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Chapter 2
Converting the Earth into a Dwelling Place

The Ethics of Nature by Ludwig Feuerbach

Adriana Veríssimo Serrão

Abstract The chapter analyzes the main lines of the philosophy of nature in the work of the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872). The thesis of autonomy and of the intrinsic value of nature, already present in the early writings, continues on to an ontology of the sentient way of being (*Sinnlichkeit*), which assigns the status of subject to all human and non-human entities. From these principles, there arises an ethics of recognition and gratitude, addressed as critique of the anthropocentrism and of all forms of domination and instrumentality. In his later writings, Feuerbach defends the view of nature as a republic, that is, a parity community without hierarchies and privileges, which includes animal rights. The balance between naturalism and humanism is one of the greatest legacies of this unjustly forgotten thinker, who understood the community of destinies shared by mankind and the mother Earth.

Keywords Ludwig Feuerbach · Sensibility · Ethics of nature · Animal rights · Mother Earth

> The philosopher must have nature as a friend; nature is truly wisdom, reason. What he thinks, she does, that is what he sees in her.[1] (GW 17, p. 289)

A Pioneer of the Rights of Nature

The consideration of Ludwig Feuerbach's thought in the context of the relations between philosophy and ecology may seem incoherent labor or an attempt of overforced reconstitution. In fact, the philosopher, as in general the mentality of his time,

[1] The most texts of Ludwig Feuerbach are quoted from the critical edition by Schuffenhauer W (ed) (1967ss) *Gesammelte Werke.* Akademie Verlag, Berlin, and identified with GW, followed by volume and page. The correspondence with the titles and dates is given in the Reference list. For the First Version manuscript of *Das Wesen der Religion*, I use WR I.

All the translations are made from the original and of my responsibility.

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lacks at least two of the traits that structure the current ecological awareness: on the one hand, a state of warning in face of a severely threatened nature (or even compromised in its survival); on the other hand, the certainty that the accumulated errors of human action are the factor that has most contributed to such disaggregation. From the theoretical point of view, this new awareness demands an idea of nature, and of "natural", whose authenticity has become nowadays entirely problematic, and it casts on man the weight of a double ethical perspective, blaming man for the irreversibility of errors already committed and making him responsible for the conservation of what still remains.

Without being entirely alien to him, the consequences of human activity on the environment, particularly changes in the climate, are referred by Feuerbach in a general way, and bring to light the clear inspiration of a motive already developed by J. G. Herder (1784, 1791), in the *Ideas for a Philosophyof the Historyof Humanity*, yet, with no association to the connotation of negative effects, much less the idea of man as the predator of living species or the destroyer of his environment (GW 6, pp. 193–194; GW 10, p. 64). Some other topics, quite indicative of the point of view of Feuerbach's intellectual biography and of his way of making philosophy, underline the difference between the philosophizing of the countryside and that of the city, the former enlivened by the pure air of free spaces, in line with the *status naturalis*, the latter reproducing the narrow horizons of closed spaces and contaminated by the impurities of city air.

The intuition of a global disaggregation, the accumulation of waste or the shortage of basic resources, are alien to this nineteenth century thinker, such as the image of the man who threatens his environment and, by extension, his planet, partially understandable by taking into account his existence spent in a discreet Bavarian village, away from urban centers and distant from factory fumes, whose harmful effects some of his contemporaries, more attentive to the negative aspects of the expanding industrial revolution, already denounced, as it was the case of the English poet Ruskin (1843,1860).

Despite these limitations, Feuerbach is still a decisive voice in favor of an unconditional dignification of nature. Unknown or forgotten when the first signs of articulation between philosophy and ecology are sought, Feuerbach would certainly deserve, in the context of the nineteenth century, the rightful place that Nietzsche has so often been acknowledged—in the matrix sense of fidelity to the Earth—, or that Oswald Spengler received—to the decline of civilization that would also drag nature, destined to lose character, lacking regenerative capacity. Both the idea of nihilism and that of decline can easily be converted into a "premonition" of fall, of a total disappearance of civilization comprehending cultural values and Earth itself. Feuerbach's contained optimism, on the other hand, does not associate the emancipatory movement of human history with the anticipation of a decadence that would act upon the natural world.

But other key themes are very much alive in his texts, namely the earthly foundation of the humans, or the consideration of the multi-functionality of nature, as origin and basis of life, as well as measure and limit. Even without the prospect of a decline, Feuerbach's position related to nature—whether in its totality, or in its

particulars—manifests an attitude of deep respect, all the more remarkable since it evolves within the pure order of reflection and is not posited as defense against an already installed danger. Such imposing regard, namely, the human duties towards the animals, constitutes a surprising anticipation of the debates about the urgent present-day challenges faced by thought and action.

