

Mind the body: the roots of personality in animality

Field of Investigation: Philosophy: metaphysics, ethics aesthetics

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I argue that inter-animal engagement (inter-animality) evokes personality and I explain the relevance of this claim in what regards our construal of humanity. The modernist view of the human, as a body animated by a higher intelligent principle, implied a human/animal dichotomy, which, in turn induced a discrimination between two (polarized) forms of learning: education and adaptation. Enlightenment philosophy considered that the great potential of the human being stands in its capability to undergo education (Rousseau, Hobbes). This contractualist hypothesis still underpins the contemporary educational paradigm(s), determining a myth of the complete human being. From a semiotic perspective, Stables (2012) criticized this rationalist myth, pointing out how it supposes the non-humanity of some groups, such as children. Instead, from a semiotic perspective, Stables proposes humanity as a continuous becoming. Furthermore, I argue, the rationalist myth of the educated human endorses a handicap for non-human animals, which can only adapt, but not educate. In turn, this determines an understanding of humanity stripped of animality. This theoretical position, besides its problematic position towards non-human animals, generates a serious problem to our construing of humanity. By stripping humanity of its animality, humanity misses the cornerstone of personality. Personality develops in inter-subjective relations, in inter-animality, which, according to Merleau-Ponty is a possibility of the flesh, of sentient bodies interacting (see also Stjernfelt 2006). Similarly, the biosemiotic understanding is that personhood is located in the skin (Hoffmeyer, 2008) – the organ that both confines and opens up the environment and alterity to the organism. We understand ourselves because we understand the other (Brandt 2007, Hoffmeyer 2008). Per Aage Brandt (2007) considers that we understand our relation with the Other because we can simulate the Other's phenomenality of (my) self by performing *iconic cognition*. This is possible only because we are embodied and thus, we perceive each other as enfolded bodies: the other is an icon of the self and the self is an icon of the other. Thus the self and the other evolve together as signs in semiosis. The interpretant of this alloscopic experience is personal relation. It is embodiment itself, being an animal, that affords alloscopic experience and learning, and, thus, accounts for personality.

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