

The Carnist a Priori: Derrida's Question of Eating Well and the Dilemma of Extermination or Assimilation in Animal Studies

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This paper focuses on the relationship between Derrida's metonymy of "eating well" and the question of the animal in animal studies through the concept of the carnist a priori. For Derrida, since the interiorization of the other cannot be avoided, the question of how to relate to the other should be rethought according to the metonymy of "eating well." However, the metonymy of "eating well" is conditioned by a horizon of questioning I propose to call the carnist a priori. The concept of the carnist a priori helps us identify the prevalent dilemma of extermination or assimilation that is commonly found in the discourses of animal studies and veganism. My aim in this paper is to identify and diagnose the carnist a priori to open up a different field of questions.

Keywords: Jacques Derrida – Matthew Calarco – carnophallogocentrism – carnist a priori – animal studies – veganism – the question of the animal

Introduction

This paper argues that questions of interiorization, or, metonymically, questions of "eating well," raised by Derrida mainly in his interview with Jean-Luc Nancy, titled "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject," depend on a horizon of questioning I call the carnist a priori, which is closely related to

Derrida's own concept of carnophallogocentrism.¹ Within this horizon, relating to the other is conditioned by an originary violence, i.e., the inevitable reduction of the other to the categories of sameness. For this reason, Derrida thinks, we should ask questions that negotiate and minimize the economy of violence. Accordingly, negotiating the economy of violence would require asking questions of "eating well." Asking questions of "eating well," we are concerned with the "least possible violence" to the other, for violence is the condition of relating to the other. The carnist a priori is the horizon that makes this framework intelligible. However, this horizon faces many problems, especially in the discourses of animal studies and veganism. I propose to call this set of problems the dilemma of extermination or assimilation of the other. This dilemma needs to be avoided to foster more proactive, proliferating relations with animal others.

I. The Question and The Metonymy of "Eating Well"

In "Eating Well," Derrida addresses the problematic of the subject and how subjectivity is both thought and constituted in the West. After a long discussion about the liquidation and the place of the subject, and how Heidegger confronts Cartesian subjectivity through his conception of *Dasein*, the interview turns to the Heideggerian discourse on the animal, which Derrida describes as violent, awkward, and at times contradictory (1995, 277). For Derrida, the answer to the question "do we have a responsibility toward the living in general?" in the Heideggerian discourse must necessarily be "no." This "no" is necessitated by the whole canonized or hegemonic discourse of Western metaphysics and religions. Even in Heidegger and Levinas, who are otherwise very critical of Western metaphysics, this answer would be "no." Derrida argues that the answer is "no" because the question is formed in such a way that the answer must necessarily be "no." The "no" is the result of the sacrificial structure, something even the most recent critical philosophers, such as Heidegger and Levinas, could not give up. In this sacrificial structure, the subject is constituted through the interiorization, ingestion, incorporation, introjection, and assimilation of the other: real and symbolic when the corpse is animal; symbolic when human. However, although Derrida points out the sacrificial structure, he explicitly states that he does not recall all this for advocacy (such as "a support group for vegetarianism") but to expose the

¹ The term "carnist" is inspired by Joy's term "carnism" (2010). The use of "a priori" here names not a formal horizon but a historical one, in Foucault's sense, see Foucault (1972, 128).

structure of subjectivity – though he admits that this advocacy “would lead us to the center of the subject” (Derrida 1995, 278).

Following Heidegger’s denial of responsibility to the animal, Derrida turns to Levinas’ discourse on animals to complete his diagnosis of the sacrificial structure of subjectivity. He names the Levinasian subjectivity “the subjectivity of the hostage.” The subject is a hostage because it is responsible for the other before itself, under the commandment of “Thou shalt not kill.” This commandment has infinite consequences: “thou shalt not make him suffer, thou shalt not do him harm, thou shalt not eat him, not even a little bit, and so forth” (Derrida 1995, 279). Although limitless, Derrida highlights that this commandment has never meant “Thou shalt not put to death the living in general” by either the Judeo-Christian tradition or Levinas. Derrida points out that even the most rigorous conceptions of ethics in the West are, at their root, humanist, for “do not kill” addresses only the human. In the sacrificial structure of Heidegger’s and Levinas’ discourse, there is “place left open ... for a noncriminal putting to death” (Derrida 1995, 278). Consequently, he claims:

discourses as original as those of Heidegger and Levinas disrupt, of course, a certain traditional humanism... they nonetheless remain profound humanisms *to the extent that they do not sacrifice sacrifice* (Derrida 1995, 279, emphasis in original).

