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Vinciane Despret

Can the Prophecies be Trusted?

For Thelma Rowell

> The relations between humans and animals *must* change. They *must*, both in the sense of an "ontological" necessity and of an "ethical" duty. I place these words in quotation marks because this change will have to affect the very sense and value of these concepts (the ontological and the ethical).[1]
>
> —Jacques Derrida

A monkey, attached to a pole in the open air, was in the habit of perching on top of it. But every time he was brought his plate of food, the crows flying around were eager to come and steal it. The scene was repeated every day; and each day the poor monkey had no other choice but to give in to an incessant back and forth from the summit to the ground, whenever a shameless crow approached his pittance. As soon as the monkey approached, the impudent birds flew off and landed a few metres away. If the monkey went up, the crows came back. One day, the monkey showed signs of an overpowering illness. In a most miserable state of dejection, he could barely hold on to the pole. The crows, as usual, turned up to take their share of the meal with impunity. In bad shape, the monkey let himself sink from the

Translated with permission from chapter 4 of Vinciane Despret, *Quand le loup habitera avec l'agneau* (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond/Le Seuil, 2002).

[1] Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow … A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 64.

pole with great difficulty. He finally dropped to the ground, and remained there, immobile, visibly in agony. Reassured, the crows grew bolder, and quietly returned to finish their daily misdeed. Suddenly, the monkey seemed to miraculously recover all his strength; in an instant he leapt, was upon one of the crows, caught it, pinned it between its knees, vigorously plucked it and threw his victim into the air, as desensed as it was deplumed. The result lived up to his gesture; no crows ventured any longer around his plate.[2]

While he was locked in his cage, the Paris zoo orangutan took advantage of his keepers' absence to bring to the door a first stool that would allow him to reach the lock. When it was removed, he brought a second stool and escaped.[3]

I have heard tell, Thompson continues, that a monkey at a table with a plate of nuts on it had the idea of pulling on the tablecloth to make them come to him. He took them into a corner of the garden where he broke them open with stones.

An orangutan who had stolen an orange, while his keeper pretended to sleep to spy on him, hid the peel to erase the traces of his misdeed. On the other hand, Thompson says, Cuvier recounted that a bound monkey had attentively observed how his keeper tied him up, following the tiniest operations in order to detach himself in the absence of the keeper—which he did as soon as the opportunity was given.[4]

If their ability to organise themselves socially is made difficult by their lack of language, Thompson explains, monkeys and apes nevertheless exhibit amazing skills. Lieutenant Shipp, from whom a baboon troop had stolen some clothes left in a barracks, decided to mount an expedition to retrieve them. He went to the entrance of the cave where the baboons sheltered, accompanied by twenty of his men. One can find the misadventure recorded in the Lieutenant's memoirs:

> They observed my movements, and detaching about fifty to guard the entrance, the others kept their post. We could see them collecting large stones and other missiles. One old grey-headed one, who had often paid us a visit at our barracks, was seen distributing his orders as if a general. We rushed on to the

[2] Edward Pett Thompson, *The Passions of Animals* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1851), 355–57.

[3] Ibid., 15.

[4] Ibid., 71.

> attack, when, on a scream from him, they rolled down enormous stones upon us, so that we were forced to give up the contest.[5]

This adventure, according to Thompson, is not at all surprising: we know that when baboons plunder our gardens, they do it under the guard of certain members of the group who take care to avoid any unpleasant surprises for their fellows. The least that can be said is that they have a keen sense of cooperation.

Have you noticed how much these monkeys and apes staged by Thompson—some of whom we have already encountered in Darwin and Kropotkin[6]—these mischievous vigilantes, tool users, strategic warriors, unrepentant liars, and kings of evasion, how much they resemble us? The choice of stories that Thompson tells us here is no accident: first these monkeys show abilities that we have long thought to be exclusively our own. Not only is their intelligence astounding and their sense of cooperation edifying, but they seem also to share the same emotions as us. Examples abound: monkeys can thus experience joy and, when tickled, it is not rare to see them laugh. Admittedly, it is harder to perceive this emotion, because their faces express less than ours. The orangutan, generally, "performs its antics with the gravity of a philosopher."[7] Like us, they can feel astonishment: before her reflection in a mirror, a monkey is surprised and searches for the figure represented there.[8]

Not only are these monkeys and apes endowed with qualities similar to ours; Thompson will further seek out the moments when this resemblance is amplified. He recounts that when the astronomers Condamine and Bouger were sent to the mountains of Peru to perform certain measurements, some large monkeys were admitted into their work room while they made their observations. It was a surprise, they say, to see how the monkeys imitated the astronomers, planting signals, running from the pendulum to the table as if they were going to write down notes. They were sometimes seen pointing the telescope at the sky, as if they too were observing the stars and planets.[9] There is nothing surprising here, says Thompson, monkeys and apes

[5] Ibid., 311, quoting Shipp.

