

Article

Animal Pneuma: Reflections on Environmental Respiratory Phenomenology

Lenart Škof

Science and Research Centre Koper, Institute for Philosophical and Religious Studies, Garibaldijeva 1, 6000 Koper, Slovenia; lenart.skof@zrs-kp.si

Abstract: This essay is an attempt to propose an outline of a new respiratory animal philosophy. Based on an analysis of the forgetting of breath in Western philosophy, it aims to gesture towards a future, breathful and compassionate world of co-sharing and co-breathing. In the first part, the basic features of forgetting of breath are explained based on David Abram's work in respiratory ecophilosophy. This part also introduces an important contribution to modern philosophy by Ludwig Klages. The second part is dedicated to reflections on what I understand as an unfortunate transition from soul and pneuma to spirit and Geist. Based on these analyses, I proceed towards an idiosyncratic thought on the nocturnal mystery of pneuma, with references to ancient Upanishadic and 20th-century phenomenological Levinasian thought. Based on these teachings, I argue that, at the bottom of her existence, the subject is a lung partaking in an immense external lung (Merleau-Ponty). In the fourth part of the essay, I extend my reflections toward comparative animal respiratory phenomenology and argue for the immense compassion for all our fellow breathing beings. Finally, in the concluding, fifth part of this essay, I am arguing for a future biocentric and breathful environment, signifying and bringing a new compassionate-respiratory alliance into the world.

Keywords: pneuma; psyche; animal breath; respiratory animal philosophy; forgetting of breath; Geist; environmental philosophy; Ludwig Klages; David Abram; Luce Irigaray; Emmanuel Levinas



Citation: Škof, L. Animal Pneuma: Reflections on Environmental Respiratory Phenomenology. *Philosophies* **2024**, *9*, 33. <https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies9020033>

Academic Editor: Michael Marder

Received: 6 February 2024

Revised: 29 February 2024

Accepted: 1 March 2024

Published: 5 March 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. The Forgetting of Breath

There is a peculiar topic in Western philosophy, marked by its almost eternal self-evident and self-imposing mission, that, ecologically speaking, discloses the devastating and suffocating effects of the long historical journey of the Western, now global Geist. This topic is the forgetting of breath in philosophy—as a key ontological and epistemological gesture of enshrouding the living *psyche* and instead postulating a surrogate entity of an immaterial *nous* (spirit, *Geist*, mind, intellect)—as the absolute opponent or even enemy of breath. At first glance, this gesture of removing or even eradicating the *psyche* in its original airy-elemental anatomy from the horizon of philosophical thinking appears to be a necessary step from the alleged proto-philosophical and magical worldview towards what we today understand as modern scientific reason. However, too much was abandoned and lost in this path towards the epoch of absolute and invincible logocentrism and anthropocentrism: we have lost track of the breathful soul of the world; we extinguished, one by one, so many living creatures, and we made too many of other living beings the mere artifacts of our new spiritual predatoriness. As a consequence, *homo sapiens* has become the sole despot over all other nonhuman animals-without-souls, depriving them of their ontological subjectivity and thus breaking the ancient mythologically and cosmologically underpinned laws of sacred alliance among all living beings of the world.

Only a few modern thinkers have shown in-depth sensibilities for this unfortunate gesture: among them are two luminaries—David Abram and Luce Irigaray—and this essay is also a homage to their ground-breaking work in philosophy and environmental

humanities. In their seminal works (especially the chapter “The Forgetting and Remembering of Air” in Abram’s *The Spell of the Sensuous* [1] and *The Forgetting of Breath in Martin Heidegger* by Luce Irigaray [2]), Abram and Irigaray argue for a return of the breath into the discourse of philosophy. As an ecophilosopher, Abram knows that air is a medium that flows within and all around us and “this unseen enigma is the very mystery that enables us to live” [1] (p. 136). By referring to the Indigenous North American contexts, such as the Navajo culture, he describes the *nilch’i* (Wind, Air, Atmosphere) as “that which grants life, movement, speech, and awareness to all beings” [1] (pp. 138–39). This holistic, elemental and respiratory worldview has enabled humans to grant subjectivity—as life, speech, and awareness to all living beings (including plants), and thus has safeguarded the most sacred bond that we ever possessed—of living within the archaico-ontological psychological resonance with the world around us, and even with the stones.