The commandment, then, only addresses the neighbor, the friend-as-human. What we find in these profound humanisms is a licensing of the killing of the animal. To be sure, Derrida objects to this licensing. However, to what degree – if he ever does at all – does Derrida himself sacrifice sacrifice? Can sacrifice ever be sacrificed? These questions bring us to the carnophallogocentric structure of the subject. The carnophallogocentric structure not only constitutes the meat-eating subject, but it also constitutes the identity of Derrida (someone who diagnoses it), of the vegetarian (someone who refuses to eat meat), and of the non-anthropophagic culture (someone non-cannibal). That is why Derrida claims that “vegetarians, too, partake of animals, even of men. They practice a different mode of denegation” and “the so-called non-anthropophagic cultures practice symbolic anthropophagy and even construct their most elevated socius, indeed the sublimity of their morality, their politics, and their right, on this anthropophagy” (Derrida 1995, 280).

Does Derrida, then, simply end up accepting and reproducing the structure of subjectivity he diagnosed in Heidegger and Levinas? While he renounces the licensing of the killing of the animal, he still preserves the core of the sacrificial

structure, according to which every relation is consumption of the other; to relate to the other is always to interiorize, introject, assimilate, and eat her. Derrida sacrifices the profound humanisms, but he keeps the inescapable metonymy of eating that constitutes the subject. "Eating" becomes the metonymy for the ways we relate to the other. The comprehensiveness of this metonymic function depends on the impossibility of delimiting the "symbolic." While you can delimit what real eating is – you ingest a literal body for nourishment or a trophy – and you can regulate and refuse it as vegans do, you cannot delimit symbolic eating, under which Derrida gathers several modes such as "interiorization," "introjection," "the eat-speak-interiorize," i.e., understanding, naming, classifying, comprehending, assimilating, etc. These are all instances of symbolic eating for Derrida – instances of taking the other in. Derrida states elsewhere: "It is not enough to stop eating meat in order to become a non-carnivore," since "vegetarians," like everyone else, "can also incorporate, symbolically, something living, something of flesh and blood" (Derrida – Roudinesco 2004, 68). Put differently, there is no outside where the other would not be, at least symbolically, eaten. The undelimitability of the symbolic is what accounts for this. It is precisely because the symbolic cannot be delimited that the commandment "Thou shalt not put to death the living in general" would not achieve a state of non-violence in our relations to animal others.²

How does one allow for and imagine an ethical mode of relation to the other, then? Since the ethical frontier is relocated, ethics now passes "between several infinitely different modes of the conception-appropriation-assimilation of the other" (Derrida 1995, 281). In our relation to the Other, then, the metonymy has a comprehensive reach, i.e., infinitely different modes of eating-the-other. As Sara Guyer puts it, "Derrida demonstrates that ethics has teeth" (Guyer 2007, 76). In this ethics with teeth, everything is knotted around the orifices:

² If every relation is a mode of interiorizing the other, how does Derrida differ from Hegel, from the speculative idealism? The difference lies between *Aufhebung* and the indigestible. For Derrida, there is always something that remains indigestible in the Other. Derrida addresses this failure of digestion in his seminar "Rhétorique du cannibalisme," which focuses on "taking in oneself (*prendre en soi*)". His interest lies in "rejecting the other, excluding, vomiting, spitting, excreting, ... that which is not good to take in oneself, not good to eat, but bad, to start with the bad taste: some bad taste" (1990-91, 1st session, 1, my translation). In "Eating Well," by contrast, he is interested in the best, or the least violent, way of eating the other. Nonetheless, saying there is no outside to eating means the metonymy has a total reach, not that it executes completely: everything is at least symbolically eaten, but no eating interiorizes the other entirely.

For everything that happens at the edge of the orifices (of orality, but also of the ear, the eye – and all the “senses” in general), the metonymy of “eating well” [*bien manger*] would *always* be the rule (Derrida 1995, 282, emphasis mine).