Autonomy and the Intrinsic Value of Nature

In its most essential aspect, Nature presents itself as the foundation of all existence, and it does not owe its existence to a being which is distinct from nature itself. Independent in origin, not possessing a determined temporal beginning, and independent in its very existing, Nature continues its course autonomously as principle of immanent generation, only obeying to its own internal rhythms of development. The strongest expression of nature is *life*, an animated reality that subsists and is renewed by means of the cycles of birth and death of the individuals.

The confrontation with religious and philosophical positions that give it a secondary, or even negative, status, is often controversial. Creationism, which places nature in the status of derivation of the creative act, which is in turn arbitrary, of an absolute subjectivity; being created, the world does not possess a positive meaning, rather, it is derived, suspended from the act of the divine will that brought it into existence from nothing (*ex nihilo*). This is the same "nothing" that also supports Hegel's speculative logic, for whom nature is posed by the spirit as a negative with which spirit faces in order to acquire the full awareness of itself. The incapability of collecting the organic sense is also typical of mechanicism, particularly targeted, since it deprives nature of vital breath and movement, when it lends to nature a fixed and repetitive mode of operation similar to that of machines. To look at the world in general and at the living in particular, under the exclusive figure of the uniform enchainment of causes, is to convert life into death, the living into inert thing, imposing on the world a stability which is in everything at odds with the immanent differentiation and the qualitative diversity displayed by natural processes.

Deemed in parallel to an organic nature as *physis*, whose essence is the vital principle indispensable for thinking the succession of phenomena, Feuerbach also considers it from a synchronous point of view as "simultaneous totality" or community. The concept of Nature as simultaneity makes it possible to account for the current cohesion of a whole whose elements have an importance and value, neglected by a temporal diachronic view. From this point of view, nature presents itself according to the scheme of space, that is, a community governed by coordination and coexistence of finites, each one participating in his own right, within the plenitude of the differences and qualities that cannot be summed up in a single figure. Nature tends, therefore, to coincide with reality, and it is even defined as the "sum of reality", also including the human being in this "being with", inserted and inseparable from the real totality. In this way, an idea of reality structured in the bipolarity Nature-Man is inaugurated, as essential mode of all existence which not even the philosopher may

ignore, as if he were an isolated spectator or a pure cognoscitive subject, instead of a total being.

It is in this context that nature also assumes itself as an ethical paradigm, as *Heil*, in the double meaning of health and salvation, a model of simplicity, sobriety and rationality, which must be understood and followed:

> Philosophy is the science of reality in its truth and totality, but the sum of reality is nature (nature in the most universal sense of the term). That is why the deepest secrets reside in the simplest natural things that the speculative fantasist who appeals to the Beyond treads underfoot. The return to nature is the only source of salvation (GW 9, p. 61).

A Renewed Ontology: All Beings Are Subjects

In the founding manifestos of the project for a new philosophy—the *Provisional Theses for the Reform of Philosophy* and the *Principles of the Philosophyof the Future*—, Feuerbach crosses the philosophy of Nature with an ontology based on the principle of Sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*), which characterizes its fully matured doctrine. *Being* is not an empty concept that would apply indistinctly to everything that can be thought. It is the sensitive and concrete being, the very *existence* unfolded in the multiplicity of the existing ones and in the irreducible singularity of each one, independent of thought and language, therefore, having truth and reality on its own: "Existence, even without sayability, has meaning and reason for itself." (GW 9, p. 308).

The most significant contribute for an apotheosized view of reality is the thesis of the being as subject: "Being is something in which not only me but also others, and above all also the object itself, are *implied*. *Being* means to be *subject*, means to be *for itself*." (GW 9, p. 304). The notion of subject loses its identification with the self-conscious and self-reflective self of Idealism in order to be integrated in a realist and full view of existence, without the privilege or exclusivity of the human understanding. Ontology prepares the promotion of the world, a world of subjects who are also objects, not as the opposite of thinking or as devoid of thought, but simply as a function of the position each plays in relation to the other; this converts the sensible reality into a fabric of interrelationships, under the originary mode of the object-subjectivity of all that exists.

A Typology of Attitudes: Between Instrumentality and Gratitude

In the characterization of aesthetic-contemplative and practical-utilitarian attitudes, the confrontation between the modes of relationship with the sensitive world is well typified.

Intuition or contemplation (*Anschauung*) is a vision of care and deepening of the sensitive. It presides over the logics of proximity, a vision on a scale that can reach the most distant skies as well as affect the closest beings. Strictly speaking, intuition is not a type of knowledge that separates the object from its representation or its concept; it is already a type of sensitive thought, that deciphers the book of the world and discloses it in the multiplicity and variety of its characters and vocables.