One of the most important interventions against the anti-respiratory trend in philosophy came from the German philosopher Ludwig Klages (1872–1956) and his (typically, also forgotten and wholly abandoned) oeuvre. His prolific and highly original books and essays, among them especially his seminal work, *The Spirit as Adversary of the Soul* (*Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* [3,4]), should be regarded as key contributions to the 20th-century philosophy, having had decisive influences for the emerging environmental philosophy and ecocriticism. In addition, this essay is also an attempt to navigate through some of the key Western interventions towards what is today known as animal philosophy, including Irigaray’s *A New Culture of Energy* [5] and Jacques Derrida’s philosophical masterpiece *The Animal That Therefore I Am* [6]—bringing to the fore what I would like to call “animal pneuma” and propose it as an example of a new genre in philosophy, called respiratory animal philosophy¹.

The history of Western philosophy is also a history of forgetting the nonhuman animals—not only as various companion species (very few of the major Western philosophers were actually able to include into their works narratives on relationships with the animals: Nietzsche, Derrida, Irigaray) but first and foremost as our abiding fellow inhabitants on the planet, sharing with us the atmospheres of breathing and living. Finally, and phenomenologically speaking, animal pneuma will be revealed in this essay as a visible yet subtle manifestation of the world pneuma—a gentle, hardly visible but rhythmic pulsation of a life within any living being, marking and inaugurating, in a *hopeless hope for the future*², an environmental-ethical promise toward the more-than-human life of this planet.

2. The Unfortunate Transition from Soul to Geist

In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, Abram contends that, within the early developments of the Greek culture, Plato and Socrates were already able to employ a new understanding of the human soul and thus mark the decisive transition from the early respiratory worldview of Anaximenes and other Pre-Socratics³ to a new, now already entirely insensitive and intangible entity. He writes about this tragic transition:

The Platonic *psychê* was not part of the sensuous world, but rather of another, utterly non-sensuous dimension. The *psychê*, that is, was no longer an invisible yet tangible power continually participant, by virtue of the breath, with the enveloping atmosphere, but a thoroughly abstract phenomenon now enclosed within the physical body as in a prison [1] (p. 151).

With this transition and immobilization of the *psyche*, a new epoch began, which has had tragic consequences for the future of human-animal cohabitation. *Psyche* is now divided into the pure intellect (accompanying the Western philosophy all the way to Descartes’s ego cogito, Kant’s pure reason, Hegel’s spirit, and Husserl’s transcendental consciousness) and the remaining ‘animal’ instincts, rendering its breathful quintessence to the bodily domain. With this gesture, our consciousness is now reduced to the intellect, leaving behind the capabilities of our sensuous perception and tactile awareness. Abram refers to a researcher of the Indigenous cultures of Australia, Robert Lawlor, saying that they “tend to consider the visible entities around them—rocks, persons, leaves—as crystallizations of

conscious awareness, while the invisible medium *between* such entities is experienced as what Westerners would call ‘the ‘unconscious’’ [1] (p. 137). He further affirms that these happenings reside in atmospheres of the surrounding natural phenomena, such as the lightning, winds, birds, and various forces of the Earth. It is precisely this tragic transition from soul to spirit that has intrigued Klages to develop his oeuvre, to which I will now turn.

In *The Spirit as Adversary of the Soul*, Klages proposes a methodical yet entirely new reflection on the dependence of our consciousness on the phenomenon of life. The aim of his work is to show the ontological, epistemological, and especially environmental consequences of this unfortunate Greek transition from *psyche* to *nous*—as a process of distancing from life and its inherent psychic potentialities. Speaking of the elemental souls and forces inhabiting matter, plants, animals, and likewise, humans enable Klages to recall and reinstate a newly reflected *biocentric* world against the prevailing Western *logocentric* world (also by inventing both concepts for the first time). He writes about the work of Geist and its effects upon the Earth itself: “it blocks her pores, robs her of the air that she could breathe, and prevents her exchanges with the cosmos” [4] (pp. 1040–1041). Klages clearly understands the respiratory element in philosophy, as he recognizes that life can only flourish in a biocentric environment, and he blames the Western man (namely, rarely, this was a women’s task) for his annihilation of the Indigenous cultures and their traditions. In his essay “Man and the Earth”, Klages is the first among the philosophers to clearly identify climate change (the devastating American dust storms of the 1930s) as the direct consequence of the destruction of earlier or Indigenous cultures. According to Klages, the visible effects of these Geist-related (or anthropocentric) human activities are the extinction of so many animal species, the clearing of forests, the changing of the river streams with their pollution, and, of course, related environmental degradation.