What does it mean for the metonymy of “eating well” to be always the rule? While a metaphor compares two unrelated terms or things based on similarity, a metonymy replaces a word with something closely associated with it based on contiguity. In this metonymy, eating stands in for relations. Besides its literal sense, “eating” here implies symbolic interiorization, assimilation, incorporation, introjection, inclusion, welcoming, etc. of the other. Accordingly, Derrida takes every case of relating to the other as an instance of “eating.”³ One might object to this reading by claiming that eating is only one figure among the many Derrida uses, other figures such as mourning, welcoming, responsibility, rights, subjectivity, and language, none of which is obviously reducible to literal eating. These heterogeneous ways of relating to the other are gathered under the figure of interiorization, when he relocates ethics to “several infinitely different modes of the conception-appropriation-assimilation of the other” (Derrida 1995, 281). Mourning, welcoming, responsibility, and the rest appear precisely as different modes of taking the other in. This is why the metonymy is not merely one trope among other tropes but “would always be the rule” for “everything that happens at the edge of the orifices” (Derrida 1995, 282). The logic of “eat-speak-interiorize” binds perceiving, naming, and comprehending to eating through their shared structure of interiorization. This is why the metonymy reaches everywhere.

Since every relation depends on the taking in of the other, he claims: “The question is no longer one of knowing if it is ‘good’ to eat the other or if the other is ‘good’ to eat, nor of knowing which other. One eats him regardless and lets oneself be eaten by him” (Derrida 1995, 282). The question should be

³ Derrida’s preoccupation with “eating” was deeply influenced by the work of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, who explored the loss of the other through the lenses of introjection and incorporation, see Abraham – Torok (1994). Derrida also wrote on their work *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word*, titled “Fors” (1977). Ever since this encounter, Derrida’s views on eating the other have been developing. In *Glas* (1986), Derrida’s work became more focused on digestion, indigestion and what cannot be digested, later followed by his seminars “Manger l’autre” (1989 – 1990) and “Rhétorique du cannibalisme” (1990 – 1991), which were given around the same time as “Eating Well.”

reformulated as a “how-question,” instead of a “whether-question.” Or as Derrida puts it:

The moral question is thus not, nor has it ever been: should one eat or not eat, eat this and not that, the living or the nonliving, man or animal, but since *one must* eat in any case and since it is and tastes good to eat, and since there’s no other definition of the good [*du bien*], *how* for goodness’ sake must [modified translation, it reads “should” in the translation by Connor and Ronell] one *eat well* [*faut-il bien manger*]? (Derrida 1995, 282, emphasis in original)

Since interiorization of the other is unavoidable, what was once thought of as the moral question can no longer be thought of as such. Furthermore, Derrida thinks that the question of “whether to eat” has never been the moral question. Namely, questions such as whether one should be a vegetarian, a vegan, or a carnivore; whether vegans should eat animals without a central system (such as oysters and mussels); whether we should give certain animals rights or not, etc., are not moral questions, nor have they ever been. There are no pure and non-violent ethical encounters in which the symbolic violence of eating the other can be avoided. To understand, to comprehend, to ask a question, to give rights, to think about – all these are instances of symbolically eating the other.⁴

However, Derrida does not stop with the question of eating well; immediately after the question, he asks other questions that question the question itself:

And what does this imply? What is eating? How is this metonymy of introjection to be regulated? And in what respect does the formulation of these questions in language give us still more food for thought? In what respect is the question, if you will, still carnivorous? (Derrida 1995, 282)

⁴ The operation of the carnist a priori is not exclusive to “Eating Well.” As early as “Violence and Metaphysics,” written in 1964, we find the same thread focused on language and thought rather than eating. “Eating Well” reappropriates this vocabulary through the metonymy for eating. The dilemma of extermination or assimilation to be developed in the fourth section of this paper is already evident in “Violence and Metaphysics”: Levinas’ ideal of nonviolence prefigures the extermination horn and Derrida’s inescapable “economy of violence” (Derrida 2001, 145 – 146) that calls for choosing the “least possible violence” (2001, 162) prefigures the assimilation horn that will be addressed below.

Here, Derrida questions whether the question might itself be still carnivorous.⁵ In this paper, I follow Derrida's footsteps in questioning "the question of eating well" itself. I will be concerned here with how the question can still be carnivorous and what that entails in practice. Questioning "the question of eating well" will help us expose the carnist a priori, the horizon of questioning, under which questions of interiorization, assimilation, and eating seem like the proper questions to ask. Not only does the carnist a priori allow for certain questions, but it also captures and/or frames questions other than interiorization as questions of interiorization. This, I believe, will open up a new field of questions for the scholarship on animal studies.