[6] [In the previous two chapters of *Quand le loup habitera avec l'agneau*—trans.]

[7] Thompson, *The Passions of Animals*, 102.

[8] Ibid., 124–25.

[9] Ibid., 317–18.

are particularly gifted at imitation. Chimpanzees make efforts to speak by grimacing, and by opening the lips to pronounce a sort of "hu-hu."[10] They imitate human facial expressions. But this particular talent for imitation was often the cause of their loss: one monkey cut its throat trying to shave like his master; another wanted to infuse a tobacco leaf to make tea and died. Indians also take advantage of these faculties to trap them: they place basins of water and wash their faces, under the watchful eye of the primates. Then, they replace the water with glue and withdraw. The monkeys, in imitating them, stick shut their eyes, and thus blinded, become easy prey.[11]

Certainly, these latter examples could be considered quite unfortunate in what had started to look like a celebration of their intelligence. Thompson does not care: these stupid accidents are necessary for the strategy he is implementing. It is not simply a matter of demonstrating abilities. He asks more of the monkey or ape: he certainly asks them to help him to construct proximity—"They look like us!"—but by taking the most active part possible, attesting to their own will to behave like a human. Thompson does nothing other than base his strategy on this very simian ability: precisely that of being able to "ape" with such ease. What does an imitating monkey or ape do if not create a mirror effect, in which the observer can recognise himself? In this story that brings together the author and his witnesses, everything happens as if everyone, on either side, was striving to maximise the resemblances.

If there is a construction of resemblance on the part of each of the actors involved, and if these stories are not unlike those of a heroic little monkey who saved his keeper or of an old baboon who extracted his companion from a pack of dogs, the characters invoked are not, however, called here to testify to our origin. These apes are not requisitioned for the role of totem, or ancestor, or to demonstrate any theory of evolution. We are still in the first half of the nineteenth century; this history has not yet happened to us, no more than it is yet subjected to or imposed on them. Yet the question of resemblance already belongs, in a way, to the culture in which Thompson is embedded. Monkeys and apes did not wait for Darwin to be brought closer to the human.

In fact, since the seventeenth century, a certain conception of nature had inscribed this resemblance into a theory: the theory of the chain of being.

[10] Ibid., 316.
[11] Ibid., 318.

This is not an evolutionary theory, far from it, since the chain formed by all the beings of nature, the continuous chain of *existents* is a static line, arranged as such from the first days of divine labour. The characteristics of this chain can be referred to one of the divine virtues: God has always been very concerned about order. However, this chain created by a God whose rigour, though sometimes impenetrable, should not be questioned, presented some difficulties: to be complete, not one link must be missing. Yet the substantial gaps between the mineral and the vegetal, between plants and animals, and above all between monkeys and humans, never ceased to amaze. Many thinkers set to work filling in the gaps and, with a zeal sustained by faith, began to track the resemblances. Among these problematic intervals, the one that separated apes and monkeys from humans seemed the most important. It should not, however, be expected that this type of research would blur the boundaries between the different species, and thus lead to rethinking the convenient hierarchy that man had had the foresight to construct so that he occupied the summit. For if it allows a sort of well-ordered continuity based on resemblances to be thought, this chain of being is also accompanied, as a static and immutable arrangement representing the eternal order of things, by a political stake: each creation must be satisfied with the place it is assigned, the serf in his hovel, the lord in his castle.

In any case, the metaphysical presumption of the great chain of being and the necessity for the gap to be filled gives a real boost to the study of and interest in apes and monkeys, whose resemblances with humans it was necessary to seek. In 1699 a chimpanzee, collected by Tyson, would present the most important elements. Thompson would dissect him upon his death. Comparative anatomy would clearly show the similarities with the human. The chimpanzee had, before its premature death, already exhibited this manifest proximity. He liked to wear clothes, he slept in a bed and pulled up his sheets—but was never successfully made continent—he cried like a child and could even become angry. One day, Tyson got him drunk, but afterwards he refused to drink more than he could bear, thereby manifesting a virtuous temperance that many people might envy.

