

## Sharing the Flesh of the World Merleau-Ponty and the Problem of Animal Minds

That my dog is ever “happy” when I arrive home or “sad” when I leave, that he is ever “afraid” to go to the vet, that he ever “wants” me to throw his ball: these, it is often said, are only so many sentimental delusions or anthropomorphic “projections”: I *represent* my dog to myself in my own image; I *transfer* my own emotions to my dog so that they might be reciprocated, but what my dog really “thinks” and “feels” I can never “know” because I can never leap inside his head or his flesh to find out. We therefore confront the following two alternatives: either my dog has no real “interiority” – no real “thoughts”, emotions, or intentions – or his interiority is so “interior” or so alien, so far removed from the horizons of “human” intelligibility that it is absolutely inaccessible to me, and anything that I might say about it would be wild fantasy or untethered speculation. But I think that if “knowledge” means anything anymore, then we *know* that this is not the case, that these two alternatives are neither sound nor exhaustive. We have at least moved beyond Descartes’ view that all non-human animals are insensate automata, but (as I will argue in this paper) we have not moved much farther, and thus we have not moved far enough.

I believe that Merleau-Ponty offers us a way forward, a way to go farther; I believe that Merleau-Ponty’s ontology puts us “back in touch” not just with conspecific (human) others but with *other* (non-human) *others* as well. Merleau-Ponty shows us that originary intersubjective field of projects and possibilities – that shared world, or that shared overlapping of worlds - with which we are always already “in touch” but with which we are also, paradoxically, out of touch. For Merleau-Ponty, we are *always already* involved with others: to be in the world is always already to be entangled with other “minds” or with what we must come to understand as other living, behaving bodies, other *corporeal schemata*; and these other living bodies amidst which I exist – these other sentient-sensible

beings at work in the world, these other exploratory and expressive motor-intentional projects, these other styles of being-in-the-world that diverge from but that also implicate and fold into my own – are not only those of other human beings but of *non-human* beings as well. As I hope to show in this paper, our “knowledge” of non-human (“animal”) others – that is to say, our knowledge of non-human animals *as* others (*not* as machines or “brutes” on the other side of a cognitive-ontological chasm) - is as basic and pervasive as our “knowledge” of other people; countless instances of human-animal interactions attest to this fact, but we are often encouraged to think otherwise.

In what follows, I will argue that Merleau-Ponty’s account of our lived relations with (human) others also embraces and illuminates our lived relations with *other* (non-human) others, that Merleau-Ponty’s solution to the traditional “problem of other minds” is also a solution to what is perhaps the last vestige of Cartesianism: the “problem of *animal* minds” (or the “*other-species-of-mind* problem”). I believe that if the classical problem of other minds is one of the great “scandals” of philosophy (and indeed it is), then so too is the problem of “animal” minds. It is true that the problem of animal minds seems to be far more intractable (and far less counterintuitive) than the old problem of other minds on account of the many apparent deep differences between human beings and many non-human animals. For the purposes of this paper I will not challenge most these alleged differences. However, I maintain (following Merleau-Ponty) that such differences never justify the kinds of skepticism for which they are often employed, and that if the problem of other minds is “scandalous” then the problem of other *animal* minds is *a fortiori* scandalous as well. The “problem of other minds” and the “problem of animal minds” implicate one another, and Merleau-Ponty offers a decisive solution to both.

In brief, the problem of other minds arises from and poses the following question: How do I know that other minds like my own – that is to say, other sentient agents, other

self-cognizant, thinking and feeling subjects - exist? How do I know that there really are other minds in the world besides my own? Merleau-Ponty summarizes this problem as follows:

...How can the word 'I' be put into the plural, how can a general idea of the *I* be formed, how can I speak of an *I* other than my own, how can I know that there are other *I*'s, how can consciousness which, by its nature, and as self-knowledge, is in the mode of the *I*, be grasped in the mode of the Thou...?<sup>1</sup>

