed. There are those who do intellectual work and those who do manual work. There are those who contribute to the public space and those who are relegated to the private sphere. And, in the end, there are those who have a part to play in forming and deciding the character of a given society—those who count and whose views are counted—and those who do not. Rancière calls this social ordering the “police.” “Politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of place and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution. I propose to give this system of distribution another name. I propose to call it *the police*.”<sup>12</sup> The idea here is that social space is partitioned into specific roles that reflect a variety of presupposed inequalities, and that partitioning is policed (and often self-policed) in order to sustain the partitions.

Given this picture of social arrangements, much of what is called “politics” in everyday language is, for Rancière, not really politics but merely more humane or more efficient policing. For instance, to subsidize the poor with welfare payments is still policing, since it retains the partitioning of social space as it is. There is no challenge to the partitioning itself, merely a blunting of some of its more deleterious effects. This is not to say subsidizing the poor is no better than not subsidizing them. It is instead to keep alive the distinction between policing and real politics.

Politics begins with the challenge to the police order in the name of equality. Here is where the radical nature of Rancière's thought begins to emerge. Equality, in challenging hierarchies, does not seek to offer another, better social partitioning than the one that is the object of challenge. To engage in politics is not to commend one police order as better than another. It is to challenge the concept of partitioning itself. The presupposition of equality does not work by offering a stabilizing set of equal roles for everyone to play; it works by undermining the hierarchies inherent in the very idea of a stabilizing set of roles. “I...propose to reserve the term *politics* for an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration—that of the part that has no part...political activity is always a mode of expression that undoes the perceptible divisions of the police order by implementing a basically heterogeneous assumption, that of the part who have no part, an assumption that, at the end of the day, itself demonstrates the contingency of the order, the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being.”<sup>13</sup>

This quick, and undoubtedly inadequate sketch of Rancière's view allows us to see the horizontal character of his view. Rather than a hierarchical division into distributor and recipient, Rancière's thought lays the groundwork for an egalitarian political solidarity. This would seem in keeping with the a-humanism we have been discussing, and in one sense it is. In another sense, though, it is in tension with it. We can see the tension in the previous quote, which concludes that the presupposition of equality is an equality of “any speaking being with any other speaking being.” This character of the presupposition seems to place it squarely within a humanism of the kind that would be anathema to a politics rooted in a-humanism. We must ask, then, what role the idea of the equality of speaking beings plays in Rancière's thought, and whether there is a way to conceive or re-conceive this role in terms that would be more open to a-humanism.

For Rancière, politics is the creation of a collective subject, a *subjectification* as he calls it. This collective subject neither arises from nor produces collective action under the presupposition of equality. It is co-extensive with it. We might say that the action produces the collective subject just as the collective subject produces the action. What is a collective subject? It is a collection of individuals who presuppose the equality of one another in their common action. But in order for that to happen, there has to be the ability for such recognition. Rancière

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uses the term “speaking being” to refer to such an ability. I’m not entirely convinced that the connection between speaking and the ability to presuppose another as an equal is as close as his writings indicate that he thinks it is. That is, it does not seem to me to be a necessary condition of the ability to presuppose another to be equal that one is a speaking being. However, at least some higher level cognitive capacities must be in play in order for that ability to be displayed.

Moreover, a collective subject requires more than simply that ability. It requires co-ordinated actions with others on the basis of the expression of that ability. In order to be a member of a collective subject in political action in Rancière’s sense, I must be able to presuppose the equality of another and act alongside that other out of that presupposition. This does not require that I reflectively recognize myself as having that ability or as expressing it in my contribution to collective action. Recall that for Rancière the presupposition of equality in a political action is often “discerned,” not consciously claimed. Nevertheless, beings capable of political action through solidarity must be able to act in a mutual fashion out of that presupposition in order to form the collective subject that solidarity requires.