If resemblance is thus already available in the era in which Thompson writes, and if it has already often been posed as a question, it is, however, not from this viewpoint that our author strives to maximise it. These apes are not mobilised within a problem of the continuity of a static chain, as they had previously been, nor within an evolutionary project, as they will be a few years later. They are neither invited to fill in the gaps to recover the order

concealed by a playful or distracted God, nor called upon to give us a history of which we would be the inheritors. The story that they have to tell us, in fact, concerns neither our past nor theirs: these monkeys are talking to us about the future.

To understand the role they are assigned, we must take up again, from the beginning, the project that Thompson has tried to implement. From the first lines of the book he has dedicated to their passions, the author sketches his first motif: "The chief object in writing these pages … has been to assist in promoting a better estimate of the value and utility of animal life, and by awakening a due regard and kindly feeling for the brute creation, to obtain for it the admiration and protection it so signally and justly deserves."[12] But before arriving at this admiration and this kindly feeling, a first step is necessary. How could we estimate their value when their lack of words and our ignorance prevent us from knowing them?[13] What we believe we know in fact proves only to be based on a series of the most questionable prejudices—mostly due to our lack of attention. There are hundreds of them, like the idea that dogs perceive the same thing as us, that carnivores are cruel, or that bees are solely determined by a blind and inflexible instinct.

It is also believed, Thompson continues, and this is another prejudice characteristic of our ignorance, that these same bees can be guided by hearing in their movements. This prejudice is interesting since it can be traced back to its origin. It is in fact based on an old English custom that requires that when the owner of a swarm finds that the swarm has escaped from its hive, he rings bells or bangs two pieces of metal against each other. Now, this custom, which has lost its meaning—and whose origin in a recommendation by Virgil has been forgotten[14]—originally had a completely different function: the racket is in no way intended to bring back the runaway bees, but simply to warn the neighbouring landowners, either that one is about to cross their property, thus avoiding the risks of an unfortunate gunshot, or that the swarm that would land somewhere among them should not be considered as a gift from heaven.

To believe that bees are guided by hearing is, of course, not very serious, and ultimately testifies only to a harmless misunderstanding. But to believe that bees, like many animals, are guided only by instinct by contrast endorses much more problematic prejudices: to refer to instinct is one of the many

[12] Ibid., vi.

[13] Ibid., 413.

[14] According to Robert Delors, "Les Abeilles," in Boris Cyrulnick, ed., *Si les lions pouvaient parler: Essais sur la condition animale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 436–71 (451).

ways of refusing them any form of intelligence. This is where the problem becomes complicated for Thompson. For this prejudice, which denies any form of intelligence to animals, is in fact based on a divine decree: animals do not have souls. It is difficult to contradict this type of decree, except by affirming that God might have had a moment of absentmindness, which is not self-evident for a creationist. Thompson will use a strategy worthy of the best casuistry: he will uncover, in the scriptures, what he will call a "second-order decree." By focusing on the central decree, Thompson says, we ended up forgetting this other second-order decree: the decree that grants to animals sensitivity and intelligence.

Of course, the author agrees, one could then retort, with Aristotle and many naturalists, that the argument was not truly necessary: does not the instinct with which creatures are endowed constitute one particular form of intelligence? But the problem with instinct is that as soon as it is evoked, everything can be related back to it. Certainly, bees have not changed much since Virgil. But have we offered them the opportunity to change and to show what they are capable of when instinct is not enough? Thompson will recount many experiments with bees, birds, and spiders, in order to demonstrate that what we take for instinct is very quickly transformed into creation, deviation from norms, inventiveness as soon as the context is modified. Where the authors see only instinct, he concludes, we must see reason, intelligence, sensitivity. For if instinct guides migration, nothing permits us to think that it makes it possible to find the place to return. Similarly, instinct alone does not account for dogs finding their masters, birds using human materials for nesting, bees stopping making honey where natural resources offer them substitutes. It was assumed, he explains, that spiders weave their web to get rid of excess material, that birds lay their eggs to relieve themselves of a cumbersome burden, and that they sit on them to eliminate their excess bodily temperature.