To start, the problem of other minds effaces itself as soon as it is raised. The implicit *conditio sine qua non* of the problem is the notion that consciousness is totally *insular*, *transparent self-presence*. This means that only 'I' can live through my experiences and that I can never live through the experiences of another. Thus, I perceive other moving bodies in the world, but how (as Descartes wonders in the *Meditations*) can I know that these bodies are "inhabited" by other *consciousnesses* and are not just complex automata (or "zombies")? How can I really know that "you" are "conscious" if I cannot leap inside your "head" to find out? The problem of other minds can only arise if we assume that this idea of consciousness is true, but if this idea of consciousness is true then the problem contradicts itself as soon as it is posed: If consciousness is truly *private*, then how can I have a notion of *other* consciousnesses (*qua other*) such that I can imagine and verbalize the problem in the first place? If we admit that consciousness is *not* totally closed in on itself, then we give up the premise from which the problem of other minds emerges; but if consciousness *is* always closed in on itself, then the problem of "other" minds *still* cannot really emerge, for this premise entails that one cannot have any notion of the existence of any mind other than one's own: the problem of "other minds" would then really have to be the problem of other "me's" or of other "myselfes", which is absurd. Thus, either I cannot and do not have a conception of consciousnesses other than my own, in which case the problem of other minds could never occur to me, or I do have experiences of others, in which case the only

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<sup>1</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, Routledge, 1962, p. 348

“problem” is to explicate the character of these experiences and how they are possible; and it is this latter task that Merleau-Ponty takes up in many of his works.

As I have just discussed, the problem of other minds presupposes what I call the “*privacy of perception*” thesis: the thesis that experience is a private spectacle arrayed before the gaze of an atomic, self-transparent consciousness; this is the idea that subjectivity is only given in the *first-person singular*, that subjectivity is the total and inalienable “possession” of a monadic subject. This idea of conscious life renders the conscious lives of others (if indeed we can say that there *are* others) forever out of reach, and it is one that Merleau-Ponty vehemently rejects. In short, if we reject any kind of dualism – that is, if we truly accept that consciousness is *embodied* through and through – then consciousness ceases to be trapped in what Daniel Dennett terms the “Cartesian theatre”; experience is no longer the private spectacle of a sovereign, transcendental ego; this “ego” is now an *incarnate* subject – a *living* body - always already *outside itself* in the world and amidst others, and living experience is always “*in the flesh*”. But to say that consciousness is “in” the flesh is not to say that it is “behind” or “within” it like a pilot in a ship; consciousness, rather, is “in” the flesh in the way that an expression is “in” a face. Consciousness *suffuses* the body; indeed, it is the very *physiognomy* of the living body. Thus, we begin to see the “solution” to the problem of other minds once we abandon the idea that consciousness is something *hidden behind* the movements and gestures of the body and learn to see these movements and gestures as *immediate* (not intermediary) *expressions* of conscious life:

...The problem comes close to being solved only on the condition that certain classical prejudices are renounced. We must abandon the fundamental prejudice according to which the psyche is that which is accessible only to myself and cannot be seen from outside. My “psyche” is not a series of “states of consciousness” that are rigorously closed in on themselves and inaccessible to anyone but me. My consciousness is turned primarily toward the world, turned toward things; it is above all a relation to the world. The other’s consciousness as well is chiefly a certain way of comporting himself toward the world.

Thus it is in his conduct, in the manner in which the other deals with the world, that I will be able to discover his consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

Subjectivity, then, is not the possession of a pure, executive subject but the *enactment* of a *living body*, and this living body is primarily what Merleau-Ponty calls a “*postural*” or “*corporeal schema*”. This is to say that the living body is a *style of comportment*; it is the *power to behave*, the *power to cope* with the world in which it finds itself; it is what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the “*I can*” that precedes any “*I think*.”<sup>3</sup> This means that incarnate consciousness is first of all not *positing* (thematic, object-directed) consciousness. The living body spins out what Merleau-Ponty calls “*intentional threads*”: *motor projects* that mark things in the world in relation my body - its needs, desires, and capacities - before these things become objects for analysis and reflection. My body takes up a posture toward the world (and toward others) prior to reflection on the world. The living, conscious body, then, is an expressive, meaning-full style of existence. In short, for Merleau-Ponty, being-in-the-world is always being-*at-grips-with-the-world*. Behavior - living, intentional movement - does not conceal or signify a homuncular mover “behind” or “within” it; but neither is it a mere ensemble of innate and conditioned nervous reflexes. Just as every face bears an irreducible expression, so too does behavior bear a certain kind of physiognomy. Consciousness *pervades* every gesture; it is the pulse and respiration, the very systole and diastole of animate existence, the momentum of embodied being-in-the-world.