II. Distinguishing Carnophallogocentrism and Carnist a Priori

How does the concept of the carnist a priori differ from Derrida's concept of carnophallogocentrism? Undoubtedly, Derrida's diagnosis of the carnophallogocentric structure of subjectivity and the question of "eating well" are critical, as they do not submit to the carnophallogocentric structure but strive to problematize it. The metonymy of "eating well," however, tends to frame questions of non-eating as questions of eating. For instance, how does a question such as "How do I play with a cat?" become an instance of interiorization, of eating-the-other? The concept of the carnist a priori helps us answer this question: playing with a cat presupposes the human conception of "play" and the rules we dictate to the cat that wants to "play." An interaction between the cat and me is quickly translated into a schema that reduces her to my rules. In other words, in playing with her, I eat the cat. But should this necessarily be the case? Can one distinguish the *question* from its *capture* here? For "how do I play with this cat?" is not necessarily a question that is symbolically alimentary. The question can be posed from a position where the *other* is the co-initiator. The cat comes at me, unprompted, against my will, as an event. This allows the relation to be something that happens between her and me. In her attempt to play with me, is my response *de jure* assimilative?⁶ What I propose to call the carnist a priori helps us understand exactly what is going on here once the question is captured

⁵ Nicole Anderson likewise addresses this question in a paper that deconstructs the case of Armin Meiwes and explores the ethics of consensual cannibalism through symbolic cannibalism; see Anderson (2010).

⁶ This question would take us into the heart of "concepts" that are perhaps neither ours nor theirs. Concerning these concepts, one might ask: do they belong to human beings in such a way that the animal other is always assimilated into it? Or do they emerge in between?

as an instance of assimilation. The carnist a priori is a horizon that frames even non-assimilative questions as questions of assimilation.

To be clear, carnophallogocentrism explains how subjectivity is necessarily constituted through the interiorization of the other. Since this is a necessity – for otherwise there would be no subject – the proper set of questions would be the ones that try to ameliorate assimilation and interiorization, questions that would help us determine “the best, most respectful, most grateful, and also most giving way of relating to the other and of relating the other to the self” (Derrida 1995, 282). In this framework, the metonymy of eating well becomes “a maxim whose modalities and contents need only be varied, *ad infinitum*” (Derrida 1995, 282). We can only stay within its horizon, varying the possible modalities within. The reach of the metonymy implies that, within the field of how the subject relates to the other, Derrida’s question too is captured by the carnist a priori. That is why he is interested in multiplying the questions of eating well.

However, as noted above, immediately after formulating the nature of the moral question, Derrida asks another question: in what respect is the question still carnivorous? Here we must follow Derrida closely. Relatedly, this question is the textual basis from which I deduce the concept of the carnist a priori. While Derrida appears to insist on the question of “eating well,” he is also suspicious about the nature of the question he is raising. Unfortunately, he does not develop this any further. Nonetheless, we can safely admit that Derrida shows a certain hesitation about the nature of this question; a hesitation his followers usually do not show when they try to develop better recipes for “eating well” rather than questioning the metonymy/question of “eating well” itself.

III. Recipes for “Eating Well” and Two Lines of Approach in Animal Studies

So, how do the readers of the question of “eating well” fare? Let us consider, first, Derrida’s closest readers on this question. David Wood, in his paper titled “Comment ne pas manger,” argues against Derrida’s ambivalence toward vegetarianism and declares that “vegetarianism is deconstruction” (1999, 32). For Wood, vegetarianism offers us a framework for political transformation. So, he tries to replace carnophallogocentrism with vegetarianism. Here, a better way of “eating” replaces a worse way of “eating.” Another follower of the question of “eating well” is Leonard Lawlor, who seeks a sufficient response to the “undeniable suffering of animals” (Lawlor 2007, 2) and argues that we must try to eat in the least violent way. He offers a seven-step “recipe” for eating well, organized around co-dependency, forgiveness, friendship, violence of naming,

the insufficiency of the recipe, and compassion (Lawlor 2007, 109 – 110). Kelly Oliver, on the other hand, notes that the question of “eating well” should be reformulated to address “not only *how* and *what* but also *why* we eat and/or assimilate the other” (Oliver 2009, 3, emphasis in original). She also reminds us that the way we treat animals is largely determined by what we take them to be. So, the question of “how” is not enough by itself; questions of “why” and “what” must supplement it (Oliver 2009, 105 – 106). Another very careful reader of Derrida’s works, Matthew Calarco, in “Deconstruction is not vegetarianism,” is still captured by the metonymy. He treats the question of eating well as a diagnostic tool for exposing the good conscience of vegetarian discourses, asking how existing vegetarian discourses (Wood’s included) “regulate and determine the proper modes of ingestion and introjection, understood literally, symbolically, and metonymically” (Calarco 2004, 197). What is common to all these readings of Derrida? These are careful, generous readings of Derrida, but what they ultimately do is produce a recipe for eating better – both literally and symbolically. However, the metonymy survives their supplements and expansions. These are all works done within the horizon of the carnist a priori.