The philosopher does not have the exclusivity of contemplation. He shares it with the attention of the botanist who looks after his plants and the mineralogist who examines his crystals, both of them linking study and love, reason and feeling, or in Feuerbach language, *head* and *heart*. He also shares it with the religious naturalist who celebrates his debt to the natural world with fearful and supportive adoration. Recognizing qualities, generating joy, intuition takes place in a relationship of respect for the object, as an end in itself, valuing nature as a good to be observed, studied, admired, not to be used. Feuerbach emphasizes the power of intuition when he associates it with love, taken as the ability that the heart has to take beings out of indifference and to invest each finite being with an absolute character, an infinite value.

> Being is, therefore, a secret of intuition, of sensation, of love. Only in sensation, only in love, is that" *this* "– this person, this thing –, that is, the singular, has absolute value, that the *finite* is the *infinite* – it is in this and only in this that the infinite depth, divinity and truth of love consists (GW 9, p. 317).

At the opposite side, utilitarianism is to be found, as the vision determined by interest and tainted by the calculative anticipation of profits, driven by the selfish functionality that reduces a being to possession or profit: it must be mine or a means for myself. The selfishness of use, rendering beings instrumental as means, generates disparity, as it becomes evident from the contrast of the two types of intuition:

> Practical intuition is a dirty intuition, tainted by selfishness. In it, I relate to one thing only because of me. I do not intuit it because of it; deep down, it is a despicable thing [...]. Practical intuition is an *unsatisfied intuition*, because in it I relate to an object that is not of equal condition to mine. The theoretical intuition, on the contrary, is an intuition *full of joy*, *satisfied in itself*, *blessed,* because for her the object is an object of *love* and *admiration*, which shines in the light of free interest, but magnificent as a diamond, transparent as a mountain crystal; the intuition of the theory is an *aesthetic* intuition, the practical intuition, on the contrary, an *unaesthetic* intuition (GW 5, p. 333).

Contemplation owes its primacy to disinterest, the absence of the willingness to possess, which presupposes a decentered point of view, but not an annulment of the self. In Feuerbach's terminology, the very concept of aesthetics translates the equation of subject and object in a synthetic plane. The freedom of nature is in solidarity with the subject's mental freedom. Feuerbach sometimes associates aesthetics with the Greek sense of awe at the world and of contemplation (*theôria*), theoretical but not intellectualist, welcoming the festive sense and the magnificence of the world with amazed eyes. Other times, he integrates aesthetical ethics in a form of authentic religiousness, made of debt and gratitude, close and respectful, present in the cult of the elements, in the celebration of qualities and natural properties:

> Do not forget, in gratitude to man, gratitude for the sacred Nature! Do not forget that wine and flour are the blood and flesh of plants that are sacrificed for the welfare of your existence! [...] *Sacred* for us then be bread, *sacred* the wine, but also sacred the *water*! (GW 5, p. 454).

In imposing a human measure, be it of the individual, or of groups, or the measure of the human species in general, utilitarianism is an expression of selfishness and anthropocentrism. However, anthropocentrism is not be confused with the concrete situation occupied by each subject, which defines a determined situation in the apprehension of the world. For Feuerbach, the human subject is an embodied self, rooted in the world according to the concrete coordinates of a "here and now". The temporally and spatially ingrained corporal position of an incarnated subject necessarily stamps the apprehension of the world with a differentiation of angles. Perspectivism, according to which the real totality is taken in portions or fractions, must therefore be broadened and encompass the point of view of others, in a dialogical conception of truth that does not altogether identify the personal point of view with the total point of view. The task of philosophy consists precisely in overcoming the limited character of the different perspectives and in attaining an inter-subjective and communicative universality.

As for "be a center", "taking oneself as center", it implies the primary and limited attitude according to which the things that revolve around my restricted, personal and local, situation are exclusively just like I perceive them. It presupposes the projection of a measure, exclusive for me or for us, taken as an absolute. Anthropocentrism initially puts on the figure of innocent anthropomorphism; typical of the stage of ignorance of individuals and peoples, as in the case of the child or the animistic mentality, it invests human properties, behaviors or feelings in the natural objects. It is in the course of personal or historical evolution that anthropocentrism will turn into a serious vice of thought, which instead of humanizing the world deliberately deprives the world from its specificity in order to judge it according to particular and categorical criteria that give it consistency and objectivity. In both cases, there is a projection over the object; in the first case, by identification and assimilation; in the second, by destitution and privation.

Feuerbach is aware that a type of self-referenciality intervenes spontaneously in the worldview. Therefore, an exercise of self-criticism is imposed on all knowledge, which, without being able to cancel the introduction of this measure, does not identify ways of knowing and saying with being in itself. It is necessary to apprehend nature only through nature itself, by distinguishing between "thing in itself" and "thing for us", in the awareness that any human measure, eventually applied to it, detains an entirely analogical scope.