As Josephson-Storm nicely observes in his elaboration on the modern Western processes of the disenchantment of the world [19], it is in Klages that an inversion of a Hegelian dialectics of the self-actualization of the absolute spirit appears: instead of the absolutizing and colonizing (understood in the broadest possible way as a sign of an ontological, epistemological, and historical process) tendencies of the world-spirit, we now meet a world-soul, being linked to the ancient narratives on the cosmic wind:

In his version of this narrative, the ancients knew the earth to be a “living being” and that “forest and spring, boulder and grotto were filled with sacred life; from the summits of their lofty mountains blew the storm-winds of the gods” [19] (p. 216).

In his beautiful and important essay on ancient cultures and feminine divinity called “The Magna Mater (*Die Magna Mater*)”, and in his attempt to render the so-called Cosmic project into philosophy, Klages finally refers to the Pythagorean doctrine of the world where—beyond the last of the inner circles of this world, being enveloped by fire—there is even a farther outer space, permeated by what I would like to call a world pneuma from which “the world breathes time” [4] (p. 1350). In this modern appropriation of the ancient pneuma doctrine lies a possibility to understand this world as being warped on air and breath. Finally, perhaps in the most idiosyncratic of all of Klages’ thoughts, we reach our destination: his doctrine of the rhythms of sleeping and waking. Suffering from insomnia, Klages viewed the condition as a distortion of the world-soul by stating: “Sleeping and waking are one breath of life” [20] (p. 33). This observation might seem very peculiar and strange at first glance, but, as we will see, it provides us with a key passageway to the obscure-nocturnal and abyssal ontological meaning of pneuma that I wish to approach now.

3. The Nocturnal Mystery of Pneuma

In the ancient Upanishadic literature (from cca. 6th/7th century BC), we find the archaic and idiosyncratic doctrine of the five vital powers to be the first epistemological doctrine within Indian philosophy. According to this teaching, humans are endowed with various powers and capabilities—they number from five to twelve (comprising our senses, but also powers of movement, defecation, reproduction, and so forth). But the most

important of them are the so-called five breaths (called *prāṇāḥ* in an idiosyncratic Vedic plural): breathing, thinking, speech, sight, and hearing. Five “breaths” are thus called after the first of them—i.e., *prāṇa*, or breath. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 4.3.3 and 5.1.15 say the following about the five breaths:

The gatherer, clearly, is the breath. So, when man sleeps, it is into the breath that his speech passes; it is also into the breath that sight, hearing, and mind pass. For it is breath that gathers all these. (...) Surely, people do not call these ‘speeches’, or ‘sights’, or ‘hearings’, or ‘minds’. They call them only ‘breaths’ (*prāṇa*), for only breath becomes all these [21] (pp. 129 and 138).

According to the ancient Upanishadic philosophers, during sleep, all vital powers are gathered together in the cavity of the heart, and the “space of this cavity is homologized with cosmic space” [21] (p. 8)⁴. This means that during sleep, all living and breathing beings are connected to the totality of a cosmic whole. While sleeping and inhaling/exhaling the material air into their bodies, on an ontological plane, beings’ breathing is harmonized with the world pneuma.

Before I proceed, let me add a small personal testimony here: for me, the respiratory turn in philosophy began at one specific moment some 25 years ago when I was observing my companion being (a dog) sleeping: I saw his gentle, rhythmic movements, the rising and falling of his chest, and in fact an undulating of the whole body of my companion—all this indicated to me not only a possibility of a common air and breath (an atmosphere) that we might share; the observation offered another, ontologico-ethical significance of this movement: if, for Emmanuel Levinas, our ethical obligation is always derived from the face of the other, then, at this moment, this obligation was revealed from the peaceful, yet utterly vulnerable sleeping body-soul (i.e., animal pneuma) of a dog. At that time, I already intuitively knew that humans and nonhuman animals share an atmosphere of this pneuma.