Sally Scholz, in her book *Political Solidarity*, defines political solidarity, as opposed to what she calls social solidarity or civic solidarity as, “a unity of individuals each responding to a particular situation of injustice, oppression, social vulnerability, or tyranny.”<sup>14</sup> This definition is kin to Rancière’s concept of subjectification, and it captures the bottom-up view of politics that we are articulating here in contrast to the distributive view we saw above. It is also a structural kin to the a-humanism we described at the outset. Political solidarity is the coming together of disparate elements in a horizontal way, an *assemblage* in the term Deleuze uses and Bennett borrows, that gives rise to an emergent state of the system—a collective political movement. (Bennett further notes that in Rancière’s thought, both its fluid and disruptive character parallel her a-humanist vision, although this is a bit wide of the current point.)<sup>15</sup>

However, if we turn away from the structural similarities between solidarity and a-humanism, we see an aspect of solidarity that seems to push it into the humanist camp, namely the requirement that participants in a solidarity movement be able to presuppose the equality of others and act in a co-ordinated fashion out of that presupposition. Beings that can do that must share a good bit with humans, or at least be human-like in some important ways. Not only must they have those particular abilities, but if we are to be able to form movements of solidarity with them, they must be able to presuppose and act in a co-ordinated fashion with human beings. This will limit the population of beings capable of solidarity; it recalls to us the restriction Rancière places upon politics as involving the equality of speaking beings.

And so here we have a dilemma. In order to accommodate contemporary a-humanism, we can revert to a more traditional politics that might allow for a distributive approach to the issues a-humanism raises. However, this carries with it all the problems of distributive approaches and in addition the problem that it is structurally divergent from the recognition to which a-humanism seeks to call our attention. On the other hand, we can embrace a more horizontal politics of equality, a politics of solidarity, but at the cost of limiting the participants in that solidarity to those who display particular human or human-like characteristics.

For the remainder of this paper, I would like to press on the second half of this dilemma. I believe there is much merit in solidarity approaches to politics, and I would like to investigate how far this solidarity might extend. In order to do so, I will take up the possibility of solidarity with non-human animals as a test case. This will allow us to see both the possibilities and limitations inherent in seeking to combine solidarity with a-humanism. And in order to perform this test case, I will turn briefly to Donna Haraway’s *When Species Meet* and Vicki Hearne’s seminal article “A Walk with Washoe: How Far Can We Go?” The literature of human/non-human interaction is vast, and far beyond my own expertise. My hope is that a glance at these two pieces will at least give us entry into the discussion of the relationship between humanism and solidarity.

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*When Species Meet* is an extended meditation on the kinds of relationships humans have with non-human animals, from experimental testing to placing videocams on animals to human/animal sport. Its aim is not to prescribe a specific form of engagement between human and non-human animals, but instead to display the various ways in which we are intertwined with our living kin. Along the way, however, Haraway makes particular suggestions, as when she asks us to think of laboratory animals not so much as objects of intervention, even if rights-bearing ones, but as workers. She writes, "My suspicion is that we might nurture responsibility with and for other animals better by plumbing the category of labor more than the category of rights, with its inevitable preoccupation with similarity, analogy, calculation, and honorary membership in the expanded abstraction of the Human."<sup>16</sup> This suggestion is in line with her broader effort to press us to expand our thought to reach out and capture our relationships with other animals, rather than conceptually narrowing those relationships to the current confines of our thought.

