

Summaries

ÉVA VÍGH

On the Zoomorphic Physiognomy of Giovan Battista Della Porta

In the history of civilization, one of the most impressive epistemological issues of moral comparison between *humanitas* and *animalitas* is the zoomorphic physiognomy. This paper aims to analyze the intrinsic relationship between zoomorphism and ethics through Della Porta's *Della fisonomia dell'huomo*, the best known work from this point of view in the history of Italian civilization of the 16th century. The zoomorphic analogies, thanks also to the very convincing illustrations, create iconographic and semantic models which have always been part of the collective cultural and popular imaginary, but in the early modern age were studied in a consistent and systematic method by Della Porta. For that which concerns the question of body and soul the reference point is Plato and the Hermetic-Platonic Renaissance thought, while in matters of morality the undisputed source is Aristotle. Through some zoomorphic examples (with the comparison between man-ass, man-ostrich, man-lion, man-ape) the paper presents the determined cosmological role of animals in recognition of the character and the affections of man.

BÁLINT KÉKEDI

Sheep and Magnets: On the Role of Teleological Considerations in the Explanation of Animal Behavior in Descartes' Philosophy

In this paper, I propose to adopt a very minimalistic notion of purposeful behavior in the case of animals – the automata of nature – in Descartes' natural philosophy. This notion of purpose derives from our observation of animal behaviour, and I will call those forms of behaviour *purposeful* or *goal-directed* where an entity performs self-correcting motion with respect to the position of another object. I argue that philosophers in the early modern period did not clearly distinguish behaviour understood as purposeful in the above-defined sense and the behaviour of machines which – although were created with a certain purpose, like a mechanical clock – were not purposeful, but pre-programmed. In the first part of the paper, I try to show that their failure to make that distinction was largely due to the charm of what I call the *knowledge argument*, which states that there must be an intelligent agent somewhere behind any sort of goal-directed behaviour, because it is inconceivable that an entity may follow a goal without it – or its designer – grasping what that goal is. By contrast, I argue that Descartes gave a very clear description of spontaneous purposeful processes in nature where we do not have to have

recourse to the knowledge argument. The most obvious case of such a process is the behaviour of a mechanical compass, which continuously displays self-corrective behaviour with respect to the poles, without there being an intelligent agent designing the magnet or directing its behaviour. The emphasis in the case of magnets, as in the much more complex case of perceptual cognition, is on the coupling of two physical systems; it is the coupling that enables the systems under consideration to form “teleological units”, within which one – or all – of the systems will exhibit purposeful behaviour with respect to the other(s). The second part of the paper addresses the issue of control, which was a more amply debated question in the period. In this part, I argue that when discussing the scope of the knowledge argument, people were concerned primarily with the grasping of the goal, rather than with the actual governing of behaviour which they thought were realisable by perfectly “blind” mechanisms even in humans. I conclude the article by claiming that Descartes’ insights into what can be achieved by purely mechanical means were ahead of his time, and that this aspect of his natural philosophy has not been given due attention by historians of philosophy.

ÁDÁM SMRCZ

The Withdrawal of Mechanism from Nature: The Influence of Early Modern Atomist Accounts on Vitalistic Philosophies of Nature

The paper draws up an evolutionary line between theories concerning the origin of the human soul. Its point of departure is a neo-stoic account (outlined by Justus Lipsius), according to which the origin of the soul is absolutely distinct from that of corporeal substances, since it is directly „infused” into the body by God. Regardless of the fact, that such claims were widely accepted by the humanists of the 15th and 16th centuries, such accounts of „infusion” were later challenged by atomist or Epicurean thinkers, since – according to them – the earlier theories could not properly explain the role of the corporeal seed in the genesis of faculties commonly attributed to the human soul. The line of argument intends to prove, that this challenge by atomist theories was of crucial importance in the development of 17th-century vitalism. This paper intends to demonstrate the line of this historical development via the examples of Walter Charleton, Pierre Gassendi and Ralph Cudworth.

VERONIKA SZÁNTÓ

Vitalism, Mechanism, and Life in Seventeenth-Century British Natural Philosophy

Although the rise of the mechanical philosophy in the seventeenth century did not bring about a revolution in the life sciences as it did in physics, it was instrumental in prompting the reconsideration of the relationship between matter and life. Most mechanical philosophers addressing physiological problems tended to evade this issue by concentrating on particular delimited bodily functions, still leaving the task of the integration of vital phenomena to an animal soul. In the present paper I focus on three articulate

attempts to elucidate the relationship between matter and life: that of Robert Boyle, William Harvey and Francis Glisson. Whereas Boyle remained ambiguous regarding the extent to which mechanical natural philosophy might be applied to living beings, Harvey, an early critic of mechanism active before the canonization of the new natural philosophy in England, insisted on the irreducible character of life. However, Harvey left the issue of the relative importance of an inherent vital virtue and the organization of the living body unattended. It was Francis Glisson, who gave the most systematic treatment of life in the era. For Glisson, life boils down to the immanent perceptivity of the material substance. The vitalistic philosophy of Glisson, stripped of most of its metaphysical burden, represented an important source of inspiration for the next century and signalled an important shift towards the “de-souling” of physiology.

DÁNIEL SCHMAL

Vitalism and the Problem of Unconscious Perception in the Seventeenth Century

The aim of this paper is to explore conceptual relations between early modern vitalism and anti-Cartesian conceptions of soul prevalent in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth centuries. One of the conceptual links is provided by the vitalist account of causation. In section one I show that William Harvey – in his *De generatione animalium* – entertains conflicting assumptions about vital causality. On the one hand, he believes that natural causes are inherent in the living body (they are equated to blood in particular), while on the other hand he holds that they operate as virtues that are „something more” than the composing parts of the organism. This tension raises questions about how higher powers can operate in the matter and perform goal-oriented activities. Harvey’s attempt to solve the problem remains somewhat cryptic, because it tends to degenerate into metaphorical talk at the most crucial points of the argumentation. In the rest of my paper I argue that Francis Glisson’s theory of perception was meant to address these issues. Glisson, a younger colleague of Harvey, believes that natural change in general and animal generation in particular stems from perceptual powers inherent in matter. Specifically, he holds that matter is endowed with *biouisia*, a certain material form of life which allows substances to have unconscious perceptions and desires which manifest themselves in organic movements. Thus, in Glisson’s view, perceptual powers provide an answer to the question of how bodies pursue goals. The conclusion is that the problem of animal generation leads to epistemological issues concerning unconscious perceptions. My contention is, then, that these problems serve as points of contact between early modern approaches to life and various anti-Cartesian currents in the philosophy of mind.

VERONIKA DARIDA

The Gaze of the Animals

The paper considers the problem of “the animals’ gaze” (*le regard*) as it appears in or hides behind the horizon of contemporary philosophy. First, phenomenological descriptions of the “gaze” and the “face” are analyzed through the texts of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, who describe only the human perspective, as Jacques Derrida’s criticism justly emphasized. Then an attempt is made to present the theory of Giorgio Agamben (and his lecture on Blanchot and Bataille), which concerns the line between human and non-human by evoking the questions of death and language.