Interestingly, exactly twenty years later, in *The Three Ethologies*, Calarco no longer seems interested in the question of “eating well.” In this book, Calarco articulates two lines of approach to human-animal relations. The first line helps us extend and reform our relations through preexisting principles and categories of relation (Calarco 2024, 50). Here we try to find ways for animals to fit into our already existing categories, political traditions, and institutions (Calarco 2024, 68). Put differently, we look for ways to assimilate and interiorize the other within our political traditions and institutions. This first line is within the horizon of the carnist a priori, for we are merely asking the best way to “eat” them. However, Calarco is interested in another line of approach. The second line focuses on rebuilding our lives and institutions from the ground up in response to the more-than-human world. Instead of reforming our relations through preexisting principles and categories, Calarco is interested in rethinking our relations as inherently open-ended. In these open-ended relations, where we do not apply the categories of sameness, experimenting with new relations becomes central. Only by experimenting can we “undo old configurations and open up different potentials and possibilities” (Calarco 2024, 50).

In these two approaches, the distinction between a priori and a posteriori becomes very evident. While the carnist a priori preserves the extant form of the relationship, the second approach focuses on more affirmative and experimental possibilities. I propose calling the questions raised in the second

approach “vegan a posteriori” questions, not only to highlight the asymmetry with the carnist a priori, but also to emphasize the experimental and experiential nature of these questions. Calarco’s concept of *syn-theōria*, which he defines as “a communal form of seeing, one possible *only* through world-traveling and by learning to see with and through others” (Calarco 2024, 111), is an instance of a vegan a posteriori question. To be sure, Calarco does not simply claim to escape the carnist a priori; he moves beyond it, and his works traverse the carnist a priori. His question of *syn-theōria* is a question about a world that does not belong to us. Thinking about this question requires us to be exposed to a multiplicity of perspectives that cannot be reduced to us; perspectives that cannot be fully assimilated or incorporated.

What happens to the carnist a priori in such questions? Do these questions escape it, sublate (*aufheben*) it, or leave something of it surviving, even in the affirmative framework? A provisional criterion that we might ask could be as follows: do we extend our extant categories to the Other in a way that assimilates them, or do we transform and challenge our categories through experimentation with the Other? Following the provisional criterion, *syn-theōria* and questions such as Haraway’s “can I learn to play with this cat?” (Haraway 2008, 22) fall on the side of transformation of concepts rather than extension of them. Whether this distinction holds against harder cases, and how the carnist a priori might still relate to affirmative, experimental work, must be left for another paper, because we must first see how the carnist a priori determines and conditions the questions asked in vegan and animal studies discourses.

IV. Carnist a Priori and the Dilemma of Extermination or Assimilation

How does the carnist a priori determine the discourses of animal studies and veganism? On the one hand, there are questions of literal eating: should we eat or not eat, should we eat this but not that, should we kill and eat in a “humane” way, etc. On the other hand, there are questions of symbolic eating: should we give them rights, should we liberate them, should they count as citizens, should they be named or not, etc. So, in either case, the animals are understood in terms of literal incorporation or symbolic interiorization/assimilation. When the discourses of animal studies and veganism become too concerned with the question of “eating well,” they reproduce the logic of the carnist a priori. The contemporary discourses of animal studies and veganism offer little on how our relation to animal others can be rebuilt, beyond the question of whether they are eaten literally or symbolically.