Now, to proceed with my reflections: even if Levinas was not willing to grant ethical significance to animals (except for one specific dog I do not need to refer to here), he recognized that, at the very basis, our ethical subjectivity is marked by a respiratory character, as he clearly affirms in two important passages from his *Otherwise than Being*:

For there is a complex of significations deeper and broader than freedom, which freedom animates. Freedom is the animation itself, breath, the breathing of outside air, where inwardness frees itself from itself and is exposed to all winds (...) that the subject could be a lung at the bottom of its substance—all this signifies a subjectivity that suffers and offers itself before taking a foothold in being. It is passivity, wholly a supporting.

It is the longest breath there is, spirit. Is man not the living being capable of the longest breath in inspiration, without the stopping point, and in expiration, without return? [24] (pp. 180 and 182).

That an ethical subject could be regarded as a lung at the bottom of her existence is a powerful testimony that Levinas considered the pneumatological logic of the long history of spirit. With these respiratory phenomenological observations, Levinas concludes (or rather seals) the tradition of Western forgetting of air, and here, he is already bringing philosophical reflection into the closest vicinity of a respiratory paradigm shift. But as regards my earlier thoughts on sleep: for Levinas, insomnia or wakefulness is a sign of a radical ethical awareness and responsibility that cannot be escaped—and insomnia thus represents an eternal *inspiration* of ethical responsibility. This refers to the longest breath of the spirit. However, at the very end of his *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas introduces the problem of breath through “restlessness of respiration” [24] (p. 180), with this phenomenon already indicating a new respiratory possibility for us. A double meaning of insomnia has thus been revealed now: in returning to the ancient Indian teachings about *prāṇa* as the life element that never sleeps, I may affirm that if ethical subjectivity *is* breath, then it is precisely in sleep that its paradoxical respiratory wakefulness marks its belonging to the

world pneuma as grounding of our ethical subjectivity which can now also be applied to environmental respiratory phenomenology and animal philosophy.

Levinas's *Otherwise than Being* was first published in 1974. However, as early as 1945, we find an incredible thought on pneuma in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes:

[S]leep arrives when a certain voluntary attitude suddenly receives from the outside the very confirmation that it was expecting. *I* was breathing slowly and deeply to call forth sleep, and suddenly, one might say, my mouth communicates with some immense exterior lung that calls my breath forth and forces it back, a certain respiratory rhythm desired by me just a moment ago, becomes my very being, and sleep intended until then as a signification, suddenly turns into a situation [25] (p. 219) ⁵.

Here, Merleau-Ponty actually describes phenomenologically the immersion of Upanishadic vital powers (thinking, speech, sight, and hearing) into the breath (*prāṇa*). Being immersed into the respiratory rhythm of sleep, the subject is at once connected to the cosmic lung, or, as I have called it earlier, world pneuma. This now opens interesting possibilities for extending the Merleau-Pontian respiratory thought into animal philosophy. We can now understand the immense exterior lung not only as a horizon of our nocturnal existence but as something even more fundamental not only to our particular existence but universally to the respiratory alliance of all breathing living beings: here, a possibility of immense compassion with each breathing living being that participates in the mysterious respiratory rhythms of sleeping and waking is revealed. It is my task now to outline the basic elements of this pneumatological and utopian animal ethics.

4. Wounded Breaths and Immense Compassion for Breathing Living Beings

With chests
full of air, you stand
before the rifles.

Jure Detela, "Poem for the Harts" [26] (p. 45)

In *Moss & Silver*, a book of poems by Jure Detela (1951–1992), the pioneer of ecopoetry in Slovenia, we meet the above-mentioned respiratory ethical obligation towards a breathing living being—a deer. The poem is from 1977, and it captures the very essence of Detela's ecopoetic imagination in which the souls of any living being (insect, butterfly, bird, rabbit, cat, deer, horse. . .) are protected by the poetic voice. An innocent deer standing in front of the human being with his chest full of air not only is a particular signification of an ethical obligation but, as stated by Merleau-Ponty, signifies an ontologico-phenomenological situation that is related to animal pneuma (here I could offer a note connected to Derrida's necessary rendering of animal into the *animot* [6]). Moreover, Detela's animal and its breath connect, as it were, with the fourfold constellation of earth and sky, divinities and mortals (now understood, with and beyond the Heideggerian constellation in a divinanimal ⁶ and nonhuman sense), indicating an airy and translucent nature of our existence when he states:

How the earth is liberated
under your hooves! How translucent it is,
how airy and sunny and green!
And how well your bodies unite it with
the sky! O how alive you are! [26] (p. 47)