But the experiments show: one can damage the web, the spider will weave it again and again until exhausted. If you remove an egg from the nest, the bird will lay a new one. And when the bird lays in a heated house, it does not brood during the day. Thus instinct does not depend on the body but on intelligence. Furthermore, when conditions change, instincts are modified. The experiments also show that when bees are made to fabricate their cells on a glass plate, they change the structure in order to adjust to the new conditions. A number of experiments are summoned by Thompson, all demonstrating that it is a matter of habits, seemingly difficult to negoti-

ate, but which can be negotiated when circumstances require or permit. It is not a matter for him of denying the role of instinct but of leaving, alongside the existence of invariants, the possibilities for variability, and especially (the importance of which we will see below) for change, or better still, for improvement. It is therefore not a matter of denying that a behaviour has some instinctive components, but of insisting on the partiality of these explanations and above all of critiquing their static character, in an understanding which, we should not forget, is non-evolutionary. "Instinct never varies in its mode and character; bees toil still, as they did when Aristotle studied them, and when Virgil described them."[15] Unless of course, they are offered other constraints.

The problem of sensitivity remains, an ability close to our own, essential in a project of the construction of proximity. We generally think, Thompson explains, that we have the privilege of sensitivity to music: Bingley's observations of elephants show that their reactions are very different depending on the musical rhythm, and that it seems to affect their emotions. Of course, animals do not speak, which makes difficult, for us, the idea that they can have emotions, and for them, the task of organising their social life. But to achieve a common goal and to be able to ask for help, they use sophisticated means of communication, even if they are different from ours. If we rely, Thompson continues, on Wenzel's research, which, by analysing the modulation of sounds in relation to the context of the emission, was able to observe the specificity of their frequency and rhythm, we will understand that these sounds express many emotions, and that they are very differentiated according to whether they express the loss of the young, alarm, sadness, love, or joy.[16]

This sensitivity that animals manifest accentuates all the more their resemblance to us, since it can be linked to concern for others, that is to say, in short, what we would call morality. The feeling of compassion for the suffering of the other that we think—sometimes wrongly—"so highly characteristic of benevolence, and of kindness of heart in the human race, is most powerfully felt in the animal world."[17] Of course, Thompson continues, "It is less surprising when extended from one to another by those of the same species, but is particularly so when exercised between those of different

[15] Thompson, *The Passions of Animals*, 149.
[16] Ibid., 330–31.
[17] Ibid., 126.

habits and orders."[18] The care of monkeys for their young in the wild is quite remarkable. Mothers make them obey, groom them, and may even impose corrections on them. Still other attachments merit consideration. Monkeys can feel friendship for one another, and show a keen sense of the harm that can be done to one of them. Attachment to their master may extend to his possessions, and many tamed primates have been seen defending them to the end of their strength. Cases of adoption can be seen in nature, either within the same species, or even, surprisingly, between different species. On this subject, writes Thompson, there is an anecdote that was told at the Red Lion Inn, in Hungerford, concerning what happened there some years ago. A dog had accidentally broken his leg. The whole time that he was immobilised in the garden, a raven who had been raised with him came to visit him, brought him bones and showed him all sorts of kindness.[19]

The particular form of sensitivity that is pain receives, in this perspective, special attention: the movements of a butterfly pierced by a pin are often attributed to the will to flee, without referring to pain. But a simple experiment shows that they suffer, and that it is not only a question of the will to flee; if the needle is heated some time after, the butterfly that did not move again manifests compulsive movements.[20] When a howler monkey is caught at maturity, Thompson explains, it becomes melancholy, refuses food, and dies within weeks.[21] A chimpanzee who had been tormented by his torturer and was unable to take his revenge also stopped eating and died on the fifth day. The argument from animal sensitivity, however, is not only about the strategy of resemblances; it comes to play the same role as when the utilitarians, anxious to grant animals the right to protection, demanded, from the end of the eighteenth century, the question be changed: we remember Jeremy Bentham's argument: "the question is not … can they talk? but, can they suffer?"[22]

For if the emotions of loss, of nostalgia, if sensitivity and suffering show us how close animals are to us, this recognition literally commits us. How can we render ourselves so insensitive to the love that animals have for their young? The whaling scenes separating mothers from their young are heart-

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 126.

[20] Ibid., 105.

[21] Ibid., 64.