Thus, we see that if consciousness is truly embodied, it is in and through the conduct of the living body that we meet it, and our “knowledge” of other “consciousnesses” is no longer a mystery:

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<sup>2</sup> “The Child’s Relations with Others”, trans. William Cobb, published in *The Primacy of Perception*, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 116-117

<sup>3</sup> See *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 137

If I experience this inhering of my consciousness in its body and in its world, the perception of other people and the plurality of consciousnesses no longer present any difficulty. If, for myself who am reflecting on perception, the perceiving subject appears provided with a primordial setting in relation to the world, drawing in its train that bodily thing in the absence of which there would be no other things for it, then why should other bodies which I perceive not be similarly inhabited by consciousnesses? If my consciousness has a body, why should other bodies not 'have' consciousnesses?<sup>4</sup>

Now, a quick reading of this passage might suggest that Merleau-Ponty offers an argument from *analogy*: I analogize from the embodiment of my own consciousness to the consciousnesses of other animate bodies. What Merleau-Ponty has in mind here, however, is nothing of the sort; indeed Merleau-Ponty rightly rejects all such arguments from analogy. In order to analogically infer the consciousness of another I must tacitly presuppose that which *ex hypothesi* I am only able to realize after I have drawn the inference; in other words, an act of analogical judgment can only be occasioned by a perception of behavior that precedes it. Thus, in order to analogically infer the consciousness of another body I must first perceive this body as conscious, but this prior perception renders the analogy circular and redundant. Thus, Merleau-Ponty clarifies his point as follows:

There is nothing here resembling 'reasoning by analogy' ...The other consciousness can be deduced only if the emotional expressions of others are compared and identified with mine, and precise correlations recognized between my physical behavior and my 'psychic events'. Now *the perceptions of others is anterior to, and the condition of, such observations, the observations do not constitute the perception.*<sup>5</sup>

Thus, to encounter the consciousness of an-other is not to find it at the end of a cognitive judgment; one perceives others *immediately* (pre-reflectively) in their bodily bearing in the world. Consciousness bursts forth through the conduct of a living, behaving body. Others can only be encountered *in the flesh*, and it is because I am flesh that others are always already present to me; sentient-sensible others are always already intermingled with my flesh and its vital intentions.

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 351

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 352, emphasis mine.

We now see Merleau-Ponty's full account of intersubjectivity. For Merleau-Ponty, intersubjectivity is primarily *intercorporeity*; it is what he sometimes calls a kind of "coition." This means that intersubjectivity happens through the *transference* or pre-reflective "*coupling*" of motor projects and corporeal schemata, the synergistic envelopment of bodily intentions. In other words, I immediately recognize the behaviors of others as possible activities and postures for my own body. I also often immediately *take up* the motor-intentional tasks of others, and vice versa. "This conduct which I am able only to see," Merleau-Ponty writes, "I live somehow at a distance. I make it mine...Reciprocally I know that the gestures I make myself can be the objects of another's intention."<sup>6</sup> This is to say that the gestures of another living body are immediately *meaningful* to me *as gestures*, as manners of dealing with the world, as motor-intentional projects polarized toward things and tasks that I might apprehend as well:

...I experience my own body as the power of adopting certain forms of behavior and a certain world, and I am given to myself merely as a certain hold upon the world; now, it is precisely my body which perceives the body of another, and discovers in that other body a miraculous prolongation of my own intentions, a familiar way of dealing with the world.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, to perceive a living, behaving body is to perceive a "prolongation" of my own bodily intentions and powers; it is to perceive *not* an "alter-ego" whose indubitable awareness of itself I can never breach or take up but an *alter-body* whose powers and intentions overlap and implicate (and sometimes even limit and motivate) my own. The motor-intentional "threads" of my body are interwoven with those of other living, coping bodies. "If I am a consciousness turned toward things", Merleau-Ponty writes, "I can meet in things the actions of another and find in them a meaning, because they are themes of possible activity for my own body."<sup>8</sup> Objects disclose not only other possible perspectives for *my* living body but possible perspectives for other living bodies as well. The object as a "theme" for

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<sup>6</sup> "The Child's Relations with Others", *The Primacy of Perception*, p. 118

<sup>7</sup> *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 353-354

<sup>8</sup> "The Child's Relations with Others", *The Primacy of Perception*, p. 117

possible perspectives or intentions of my own is where I immediately meet the perspectives and intentions of others. Every object is a nexus of meanings and relations where my motor projects and the motor projects of others are inextricably enmeshed, and this fact alone shows us that subjectivity is always already *intersubjectivity*, that corporeity is always already *intercorporeity*.

To perceive the conduct of a living body is not to perceive a mechanical object or a brute husk of extension, and neither is it to analogically infer the existence of a pure self-present ego on the hither side of it: it is to *bear witness* (pre-reflectively) to an-Other; it is to be dis-possessed or swept up by the conduct of another “self” at work in the world. I see “in” conduct neither the movements of a brute thing nor the executed thoughts of a bare ego but a *corporeal schema*, an incarnate *style of existence* and point of view on the world akin (but *not* equivalent or reducible) to my own. We know, for example, that seeing a human being stride across the street is very different from seeing the leaves of a tree rustle in the wind, that seeing a dog chase after a squirrel is very different from seeing a rock roll down a hill: Human beings, dogs and squirrels *behave*, but trees, leaves, and rocks do not. It is true that we all recognize a radical difference between, say, a living tiger and an animatronic model of a tiger, but this difference makes all the difference.

Merleau-Ponty shows us, then, that the “problem of other minds” is really the “problem of other living, behaving bodies”, but such a problem is, as it were, an oxymoron; to put the problem this way is to dissolve it. However, before I turn to apply Merleau-Ponty’s account of intersubjectivity to our knowledge of “animal minds”, I hasten to underscore the fact that Merleau-Ponty does not reject the distinction between interiority and exteriority but *complicates* it. First, for Merleau-Ponty interiority does not *reduce* to exteriority. This fact refutes the objection that Merleau-Ponty denies the “*what-it-is-like*” or *lived-through* dimension of experience. Merleau-Ponty does not deny that only “*I*” can live



through my pain or that I can never truly live through *your* pain. Thus, “the grief and the anger of another”, Merleau-Ponty writes, “never have quite the same significance for him as they have for me. For him these situations are lived through, for me they are displayed.”<sup>9</sup>

However, we have already seen that Merleau-Ponty *does* deny the claim that this lived-through dimension of conscious experience renders the consciousnesses of others radically inaccessible. Even in the most “private” aspects of my life I never cease to be “in touch” with other incarnate beings:

...Our glances are not “acts of consciousness”, each of which claims an invariable priority, but *openings of our flesh which are immediately filled by the universal flesh of the world*. All depends, in short, upon the fact that it is the lot of living bodies to close upon the world and become seeing, touching bodies which...are *a fortiori* perceptible to themselves. The whole enigma lies in the perceptible world, in that tele-vision which makes us *simultaneous with others and the world in the most private aspects of our life*.<sup>10</sup>

Though I cannot fully discuss Merleau-Ponty’s idea of “flesh”, it suffices to say here that the “flesh of the world” is the *intercorporeal tissue of Being*, and it is that in virtue of which interiority is never totally closed in on itself, never wholly “interior”. If interiority were wholly interior, then it would be impossible to bridge self and other; but we have learned that “interiority” is really a misnomer. It is true that interiority does not reduce to exteriority, but it does not follow that interiority and exteriority are *mutually exclusive*; interiority and exteriority are the warp and woof of Being, two aspects of the flesh of the world.