> Even if nature does not see, it is not *blind*, even if it does not live (in the subjective, sensitive sense of human life in general), it is nevertheless not *dead*, and even if it does not form according to intentions, its formations are not *casual* because where man defines nature as dead and blind, its formations as casual, then he converts his own being (that is, *subjective*) into a *measure* of nature, determines it uniquely *according the opposition to himself*, refers it as a disabled being, because she *doesn't* have what he has (GW 10, p. 60).

Human Existence and Lived Nature

The natural world presents itself as provided with autonomy, whereas the human place, on the contrary, is already marked by the dependence on nature, the origin and source of all instances of life, inorganic and organic, plants and animals. Thus, being a living species, man also began to emerge from nature; so, the man of the world (*Weltmensch*), modulated by his thinking and acting, he is and always will be a man of nature (*Naturmensch*) too (GW 11, p. 175). However, Feuerbach does not linger for long on the issue of the historical and the temporal origin; he just introduces some very general principles, and it is up to the empirical sciences to explain and confirm them in their particular causes: the precedence of the Earth in relation to all species, including the human species, since it made a late appearance, deferred in time, compelling one to ponder a stadium in which Earth, plants and animals already existed, but man still did not exist (GW 6, p. 109). This is so, because the natural condition of the living species cannot be found in its remote natural origin. The human species is above all a being in nature, in the sense of a total involvement in a process of existence.

In his actual inhabitation, the common human being has no knowledge of the complex debates in the field of ontology and gnoseology, but he knows well the sensitive nature that surrounds him and in which his entire existence progresses. What the philosopher can express in a pure order of thought, instituting the idea of a foundation, distant in the ontological order, a first in time or in value, the common human being experiences as next door reality in every moment of his existence.

He lives this reality as native land (*Heimat*), underlining the sense of belonging to his land, as soil or original home. This land is not just located in space and time, which are the coordinates of existence in general; the human being comes from a place, from this identified place, where, after leaving, he will return to with the familiar feeling of belonging, the memory of which he may even carry along in the representation of a future life after death (GW 5, pp. 307–310). The homeland is a characteristic setting, a landscape determined by the peculiarities of the soil and the climate, the outlines of the mountains and the course of the rivers, inhabited by specific fauna and flora (GW 10, p. 253; GW 6, pp. 47–48).

He lives nature as sensitive, which he experiences in the profusion of sensations, which are neither affections nor obscure impressions, nor sensory material intended primarily for knowledge. Sensation is provided with consistency, it is an essential union, alliance and ontological copula, it is the being united to the being. Stronger than intuition, which perceives at a distance, sensation links the sentient and the sensitive in a single act:

> Only to the beings that I see and feel, or to those others that although I do not see or feel are nevertheless visible and sensitive in themselves, or to any other sensitive beings, I owe my existence, the fact that without senses I sink into nothing (GW 6, p. 106).

If sensibility—already understood by Feuerbach as an inter-sensorial inclusiveness of hearing and sight, taste, smell and touch—is characterized by the movement of opening to the world (coming out of oneself and having the foundation out of itself),

the reverse is equally true. The world also enters in us, and not only through the sensory channels, but through the whole body, a "porous self" that allows itself to be impregnated with the world (GW 9, p. 151). The sensitive body encounters singular beings, but also the fundamental elements that surround it and everything encompass—the air and the light—and other fundamental elements, like water and land, omnipresent sensitive, but also biotypes, i.e. physical and biological constituents, chemical and organic nutrients, equipped with special virtues, to which he owes physical health as well as inner well-being. The same air that acts upon the lungs, tones and eases the thinking function. Water is praised for its purifying function and invigorating power, be it physical or spiritual. As for light in the condition of universal being—seeing is the sensation of light; and that same light that makes me see other (GW 11, pp. 180–181). Nature is lived as an original bond, in the multiplicity of vital nexuses, sometimes typified by *breath* and *nutrition*, which preserve and renew existence at every instant, and by this reiteration prove the same unexpendable gesture of connection to being:

> I need air to breathe, water to drink, light to see, vegetable and animal substances to eat, but nothing, at least immediately, to think. A being who breathes, I cannot think it without air, a being that sees without light, but I can think the thinking being in isolation for itself (GW 9, p. 269).

In the always renewed movement of "ingestion" and "assimilation", nutrition shows a type of homogeneity between our human-being and the natural-beings; yet, this homogeneity is selective and not unrestricted, in the sense that we only assimilate what is similar to us, in order to once again in return transform the assimilated into new forms of expression. Through ingestion and assimilation, there is a natural world that is humanized, there takes place a kind of daily incarnation of nature (GW 11, p. 179). But it is due to the externalization that life gains expressiveness, refledged in new forms, according to the potentialities that the human being, the maximal expression of vital force, adds to its basic natural constitution (GW 10, pp. 138ss). The image of human existence as an immense system of exchanges and a continuous "circulation of life", sometimes used in a real sense, sometimes with a metaphoric intention, has a broad, almost systematic efficacy, which results from the interaction between Man and Nature and the continuity between the natural and the cultural.