[22] Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789; London: The Athlone Press, 1970), 44.

breaking, Thompson writes: "There is something extremely painful in the destruction of a whale, when thus evincing a degree of affectionate regard for its offspring which would do honour to the superior intelligence of human beings, yet the feelings of compassion [that might be experienced] must give way to the object of the adventure, the value of the prize, and the joy of the capture."[23] How can we be so unfair? Animals love and respect us, they take care of us and our possessions—many anecdotes relate the rescue of humans by elephants and dogs. Moreover, animals show that they perceive our emotional states, and we find many testimonials of when our dogs or our horses can divine our turmoil, our anger or our sadness, and try to remedy it.

The critique of instinct, the construction of proximity and resemblances, the denunciation of prejudices, the recognition of the sensitivity of animals—and the critique of its absence in humans—are all strategies for bringing this second-order decree to the forefront: "brutes have more reason than they can show, from their want of words, from our inattention, and from our ignorance."[24]

Thompson knows that he must enlist his readers, if he wants to give this second-order decree a chance of being taken into consideration; he knows that he must mobilise interest to produce change. He knows that to interest us, animals must be rendered interesting, surprising, inventive, and above all, brought much closer than we imagined. Monkeys and apes will be the actors best able to play this role, provided that we recognise the abilities that would prove most strikingly that the first decree, according to which animals are very different from us—since they have no soul—is not the right decree to address. But if apes and monkeys are privileged candidates, as they are very gifted for this kind of exercise, it is not to them alone that the project is addressed. It is addressed to all animals. Apes and monkeys would almost be concerned the least, since as their abilities demonstrate, they have already been offered many chances.

That is not the only issue. The critique of instinct is a major piece of this edifice. If Thompson put so much effort into dismantling this old prejudice of instinct, it is not only because instinct makes of the animal a sort of blind machinery. There is something else. Instinct proves to be, in his project, the most problematic prejudice to overcome. Not because it constitutes a denial of intelligence—but because it prevents animals from changing. Or

[23] Thompson, *The Passions of Animals*, 155.
[24] Ibid., 413.

rather, since it mostly comes down to a misunderstanding, because it prevents people from thinking that animals can change. Remember, instinct not only transforms the animal into an automaton, but also, and above all, in the fixist world of creationism, it does not allow any freedom for transformation: bees have not changed since Virgil. Except precisely in experiments. The stakes of the critique of instinct need to be read in the contrast that Thompson defines between instinct and intelligence, for it is there that the key to the project lies. Instinct, he writes, is the inheritance of the species, from which it is inseparable; intelligence is the property of the individual, but above all: "by means of the former, the animal is dependent on nature, and by the latter *it emancipates itself*."[25]

Thompson wants to enlist us in the most astonishing project of emancipation. To set it up, and to make us grasp the most concrete and immediate stakes, he will attack another prejudice, that which leads us to arrange animals into a hierarchy according to whether they are domesticated or wild. Previously, he writes,

> it was generally believed that herbivorous animals possessed a more gentle and docile character than the Carnivores. The gazelle was the picture of gentleness and beauty … while deadly cruelty and violence were ascribed to the tiger, the wolf, and the hyæna. But by the acute and persevering observations of Cuvier, the character of these animals has been placed in a clearer light, and the long adopted opinion has not only been discarded, but reversed.… The carnivorous animals attach themselves to their keepers, and are thankful for their kind offices; and even the hyæna, the blood-thirsty monster, as he has been described by all naturalists since the days of Buffon, crouches, when gently treated, like a dog at the feet of his master, allows itself to be caressed and fed by him, and shows the greatest attachment and obedience.[26]

Of course, we must not descend into naïve idealism, we can not deny the savagery of some. But the example of the hyena tells us how we ought to understand this wildness: Thompson affirms that if treated properly, he will show the greatest attachment. Opposing the domesticated animal to the wild

[25] Ibid., 149, emphasis added.
[26] Ibid., 387–88.

animal is not only a prejudice; it is also a misunderstanding with the most disastrous effects. The domesticated/wild opposition, which leads to that between "peaceful" and "bloodthirsty," does not hold water; wild animals are in fact most often domesticable, for a very simple reason: they are social. Domestication is nothing other than the utilisation of the same impulses as those of socialisation, since it is founded, in the words of Cuvier, on *seduction*, or in those of Thompson, on *subjugation*, which "has been accomplished by tearing the animal from its natural state, by altering its condition, by increasing its wants, by creating in it new desires, by providing the means of satisfying them, and by making it thus feel its entire dependence on man."[27] To consider them as wild, Thompson says in a way, is in short not to give them any chance—and not to give ourselves any either. For if the animals that one calls wild still are wild, it is by virtue of our ignorance, by virtue of misunderstandings that leave them no chance; and which do not leave us much chance to change our relationships to them.