Now, I think that what we said so far about our experiences of *human* others is equally true of our experiences of *non-human* others. If animals *behave* in a variety of ways (however deeply different these ways may often be from our own and from one another), it is natural that we would relate to so many of them not as *things* but as *others*, as others with whom we sometimes exchange emotional experiences and intentional projects. Thus,

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<sup>9</sup> *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 356

<sup>10</sup> *Signs*, “Introduction”, trans. Richard C. McCleary, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 16, emphasis mine.

Merleau-Ponty says about animal conduct what he also says elsewhere about human conduct:

The gestures of behavior, the intentions which it traces in the space around the animal, are not directed to the true world or pure being, but to being-for-the-animal, that is, to a certain milieu characteristic of the species; they do not allow the showing through of a consciousness, that is, a being whose whole essence is to know, but rather a certain manner of treating the world, of "being-in-the-world" or of "existing."<sup>11</sup>

What Merleau-Ponty says here about "animals" is exactly what he says about human beings. If behavior is a *style of being-in-the-world*, then the behaviors of human beings and those of animals are all styles of being-in-the-world, styles that are often deeply divergent but never divorced from one another. The being of the human being and the beings of non-human beings are all *forms of conduct*, ways of coping with the world. Of course, exchanges of corporeal schemata may not be possible in all cases (e.g., I cannot use echolocation like a bat) but divergent styles of being-in-the-world (however deeply divergent they might be) nevertheless overlap and implicate one another in many ways (e.g., human beings and bats are both installed in "sonorous Being"), and exchanges with animals *do* happen. Besides exchanges of emotion and intentionality, there are countless instances of "pairing" between human and animal corporeal schemata; examples of such pairing are often instances of "imitation," where an animal will perform the gestures or the bearing of a human being in the same way that an infant (non-analogically) imitates the expressions of an adult: a transference of motor projects is possible across different forms of flesh. Embodied beings, then, are never "opposed" to one another; sentient-sensible beings are always in some ways "sensible" to one another, for they all belong to what Merleau-Ponty calls the "flesh of the world".

Thus, if (following Merleau-Ponty) we have rediscovered subjectivity in living behavior, then in order to deny subjectivity to animals we must also deny living behavior to them, but this is a bullet that I wager even the most stubborn skeptic would not bite. It

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<sup>11</sup> *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. A.L. Fisher, Beacon Press, 1963, p. 125-126

seems, however, that there is one last rearguard option available to the skeptic. Given the *prima facie* differences between humans and animals, one might say that “attributions” of complex emotions and intentions to animals are mere “anthropomorphic projections.” To say that an animal is anything more complex than an organism that can feel and react to pleasure and pain and act on immediate biological imperatives, so the skeptic argues, is to “anthropomorphize” the animal; it is to “project” into the behavior of the animal human faculties and characteristics. Such charges of “projection”, however, are not only usually *ad hoc* but are also incoherent. Charges of projection do not (and cannot) explain *how* such “projections” are possible (or *why* they happen in the first place). As Merleau-Ponty puts it:

Nothing would be served by saying that it is we, the spectators, who...project into the exterior the intentions of our thinking, since we would still have to discover what it is, what kind of phenomenon is involved upon which this *Einführung* rests, what is the sign that invites us to anthropomorphism.<sup>12</sup>

“Every theory of projection”, Merleau-Ponty later reiterates, “...presupposes what it tries to explain, since we could not project our feelings into the visible behavior of an animal if something in this behavior itself did not suggest the inference.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, if a skeptic alleges that an interpretation of a form of animal behavior is a kind of “projection”, we are right to pose the following question: what *occasioned* this projection in the first place? If the skeptic’s charge is not to be meaningless he or she must explain the possibility of “projection”, but the possibility of projection actually renders the skeptic’s position incoherent. A “projection” of human features into animal behavior (if it does not spring out one’s head *ex nihilo*) could only be occasioned by an experience that evokes the presence of these features in the first place, but then the “projection” is, indeed, no longer a “projection” at all and skepticism lapses either into circularity or an infinite regress. As Merleau-Ponty argues, charges of “projection” beg the question, for they necessarily presuppose the very experiences they are supposed to explain (or explain away). In other words, an experience