There are two outcomes in the discourse of animal studies and veganism, both produced and conditioned by the carnist a priori: extermination or assimilation. Gary Francione's abolitionism is an instance of the first. For Francione, domestic animals are wholly dependent on us, so that the relation between domestic animals and us, by its very nature, is one of master and slave. He argues that "humane" treatment or welfarist reforms are not sufficient, for they only serve to make exploitation economically efficient. Two things can be done for the domestic and nondomesticated animals: care for the domestic animals that already exist and stop breeding them, and leave nondomesticated nonhumans alone (Francione 2008, 13). In Francione's framework, the ideal of a nonviolent relation to the animal other risks ending the relation to the other altogether: either by gradually exterminating the other (as with domestic animals) or exterminating the relation through non-relation to the other (as with nondomesticated animals). This outcome is the result of the carnist a priori, pushed to one of its logical ends. If every relation is interiorization, assimilation, or incorporation, the only way out of this violent relation is to end the relation itself. The ideal of purity eventually leads to the extermination or annihilation of the animal other. The "several infinitely different modes of the conception-appropriation-assimilation of the other," Derrida mentions, are outright and completely rejected by Francione. However, Donna Haraway sharply identifies the danger of this position, claiming "living always means someone else dying differentially" and vegans, by avoiding animal products, risk consigning "most domestic animals to the status of curated heritage collections or to just plain extermination as kinds and as individuals" (Haraway 2008, 80). Evidently, questioning the carnist a priori allows us to identify the threat of extermination posed by one of the leading figures of the animal abolition discourse.

The other outcome, assimilation rather than extermination, is exemplified by projects that extend existing legal and political categories to animals. *Zoopolis* (2011), written by Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, is a recent instance of this. While they are careful about the plurality of animals, with their categorization of domesticated, wild, and liminal animals, they still seek to grant animals rights, citizenship, and denizenship. For Matthew Calarco, this approach "extends and reforms extant social orders according to preexisting principles and categories of relation" (Calarco 2024, 50). According to Calarco, while *Zoopolis* is an important work for the "political turn" in animal studies, it falls short of questioning the extant categories of relation (Calarco 2024, 58 – 59). Works such as these land on the assimilation horn of the carnist a priori. The dilemma we have here, then, can be articulated as follows: animal others

are either translated into the political-moral circle or left to sterilization and morally justified extermination.⁷

Where does Derrida stand here? To be sure, Derrida explicitly points to the violence against animals (Derrida – Roudinesco 2004, 71; 2008, 24 – 27). He does not believe that simply becoming vegetarian is sufficient. What is Derrida's alternative, then? The practical implications of Derrida's theoretical framework resemble animal welfarism: he hopes that the qualitative conditions will change together with quantity, the demand for more "natural" conditions for the beasts will be met, and that the conditions of violence and cruelty toward animals will be modified over the course of centuries (Derrida – Roudinesco 2004, 71 – 73). What is needed, for him, is the "least bad solution" (Derrida – Roudinesco 2004, 76). Since the assimilation of the other cannot be escaped, Derrida's position becomes a variation on the assimilation horn. Therefore, while Derrida raises the question of the question's carnivorousness, which I identified as the carnist a priori, the practical implications of his work are in line with the welfarist position, which falls under the assimilation horn. Questioning the question itself, though, could take us beyond the dilemma of extermination or assimilation and the carnist a priori that conditions the dilemma.

Eventually, "how would Derrida's theoretical framework fare against the various positions in animal studies?" is an interesting question that must be pursued elsewhere. However, for now, we can only note that Derrida gestures toward a "different kind of right" (Derrida 1995, 273) that he never fully develops. Elsewhere, he also claims that "the question of animality" will change the senses of words such as "ontological," "ethical," and "rights" (Derrida – Roudinesco 2004, 64). Perhaps, questioning the question itself and exposing the carnist a priori as a horizon that conditions even the discourses of animal studies and veganism could be the right step to take to see how the senses of these words could be challenged and transformed for different kinds of relations with animal others.

⁷ Their recent work *Animals and the Right to Politics* (2026) is more ambivalent on this point. This work uses ethology to show some animals have political agency, thereby expanding the ordinary sense of the "political." However, by relying on ethology, Donaldson and Kymlicka do not deconstruct the concepts they use, but they expand them, so that some animals can be said to be *zōon politikon*. For a work that focuses on the relation between deconstruction, zoopolitics and philosophical ethology, see Briggs (2021).

Conclusion

Extermination or assimilation are not two unrelated outcomes but two outcomes of the same horizon, the carnist a priori. The task before animal studies is not to find a better recipe, but to pursue questions that go beyond the dilemma of extermination or assimilation. This is where the carnist a priori proves useful as a concept. It helps us catch the horizon operating even in the questions raised in the most “radical” discourses of animal studies, and it shows why the second line championed by Calarco is not merely a supplement to the question of eating well. Certainly, how the vegan a posteriori questions relate to the carnist a priori remains to be asked. What I tried to establish in this paper is that the dilemma of extermination or assimilation is itself an outcome of the carnist a priori. And to find a way beyond it, if there is any way beyond it, we need to seek affirmative frameworks rather than a better recipe for eating well.

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