Obviously, the problem of cruelty remains; it would be difficult to completely erase it from nature. Is this not a paradox? This paradox has long troubled creationists: how to understand that a perfect God, creating nature in his image, could have let slip these troublesome little details like, for example, lions devouring young and innocent gazelles? The solution generally adopted by the creationist was quite simple: it is neither an error, nor an omission, nor anything that contradicts the perfection of the world—quite the contrary. According to the versions imagined by the most inspired creationists, God would be able to invoke various arguments. The arguments of a utilitarian philosopher: by killing the gazelle the lion spares him years of old age; God thus calculates, in the sums of all happiness and all misfortune, the best possible distribution. He can also present the arguments of a hunter: since by killing the gazelle the lion averts its overpopulation, he becomes what we would call today the "veterinarian" of the savannah—like the hunter has become, in the eyes of today's hunting advocates, or, in the eyes of its protectors, the wolf has become for the forest. According to still other versions, God would authorise a little more bias towards humans, since by averting the overpopulation of gazelles, he prevents them being a disaster for human crops. Divine Providence thus avoids, with a minimum of cruelty, far greater horrors.

If at times Thompson seems to want to rally to these arguments, he nev-

[27] Ibid., 387.

ertheless manages to find another solution, much more compatible with his project: such a far-sighted God might risk encouraging people to inaction. First, Thompson affirms, nature is not cruel: on the contrary, animals have implemented many behaviours that testify to a "natural peace." Play is only one of its manifestations. And even what we might too quickly deem to be conflicts receive an entirely different interpretation when we observe them attentively. The battles of deer, he explains, are only feigned, and the locking of antlers, even if it is aimed at mastering the other, is ultimately only a form of play. Again, the proof is that all the animals that feign violence in their games quickly stop it being exercised: each takes the greatest precautions to not wound the other with his bites. And, to cite just one example among others, the orangutan, in fighting with his keeper, tries only to throw him off, and only pretends to bite him.[28] It is true, Thompson concedes, that still more dubious examples remain. But the blame must not be addressed to the animals: in most cases, Thompson says, nature is only cruel because we have rendered it such, through our ignorance and above all through our practices. Through our practices, because humans, far from wresting animals from their nature, reassign them to it in a way that perverts them: "The courage of the cock is not to be subdued by the most powerful assailants … but its noble spirit is occasionally shamefully perverted to the most cruel practices, and its natural weapon made more fatal by artificial means. The cock-pit still remains a reproach to the character of Englishmen."[29] The human, by his ill treatment, perverts the natural world and makes it cruel. However, it is not a matter, by stigmatising fighting, of denouncing the tearing of animals from nature; far from it. It is a matter of denouncing the fact that in doing so humans pervert them. The tearing away from nature, in this case, is not tearing away from wildness; on the contrary, since the operation makes the animal even more savage. No, it is not a matter of reproaching the human for removing the animal from its natural condition; on the contrary, it is a matter of reproaching him for not having done so, or, even worse, for having done so badly. This is indeed the tragic fact of our ignorance: because we have not given animals the attention they deserve, because we have associated what we believed to be wildness with violence and cruelty, because we have not seen the possibilities of peace with the animal, our world has remained what it was. We have missed our opportunity; we have missed the chance to tear them away from what makes them wild.

[28] Ibid., 63.
[29] Ibid., 232–33.

This opportunity is, however, within reach: this is testified by the miracle of the taming of the hyena, the extraordinary abilities of monkeys who live in harmony with humans and, more generally, the miracle of the socialisation of beings. It is the miracle of domestication: to make emerge within the animal all that is only potential in it and which tends to improve: kindness, gentleness, sociability.