This project comes out clearly in her long discussion of the relationship she has with her dog Cayenne Pepper during the human/canine sport called "agility." Here the recognition of her dog's advanced skills meshing with the trust required between her and Cayenne Pepper yields a complex sporting relationship that is necessary in order to prevail in the game. This complex relationship must be developed between the particular beings in the game. It cannot be mapped out in advance. What it requires first and foremost, however, is abandoning preconceived notions of an abyss that separates the human from the non-human. "If we appreciate the foolishness of human exceptionalism, then we know that becoming is always becoming *with*—in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake."<sup>17</sup>

Vicki Hearne is also concerned with undermining preconceived notions of human/non-human relationships, but from another angle. She points out that we often presuppose the ability to form relationships with other animals to lie along an evolutionary continuum. This would mean that we are capable of having the deepest relationships with our closest evolutionary relatives, the great apes. This view is reinforced by the idea that chimpanzees seem to be able to communicate in language. The example she appeals to is that of the chimp Washoe, who was the first chimpanzee to be taught American Sign Language. However, mutual linguistic communication is not the only way in which relationships can develop. After all, while chimpanzees can communicate, it is difficult with most chimps to develop the kind of trust we associate with the best forms of domestication.

With dogs, however, the situation is different. In a gesture similar to that of Haraway's, Hearne shows us how training can integrate dogs into a group that includes humans and canines more readily than can be had with most great apes. This integration need not be one that is entirely that of canine subservience, although it does require integration of the dog into human culture more than the other way around. She insists, however, that beings capable of such integration display a moral capacity that cannot be reduced to the intellectual capacity associated with the ability to speak a language. "Command of language is a clue we use with one another, but command of language turns out to be useless without respect for language. If I respect your words that means that I give myself to responding meaningfully to what you say."<sup>18</sup> The ability to speak may be more accurately ascribed to chimpanzees, but the ability to form a moral community with humans may lie more deeply with dogs.

Both Hearne and Haraway are concerned to show the complexity of human/non-human interaction. They pointedly display that the kinds of relationships we can have with other animals are deeper and more variegated than we have thought. This is in keeping not only with their experiences but with recent biological and evolutionary research that has shown the previously unrevealed genius of various non-human species. Once we jettison what Haraway calls "human exceptionalism," we can open ourselves to the possibility of more interesting and more engaged relationships with other species.

But can any of this amount to political solidarity? Does it yield the possibility of collective action under the common presupposition of equality or "a unity of individuals each responding to a particular situation of

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injustice, oppression, social vulnerability, or tyranny”? There is some form of solidarity, to be sure. There is some kind of unity between human and non-human animal. This unity is the product of an understanding that emerges between the two, an understanding that may have cognitive elements but is not reducible to them. It is a unity that forms a bond, and that bond in turn may lead to behavior like mutual protection, affection, tighter co-ordination of behavior. But it does not seem to lead to the political solidarity envisioned by Rancière. As Bennett notes, “my conatus will not let me ‘horizontalize’ the world completely.”<sup>19</sup>

Sally Scholz contrasts what she calls social solidarity with political solidarity. She writes that, “the solidarity that victims of domestic abuse share with each other is not equivalent to the solidarity of a social activist movement aimed at changing a culture of abuse. In both cases, the initial sense of solidarity marks the bonds of a community united by some shared characteristic or similarity (social solidarity) while the second sort of solidarity indicates political activism aimed at social change (political solidarity).”<sup>20</sup> What can occur between humans and other animals, particularly when humans of the sensitivity of a Donna Haraway or a Vicki Hearne are involved, is more like social than political solidarity. There can be a community bound by sharing, but not a collective action requiring the presupposition of equality.

This does not mean that humans must consider non-humans as less than equal. That is an entirely different issue, one that I cannot address here. It means only that there cannot be the type of recognition of mutual equality that can allow for political coordination of the type that Rancière marks when he speaks of the equality of speaking beings.

There seem to be at least two lessons to be drawn from this. The first is that solidarity may stretch more widely than those in the sway of the distributive paradigm can see. The philosopher Bernard Williams, in his article “The Human Prejudice,” writes that “the only moral question for us [humans] is how we should *treat* them [i.e. non-human animals].”<sup>21</sup> Given what we have just seen, this seems to me to be mistaken. There are other moral questions as well. As Hearne and Haraway have shown, there are moral questions not only of how we treat other animals but more broadly of how we relate to them. There are questions of what kind of bonds we should have with them, questions of how we should encounter them, and questions of how we should view them.