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<sup>12</sup>ibid., p. 125

<sup>13</sup> ibid., p. 156

of animal behavior is explained (or explained away) as an instance of anthropomorphic projection, but this anthropomorphic projection is itself only possible on the basis of an experience of behavior that “invites us to anthropomorphism”, an experience of a form of behavior that is *literally* ‘*anthropo-morphic*’ in certain of its aspects. Thus, the skeptic’s position is circular (and self-defeating) insofar as “projections” are only possible on the basis of those very kinds of experiences they are supposed to explain away.

Now, if we do not give up the skeptical thesis of “projection” – or if we try to rescue this thesis from circularity – then it will lapse into an *infinite regress*. I say that my dog is “sad”, and a skeptic says that this apparent sadness is a projection on my part. What, then, occasioned this projection of sadness on my part? As I have just discussed, this “projection” of sadness can only follow upon an experience of my dog that suggests “sadness,” but this experience that “suggests sadness” must *ex hypothesi* be another projection on my part, and *this* projection will have to follow from a prior experience that suggests *it*, and this prior experience will also have to be a projection, and so on *ad infinitum*. This infinite regress directs us to a primary experience that cannot be explained away as a “projection”, and it shows us what Merleau-Ponty argues time and again: living experience is the ultimate foundation of what we call truth and knowledge.

All of this is not to say, however, that we can never *misinterpret* animal behavior, that we can never *falsely* ascribe certain meanings – say, certain emotions or intentions - to the expressions and gestures of an animal. As we have seen, skepticism about other minds (whether human or otherwise) is implausible and incoherent for a number of reasons, but this does not mean that our interpretations of behavior can never be mistaken; all it means is that such mistaken interpretations are not mere “projections.” If every supposed “projection” follows upon a prior (indeed primary) lived experience that elicits it, then living experience is the bedrock ground of sound and mistaken interpretations of behavior

alike, and it is precisely this irreducible, anterior level of living experience to which Merleau-Ponty directs us.

We are always prone to error, but such is the lot of living experience. If the failure of skepticism does not imply the impossibility of error, neither does the possibility of error license skepticism. We can be (and often are) wrong about the interior and intentional lives of animals, but so too are we frequently wrong about the meanings of *human* behaviors: miscommunications between human beings – misperceptions of emotions, desires, motivations, beliefs and intentions – are endemic to human experience. As Merleau-Ponty argues, ambiguity is essential to living perception: so long as we are always already *outside ourselves* and *in the world*, we can never totally expunge or transcend perceptual ambiguity. Thus, if miscommunication between human beings is not solid ground for skepticism about knowledge of “human minds,” then neither is miscommunication between human beings and non-human animals a cause for skepticism about “other species of mind.” We are involved with *animal others* (which is to say, we are involved with animals *as others*) as deeply as we are involved with conspecific (human) others. Indeed, those cases in which we mistakenly impute emotions and intentions to animals only attest to how *profoundly intersubjective* living experience really is, to how deeply we are caught up with others in the skein and flow of life.

Now, we might offer a different reply to skepticism about “other species of mind”, one that I think is tempting to many contemporary philosophers and scientists. We might maintain that ascriptions of subjectivity to animals are justified as “*inferences to the best explanation*”, as the best explanatory accounts of various forms of behavior. This view is well represented by Colin Allen and Marc Bekoff in their book *Species of Mind*.<sup>14</sup> Allen and Bekoff argue that we are right to think that many animals have rich conscious-cognitive

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<sup>14</sup> Collin Allen and Marc Bekoff. *Species of Mind: The Philosophy and Biology of Cognitive Ethology*. The MIT Press, 1997.

lives, for attributions of certain “higher-order mental states” (e.g. emotional and intentional states) to animals are no different from other explanatory, scientific hypotheses or posits: they are justified as inferences to the best explanation of observed phenomena. Thus, Allen and Bekoff write that “...mental-state attributions, when justified, are justified by inference to the best explanation”<sup>15</sup>, and I would say that their view is one that is shared by many contemporary cognitive-behavioral researchers and philosophers of science.