> They are now wild and savage, from the appointed circumstances amid which they are at present ordained to live; and when this state of the universe shall be altered, their moral transformation will become a natural appendage to the great social and intellectual revolution which the Hebrew prophets attach to the ulterior ages.[30]

It is here that Thompson's long-term future and fabulous dream appear. To accomplish what God has promised; to fulfill the oldest and most beautiful of prophecies, the prophecy of Isaiah: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb … and a little child shall lead them" (Isa 11:6).

God promised, of course, but he did not specify the moment when we could begin to hope that he would keep his promise, nor what share of the activity he intended to take in this affair. Why not get to work and anticipate right away? Is that not what any prophecy demands of us: to *anticipate*? Why not give to this revolution announced by Isaiah that which is the destiny of all prophecies: to *accomplish* it? Is not the fate of prophecy to give us dreams to realise, and courage in the tranquil certainty that these dreams are possible?

Why not transform *ourselves* in order to transform the animals? The opportunity is within reach: if we transform ourselves, if we interest ourselves in them, if we patiently seek all that waits only to be actualised, we will then be able to fulfill the prophecy. What propels Thompson's dream is then nothing other than a long labour upon *misunderstandings*, in both senses of the term. Tackling the misunderstandings of our prejudices first, by denouncing those of a too quickly accepted decree, those of our hierarchies, of our ignorance, the misunderstandings that paralyse action and lead to wars. Transforming them, then, into an entirely different form of misunderstanding: the *misunderstanding of accomplishment*, that through which events can be actualised, simply because the promise they hold puts us to work. Thompson proposes in a way to address ourselves to animals as if they already were what the

[30] Ibid., 392; Isa 11:6–9. [Thompson refers also to Isa 65:25 and Hos 2:18—trans.]

prophecy promises they will be: he knows that this way of addressing them can actualise what is only in potential and authorise these animals to acquire what constraints have hitherto refused them. In sum, what Thompson tells us throughout these pages, throughout this effort to transform us, to render us sensitive to sensitivity, intelligent to intelligence, trustees in the promises and bound by them, is that animals are not yet quite like he describes them, they are still not *fully accomplished*. But they wait only to be accomplished, they wait only to accomplish, to realise the prophecy. Why not utilise this fundamental resource that is the lack of precision of all prophecy, all the possibilities of misunderstandings that they preciously contain, to leave in human care the invention of the means to accomplish the promise and its requirements?

We then better understand this effort of more than four hundred pages to enrol us in multiple stories, of experiments on bees, birds or spiders, of observations of zookeepers, of apes or monkeys testifying to their intelligence through stupid acts, of tame hyenas, of crows or ravens whether plucked or friendly with dogs, of discoveries and anecdotes, of decrees and counter-decrees. Thompson knows that if the constraints that weigh on animals seriously compromise the fulfilment of prophecies, the constraints that weigh on human knowledge are just as important. The world will be interesting only if we have the opportunity to be interested in it, it will be transformed only if we agree to go through the transformation ourselves. We will have the world that our knowledge deserves.

We will only have a good world, above all, if we are capable of attaching it well. The lesson of domestication tells us nothing else: the tearing away from nature is in no way a detachment; the emancipation Thompson speaks of is in no way a making autonomous. It is rather a "socialisation" by which animals enter into a world that is striving to build itself up as a common world, and are linked in new ways to those who inhabit this world; what the sociologists Arluke and Sanders today call, to designate the modes of understanding that authorise these bonds: a "social accomplishment."[31] To emancipate, in Thompson's perspective, is to free from bad constraints: it is not to detach, it is to attach better. It is to find, as Bruno Latour so nicely says, "*among the engaging things themselves*, those that will procure good and durable ties"; it is to substitute for ties that paralyse bonds that give a chance.[32] What

[31] Arnold Arluke and Clinton R. Sanders, *Regarding Animals* (Philadephia: Temple University Press, 1996), 49.

[32] See Bruno Latour, "Factures/Fractures: From the Concept of Network to the Concept

Thompson proposes, in sum, what he designates as the implementation of a revolution that frees from constraints to being, is to better attach: animals to humans, humans to the world, and the future to the prophecies. It will take more work, more good constraints and more bonds to give these animals a chance to actualise their powers, their intelligence, their abilities and their social talents. It will take more knowledge and more practices to create a good common world: the one in which *the wolf shall dwell with the lamb*, the one in which will be found, among the children of men, someone to lead them by the hand.

Translated by Matthew Chrulew

of Attachment," trans. Monique Girard Stark, *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 36 (1999): 20–31 (23).