And this last question, the question of how we should view them, leads to the second lesson, and back to contemporary a-humanism. In its attempt to place the human within a wider systemic nexus, the work of Protevi and Bennett and others shows us how to see ourselves as part of a larger whole rather than as its master or privileged character. If I may be permitted an ugly neologism, it horizontalizes our perspective, allowing us more readily to become engaged with the world rather than to see it lying at our cognitive feet. As Bennett puts the point, “The political goal of a vital materialism is not the perfect equality of actants, but a polity with more channels of communication between members.”<sup>22</sup> Among the important contributions that a-humanism may offer is to allow us to see ourselves as part of a natural order in such a way that we can look across rather than down on other beings. Given our current treatment of the environment and non-human animals, this is not a little.

However, although not a little, it does not amount to political solidarity. Contemporary a-humanism sits uneasily with political solidarity, a form of political action that cannot cut its moorings to humanism. This is not because it somehow involves a political failure, no more than contemporary a-humanism involves one because it does not issue out into political solidarity. Ultimately, there may be a level of irreconcilability between contemporary a-humanism and political solidarity. They are not entirely opposed. They can approach each other. But in the end they do not touch.

This leaves us with our paradox. On the one hand, if we embrace the distributive paradigm for politics, we can accord certain elements or aspects of the environment or certain non-human animals a type of justice. The cost of this is that of losing the perspective and insights that contemporary a-humanism lends us, to violate the horizontal structural approach it commends, and to engage in all of the problems that have been cited for

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distributive approaches to justice. On the other hand, if we embrace an approach roughly of the type Rancière recommends, we gain on a variety of political fronts but cannot realize at the level of political solidarity the horizontality contemporary a-humanism seeks. Political solidarity must yield, at some point, to a more distributive approach. While Williams may be mistaken in claiming that the only moral question in relation to other animals is how to treat them, he would not be mistaken in thinking it an important one.

How troubling is this paradox? That depends on how deep one's commitment to jettisoning humanism is. If humanism is to be completely overthrown, then we must overthrow a politics of solidarity with it. Alternatively, if we want to take on board the lessons of contemporary a-humanism without abandoning a politics of solidarity, then our task is twofold. First, we must recognize the limits—whatever they may be—of a-humanism for political solidarity. Second, and on the other hand, we must do our best to create routes of solidarity with other beings, and perhaps especially other animals. (I have left the issue of cyborgs out of the discussion, for reasons both of space and expertise, the latter having at least something to do with personal tendencies toward the luddite.) That solidarity can inform our practices, as can contemporary a-humanism. And perhaps someday we might be able to move toward something like a political solidarity that transcends the human. But until then we must live with our limitations, both theoretical and political, and allow them to impose on us a kind of modesty that, after all, would not be entirely foreign to contemporary a-humanism itself.

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## NOTES

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1. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Random House, 1970 [1966], 387.
2. John Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 33.
3. Protevi distinguishes several types of de-territorialization: a relative de-territorialization that moves the system from one attractor to another, a deeper but still relative de-territorialization that creates new attractors, and an absolute de-territorialization that resists the pull of attractors in favor of something more nomadic.
4. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, 10.
5. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 23-24.
6. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 51.
7. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 101.
8. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 16.
9. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 111.
10. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*. Trans. Julie Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, 33.
11. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Trans. Kristin Ross. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1991, 46.
12. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 28.
13. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 29-30.
14. Sally J. Scholz, *Political Solidarity*. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2008, 51.
15. See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 106-7.
16. Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 73.
17. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 244.
18. Vicki Hearne, "A Walk with Washoe? How Far Can We Go?" *Adam's Task: Calling Animals by Name*. New York: Knopf, 1986, 20.
19. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 104.
20. Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, 5.
21. Bernard Williams, "The Human Prejudice." *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, 141.
22. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 104.