"We live in nature, with nature, of nature"—the sentence alludes to the impossibility of cutting or suspending the vital flow, and to the idea of a joint destination: a common future or a common lack of experience: "because it is in nature that we see, that we labor and exist; it is that which encompasses man; to be retired, it is also his own existence that is suppressed; it is only thanks to it that man subsists, it is only from him that he depends in all his activity, in all his steps" (GW 6, p. 91). It is therefore without contradiction that Feuerbach can call himself "Naturalist oder Humanist" (GW 6, p. 257).

Necessity and Mastery: The Original Ambivalence

Seeming to establish itself on a profound balance, by recovering for its doctrine a classicist spirit to which it always revealed to be especially attracted, the last Feuerbachian philosophy is nevertheless disturbed by a new element, which marks it with signs of an intense paradox that is absent from previous writings. The discovery of this element is parallel to Feuerbach's incursion through cultural anthropology, when he meditates on the historical genesis of religious formations and seeks to establish their interrelationship starting from natural religions, archaic forms of times and peoples whose insertion in the geographic environment was very narrow, allowing to capture, in their primitiveness, defining traits of an original state. This analysis highlights the fact that man, although being of a natural being, does not inhabit nature harmoniously, but tends *by his constitution* to rival with it. There is even an antagonism that, to the detriment of contact with natural beings, not only leads him to prioritize relationships with the other human in whom a similar is easily recognized, but above all to claim for himself a status of superiority.

The primitive, or the "physical man", whose existence takes place in close cohabitation with the surrounding environment, entirely dependent on the resources of the land, subject to tempests, to attacks by beasts and to the violence of the elements, with rudimentary means of protection at his disposal, he feels the extreme fragility of his vital situation: "the primitive is a stranger in nature" (WR I, p. 238). If he can sometimes feel close to coexistence, when it is prodigal and provides profuse resources, it tends to put the accent on the unpredictable variability that brings him to a situation of expectation, insecurity and discomfort. He considers nature as a strange and distant being, a distance reinforced by muteness and silence, an indifference which does not respond to human questions and requests and does not accommodate subserviently to our wishes and demands.

Starting from primitive religious forms to philosophical anthropology, Feuerbach theorizes—by returning to the Hegelian theme of the master and the servant—the relation of ambivalence as the original way of being. Man is rooted in nature, but in a relationship that is far from peaceful. Man and Nature oscillate in the permanent tension between dominion and serfdom, on the basis of which there is not a theoretical attitude of disinterested admiration, but rather the basic mechanism of survival, the necessity or lack (*Bedürfnis*), a kind of structural fault (*Not*) that precedes any satisfaction.

Because he needs the products of nature, man depends on it, a dependency that makes of him a servant, and of nature, a master. By enjoying nature, disposing of its goods, nature becomes the servant and man, the master. The image of this duplicity, not entirely conscious and assumed, is enriched with the duplicity that balances between two types of uneven position:

> To this tree here I owe my existence; if it did not exist, I could not exist; it gives me food, clothing, shelter; it imposes itself on me at the same time for its majestic grandeur and for the magnificence and unfathomable of her peculiar vegetable being. [...] As I need her, I am a servant; while I enjoy it, I am a lord; in necessity, I lower myself, in fruition I put myself

> above the object; there I experience it as a being that exists by itself, independently of me; here as a being that exists for me (WR I, p. 224).

The always imminent and never resolved rivalry is reflected in the duality of feelings, taking place in the contrast between the *humbleness* (of deprivation) and the *pride* (of fruition). These feelings are internalized as psychological mechanisms, within a conflict of conscience, divided between the inevitable practical use that necessity requires and the conscience, even if latent, that accompanies the practiced act. In other terms: between the *frivolity* or lightness with which he uses nature to its advantage and the theoretical weight that accompanies the action practiced as an act of wrong doing, an *outrage* to a sensitive being lacking any defense:

> And frivolity or, at least, the irreverence of fruition is a practical necessity for man, a need on which his existence is based – a need that is nevertheless found in direct contradiction with his theoretical respect for nature, understood in the human sense as a living, selfish, sensitive being, who, as much as man, is not willing to drop anything, nor let be taken away (GW 10, pp. 32–33).

The anthropological structure of dominance and servitude is more deeply rooted in the sphere of moral conscience that accompanies this way of being and of using. Not being innocent, the acting duplicates itself in a moral contradiction of *pacification* and *remorse*. Since the act performed contradicts respect, and even veneration for the object, the awareness of evil requires that the pain committed be repaired by means of self-inflicted pain.