However, I think that this view falls prey to the same problems we have just addressed. That is, this view actually concedes and reproduces the very premises of the kind of skepticism it is supposed to answer. On this view, our *knowledge* of “animal minds” - our access to the conscious lives of non-human others - is always only “*inferential*”, but we have already seen that this kind of view is deeply problematic. Indeed, this view is really just a version (or an inversion) of the skeptical “projection” thesis, and it falls prey to the same objection: “inferences to the best explanation” beg the question. In other words, Merleau-Ponty’s objection to skeptical charges of “projection” also holds against Allen and Bekoff’s view: if we have reason to ask the skeptic “what invites us to anthropomorphism?” then we also have reason to ask Allen and Bekoff “what invites us to infer intentionality?” One can only “infer” intentionality from apparently intentional behavior, and this means that one never *first* “infers” intentionality (or any other mental state) at all. An inference to intentionality can only follow from a prior experience that suggests intentionality. Thus, Allen and Bekoff’s view lapses into circularity because one must implicitly presuppose intentional behavior in order to draw an inference *to* intentional behavior. Indeed, “inferences to the best explanation” are really just rationally justified “projections.” Thus, Allen and Bekoff accept the skeptic’s basic idea of “projection” and only contend that certain “projections” are warranted. Moreover, this apparent solution to the “other species

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<sup>15</sup> *Species of Mind*, p. 56

of mind problem” presupposes the thesis that generates this very problem (as well as the classical problem of other minds) in the first place: the thesis of the *privacy* of consciousness. That is, the “inference to the best explanation” “solution” is only cogent if the conscious lives of others are “*private*”, for only if the conscious lives of others are private are they only accessible *inferentially*.

The failure of Allen and Bekoff’s supposed solution throws into relief what Merleau-Ponty has already shown us: we do not “know” other minds (human and non-human alike) *inferentially*; we are not acquainted with the conscious lives of others only indirectly after an *act of judgment*. The inferential stance of a scientist is only a later-order posture of detachment. We “know” others pre-reflectively through our living, behaving bodies; we know others through the *antepredicative* (pre-inferential) encroachment of our perceptual capacities and motor projects. Thus, intentionality, for example, is neither primarily nor exclusively something that we *ascribe to* behavior: “behavior” *as such* is always already, irreducibly intentional; to “behave” *is* to enact a style of being-in-the-world; it is to “*sing the world*” through a melody of gestures; it is to be polarized toward an originary and transcendent intersubjective field of tasks and possibilities. Knowledge of “other minds” – and knowledge of “*other* other minds” - is grounded in the pre-objective, “elemental” involution of corporeal schemata, in the primordial (pre-judicative) synergy of “self-others-things”. “Other minds” are encountered “in” (not behind) the flesh.

In closing, I hope to have shown that Merleau-Ponty offers us the most compelling account of our experiences with human and non-human others, an account that honors rather than distorts, that foregrounds rather suppresses what we live. Merleau-Ponty shows us that to be in the world is to be open to others and to things beyond oneself, to exist amidst an irreducible, proliferate multiplicity of others; it is to transcend oneself toward an intersubjective world that conditions and outstrips one’s existence and horizons

of possibilities: a world of which one is neither the sole inhabitant nor the sole constituent, a world that is shared. Merleau-Ponty helps us rediscover the *world in which* – and those *others with whom* – we are always already involved but from which we are often so deeply – and so dangerously – estranged. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology helps us dwell in the world more *responsively* – which is to say, more *responsibly* – with each other and with *'other others'*.