In natural, animistic religions, the elimination of the sense of guilt is achieved via gratitude ritually translated into sacrifices or offerings to the divinized forces and natural beings, restoring some power to them in exchange for the good that was taken from them. As civilization progresses, when basic dependence, the fear of the elements or physical insecurity is less felt, the elimination of the sense of guilt tends to be almost total. It is now achieved not by means of the naivety of the offering or of the sacrifice to the deities, but in the most extreme act of appropriation: in transforming into my power what the power of the object is—"to make dependent on me what I am dependent on" (WR I, p. 242).

Man finally proclaims himself as the master of nature, whose power allows him to erase his mysteries, annul his autonomy and dignity, considering it not only as a means of subsistance and a useful thing, but as something that he can transform of his own will (WR I, p. 284). Now anthropocentrism is not to be confused with a simple error of vision or misguided knowledge that could be corrected by the exercise of self-critical reason or by the discipline of culture; neither does it indicate the contrast between human types, attitudes or living styles, such as the contrast between aesthetic contemplation and utilitarian use.

It is a constitutive condition of a profound disposition, which, once understood in its dynamics, must be strongly repressed in its manifestations. What best characterizes human pride in its relationship with nature is also not the figure at the center, but the figure at the *top*, the tendency to put oneself at its highest point, assuming the status of a superior being. The tendency towards self-promotion and the establishment of superiority define, in what concerns man, a moral and even political position,

as vindication of power and exercise of a domain. “The man now places himself at the top of the world as his alpha and omega” (WR I, p. 278).

The natural order was almost definitively inverted, but there is still and always a residue of a nature that cannot be canceled, leading man to an increasing desire of dominance. The most diverse cultural and civilizational, religious and philosophical forms now fall under this category of domination, which in turn can be reconducted to some fundamental modalities.

One is the way in which the religions of subjectivity, or theism, are performed in the figure of a God who creates nature so that man can reign over other creatures. Another is the attempt to transform this non-human that resists us into a quasi-human, by instilling subjectivity, conscience, personality, in order to indirectly justify a prominent place for man, which appears in a subtle way in the objective teleology of mankind as the end of nature. Another, on the contrary, takes away nature’s life, its ability to enjoy and feel, making it a thing that is his own work and his product; it starts deliberately by mechanizing and materializing nature, in order to impose once again, without resistance, his intellectual schemes and categories or the whims of his will.

History is the display, renewed and gradually intensified of this confrontation, of the tendency to shape and overdo nature, converted into a gesture of dominance. Hence, this radical anthropocentrism, both theoretical and practical, has to be corrected; this complex structure of rivalry, if it cannot be entirely overcome, must be strongly disciplined. Now, anthropology and ethics do not coincide, since a natural disposition does not necessarily lead to a fair behavior:

> Everything that exists is authorized to exist, it has just as much right to exist as I do; by depriving a tree of its fruits, by cutting it down, I commit an outrage on it (WR I, p. 234).

The Animals, Partners in an Equal Community

Feuerbach stands out as a dissenting voice within a long tradition of philosophy that addressed the issue of animality from the point of view of the humanity of the human, therefore, within a non-absolute purpose, instead, a comparative one. This comparison allowed to locate the status of the human and to determine its essence, namely, when the specific difference was raised to a criterion strong enough to institute a dualism between both parts. On the contrary, in *Principles of the Philosophyof the Future*, the difference between man and animal is reinstated not via the lack of the faculty to think and to speak, but via different modes and gradations of the common sensitive element:

> Man is in no way distinguished from the animal just by thinking. On the contrary, his total being is his difference from the animal. It is true that whoever does not think is not a man, not because thinking is the cause, but only because it is a necessary consequence and property of human essence (GW 9, pp. 335–336).

And the text goes on, pinpointing the mode of differentiation: in one case, a wide and capable sensibility capable of universality, in the other, a refined but restricted

sensibility. Feuerbach's procedure is neither one of exclusion (installing an insurmountable cleavage, for example, between rational and irrational, or between reason and instinct), nor one of indistinction (humanizing the animal or animalizing the human), but instead one of *inclusion*.

The general principle that governs the sensitive is applied to the comparison between animal and man: neither the absolute equality (or abstract formality), nor the entire difference, but a conjunction of similarity and particularity, which Feuerbach calls kinship or affinity (*Verwandschaft*) (GW 9, p. 272). As sensible beings, beings are determined according to affinity, which preserves the differentiating element of their respective distinctive qualities, thus making them "relatives", within the recognition that establishes an ontologically communitarian conception, which is ethically egalitarian or fraternal.

Feuerbach does not attempt to follow the easiest means to valuate animals, that is, the hypothesis of the animal machine or the reduction to instinctive behaviors, which would be to anthropomorphize animals by the attribution of human operations. Hence, Feuerbach refuses to see them according to the model of human characteristics, i.e. as a potential or incomplete man, unveiling traces of thought, language ability, culture, the manufacture of instruments or artistic sense, forcing them to get closer to our image. Also on this line, the principle that natural manifestations must be understood by themselves remains firm, according to a non-projective analogy.

In the enumeration, without systematic intention, of the attributes of animal sensibility, Feuerbach points out a broad spectrum.

The first set of attributes is referred to, in the Introduction to *Das Wesen des Christentums*, as "consciousnes in the broad sense", including the feeling of self, as perception and capacity of sensitive differentiation (GW 5, p. 28). Subsequently, Feuerbach comes to recognize characteristic traits of affective, and even moral, sensitivity. Animals and humans are united in their ability to feel and to suffer, which constitute the expression of life, because they have the faculty to be affected, be it positive as joy and well-being, or negative as suffering and pain. Animals and humans are also united in the inter-subjective trend of the sexual impulse, including the tendency to feel and put in practice a zealous love towards the partners in the species, such as it is manifest in their care for their offspring (GW 5, pp. 178–179).

One counts as unexpected, the attention Feuerbach pays to the signs of an inner life, such as preferences and choices, and to moods, psychological or moral struggles, awareness of actions, as his biographer Karl Grün confirms in a separate section of some of Feuerbach's late aphorisms (Grün 1874, pp. 331–332).

As for the position in relation to animals, we can trace a coherent series of passages, which demonstrate well the demand for an ethical posture extended to non-human sentients, dignified as subjects, holding the capacity to feel. In general, Feuerbach denounces the negative reactions from the indifference to death, considered by animals as a natural event, in contrast to the dramatics, associated to human death, to the rawness in its treatment and its opposite use for human vanity (GW 10, pp. 309 ss.) Unequivocal is the complaint of experimentation and vivisection, a correlate of the mechanism that persists in analytical science, which becomes the

target of profound criticism since it objectifies and destroys the identity of individuals by going on to dismember them, thus breaking the vital unity.

Along with the condemnation of violence and mistreatment, Feuerbach claims, from a juridical point of view, for the institution of an immanent right. There is a fully identified original right on the part of natural beings: the right to life, and to a full life, which they cannot, however, express or vindicate:

> Among us, we cleverly and selfishly forbid crime and theft, but in relation to other beings, in relation to nature, we are all witches and thieves. Whoever grants me the right to the hare? The fox and the vulture are as hungry and entitled to exist as I. Who gives me the right to the pear? It belongs equally to the ant, the lizard, the bird, to the quadruple (GW 6, p. 356).

Man is responsible for the right of every one to life, the supreme value, and is the delegate of the will to live of all other beings. The former became the holder of a law that governs them, but that the latter neither know nor can claim; this law is precisely the most unconditional juridical and moral law: the interdiction to kill, not only the complex animals, but also those that, despite being tiny, insignificant, disquieting, man does not engage into an immediate affective relationship:

> When I crush a flea, because it stung me, I thus refuse the necessity of its existence; I remove it from the organic connection with itself and the rest of the world; I retain only the sting, just as the jurist or the moralist judges the man who steals only the theft, this stuck in the heart of self-love and love of property. In short: the flea bites, but it shouldn't bite, at least for me. The bite of the flea is a crime of injury to the human impulse towards happiness, but the flea cannot bite if it does not exist, therefore, it must not exist; therefore, it must die (GW 11, p. 96).

This law decentralizes while at the same time bringing man to the center; man is put outside the world, and then again in himself, in the place of universal advocate. By understanding that one must waive an exclusive right taken by usurpation, to which man is not entitled, to waive free death is then to compensate for a previously contracted debt, for a previously committed outrage (GW 6, p. 356). The explicit use of the concept of law, extended to non-human beings, exceeds the legal understanding of law as a report of duty and anticipates Henry Salt's (1892) egalitarian manifesto *Animal's RightsConsidered in Relation to Social Progress* considered one of the founders of the animal rights movement.

From Morality to Ethics: Man as the You of Nature

Once it has become evident that the Feuerbachian conception of morality is not restricted to the internal sphere of the relations between humans, the objective aspect of the *moralityof nature* is now equally justified, that is, the recognition of the inherent value of all natural beings. It is now necessary to specify how this extension to the extra human order also amounts to *an ethics of nature*, or more strictly, *an ethicsto nature*, since for Feuerbach morality and ethics do not coincide. In its entirety, nature already offers a moral paradigm with a political and legal matrix when it is

conceived as a *republic*, according to the determinations of universality and of equal status, of horizontal coexistence, dispossessed of hierarchies and privileges, and of the reciprocal action between all beings:

> Nature has neither a beginning nor a final term. In it everything is in reciprocal action; everything is relative, everything is at the same time effect and cause; it is all omnilateral and reciprocal; it does not converge to any monarchic point; it is a republic (GW 6, p. 115).

The community model of morality frames the ethical perspective as the principle of maximum generalization, but this model is unable to explain it fully, since ethics concerns the action of a concrete and positioned singular individual, therefore, being in direct relation with another equally positioned singular individual. Combining the two fundamental aspects of his thinking—the philosophy of sensibility, in its tendency to plenitude, and the philosophy of intersubjectivity, as a movement towards the other—Feuerbach subordinates ethical action to the principle of joint realization of "my good and the good of the other", or the principle of bilateral and omnilateral happiness (GW 11, p. 73).

Expanding the ethical idea that sustains concrete living, it is also necessary to consider nature as a You, and to do the good to that You, envisaging nature with an attitude of reciprocity and parity similar to the relationship that connects man to the other man. This positive and expansive relationship, since all beings of nature are involved, is given back by them and reverts to man. When man treats nature as a You, in turn, nature converts man into a friend, a You:

> But what counts for man vis-à-vis man is also valid for him vis-à-vis nature. He is not only the I, but also the You of nature (GW 20, p. 311).

The differentiation between morals and ethics allows for two complementary orientations to cross over one another without contradiction: on the one hand, the defense of inherent value, that is, the objective position of universal intrinsic rights; on the other, the call for a subjective attitude, which can manifest itself via altruistic feelings (sympathy and compassion, respect, care and love) or as action that effectively operates to do the good and to avoid or minimize evil.If the feeling of altruism already reveals some minimal ethics, it is only in the action that ethics is actualized: ethics is action that wants to do good. The ethical subject thus becomes entirely responsible for his action, which involves the other and intervenes in his sphere, bringing benefits or harms.

Feuerbach defends a position of parity, distant from the one-sidedness of a type of naturalism indifferent to man and from a type of humanism indifferent to nature, as it is exemplified in his *Lectures on the Essence of Religion* about the land and its products. On the one hand, the imperative *sentence*: "I order you to give me a good harvest", exemplifies the violence of the will that imposes human measure. On the other hand, the useless *plea* that he begs: "please, give me a good harvest", exemplifies the attitude of non-acting and of resigning from intervention (GW 6, p. 356).

According to this, we have neither the authorization to exercise unlimited domination, nor the disqualification that removes man from his post and restricts his ability

to intervene. Feuerbach's balanced position gives man the one quality of being the *composer* of the world: "Mozart, there is only one. This Mozart of nature, at least on Earth, is man." (GW 19, p. 40). The composer does not dominate, rework, shape and affect; he is the author of original productions, but not a creator; he does not destroy or alter immanent productivity; he beautifies and humanizes.

Humans are therefore authorized to dispose of the potentialities provided by nature and to have their benefit, as long as they take them as a good in themselves, under the light of benevolence and benefit, not of utility and profit. Made of the inseparable connection between a Humanism that contains nature and a Naturalism that contains man, there arises the new paradigm of a friendly collaboration, close to "sustainable development", and far from any ecological radicalism.

Sometimes a certain variance between the descriptive and the prospective plan may be found in these texts. Halfway between what is and what can and should be. But here, in the case of ethics towards nature, there prevails with any doubt the perspective of the future, of the project.

Man is a son of nature, who will always be the source of life, the Mother. However, Feuerbach stresses that the relationship with the Mother will have to be achieved in an adult way:

> The true culture and the true duty of man is to accept and treat things as they are, not to make them more or less than they are. [...] Our duty is to avoid extremes […] and consider, treat and resent nature as it is – like our mother. [...] just as we don't need to be lost [...] only at the level of the child in the relationship with our human mother, must we also face nature not with the eyes of children, but with the eyes of the adult, of the self-conscious man (GW 6, pp. 46–47).

It is irrelevant whether Feuerbach was unaware of the scientific concepts of environment or ecosystem or distant from the already emerging movements in the defense of animal rights. It is enough to note that his philosophy contemplates the denunciation of anthropocentrism and that his ethics is also the refusal of a special place, of privilege, of the human being, i.e. the contestation of man's tendency to place himself at the top of the world as elected being, by origin or by alleged merit claimed as a right.

Transforming nature into a home could synthesize the spirit of the Feuerbach's ethics of nature, a project that, unfortunately, the posterior course of civilization would not confirm:

> It is only the man who, thanks to his ordering and training, imprints the imprint of conscience and understanding; it was only he who, little by little, in the course of time, transformed Earth into a rational home (*Wohnung*), adapted to man, and one day he will transform it into an even more human home, even more rational than it is now (GW 6, pp. 193–194).

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