Related to this airy atmosphere but transferred now to the watery domain in his essay on the media of breathing, John Durham Peters offers another dimension of the respiratory alliance within the media of breathing. According to Durham Peters and his philosophy of media, media are here to be understood in the sense of the elemental atmospheres of breathing—as air and water in which humans and animals live and breathe. In his account of comparative respiratory animal phenomenology dealing with humans and cetaceans,

Durham Peters reveals some fascinating possibilities for respiratory philosophy. Let us look at one fascinating excerpt from his essay:

If their breathing is always under conscious control, how do cetaceans sleep? Some experimentally observed dolphins can remain awake for five days in a row without showing symptoms of sleep deprivation. It appears that their brains sleep one hemisphere at a time, even shutting the corresponding eye, in what is known as “unihemispheric sleep.” Among humans, conscious breathing is an exception, but among cetaceans it seems to be the norm. Every cetacean seems to be a kind of yogi, a respiratory artist who puts breathing in the foreground of consciousness [28] (p. 185).

Allow me to accompany this beautiful observation with another personal testimony: some time ago, I was watching a documentary on whale hunting with disheartening images of a fatally wounded whale. Instead of emitting air bubbles (a kind of a *watery air* exhaled, cherishing, as it were, a life of the whale), a bloody mixture of water and air was now springing from his blowhole, which is a whale’s nostril. In other words, a whale was bleeding fatally, and I was feeling a dejected compassion with the dying animal. Durham Peters poignantly captures this sentiment in the following excerpt:

Our lungs and breathing evolved in a world in which we could take environmental access to oxygen for granted, but marine mammals can breathe only at the ocean’s surface (a fact that whale hunters have long exploited, “there she blows” being the classic call of a spotter on a whaling ship). Since they cannot survive outside the ocean—beaching is fatal—cetaceans must know how to modulate breathing at every point in time [28] (p. 185).

From some immense exterior lung towards our immense compassion then: an immense compassion for the wounded living and breathing beings emerges in us; for animals, terrified on the way to the slaughterhouse, suffering in laboratory experiments, or those hunted for sport or fun. This is a testimony to a paradoxical ethical temporality of respiratory wakefulness, and perhaps, this wakefulness could even be idiosyncratically called *an ethic of unihemispheric sleep*.

Let us return to an actual sleep one more time now. In his book on animal philosophy, Derrida testifies similarly about animals’ sleep: “I also love to watch what they call an animal sleep, when such a living creature breathes with its eyes closed, for not all animals are seeing animals” [6] (p. 62)⁷. The eyes of a living being are now closed; an animal breathes gently, and the radiance of its eye, a sign of a life, now peacefully resides in its heart, as Upanishadic thinkers would argue. But animal sleep can reveal another phenomenon to us: regardless of the animal species—i.e., of being a predatory or non-predatory animal, in their sleep, we can observe these animals as coming into a (temporary) peaceful repose, signifying a time when they partook in the common atmosphere of the world *pneuma*. In sleep, any living being fully and unconditionally surrenders her/his/their existence to the breath as, as it were, its guardian. But who is there to protect the nocturnal breathers? What is the ethical signification of this sleep? In “The Peaceful Kingdom” simile from the book of Isaiah 11.6, it is stated:

The wolf shall live with the
lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with
the kid,
the calf and the lion and the
fatling together,
and a little child shall lead
them [29] (p. 641)

The restful sleep of the living community of nocturnal breathers is sign of an immersion into some immense external cosmic lung, a return into the primeval respiratory matrix. We all are restless sleepers, intaking with our breaths the joys and sorrows of animal *pneuma*.

As beings with souls, we are capable of taking the longest breath—marking the signature of our restless and immense compassion. The everlasting inhalation and exhalation of the co-shared world pneuma also refers to what Irigaray would understand in the sense of “incarnating ourselves with the help of animals” [5] (p. 47)⁸. This is now a mysterious eschatological promise of peace—a testimony for our longest breath of compassion, *the covenant of a new respiratory alliance*.

5. Coda: Towards a New Respiratory Alliance

We have seen that as beings-with-souls we are capable of the longest breath, as an ethically pregnant respiratory gesture towards anything that lives. World pneuma is the respiratory matrix of the world, the abyss of silence, a primordial sleep of the world before there were any signs of night or a day, even before there was any existence whatsoever. It is a pure and first Nature, pulsating in primeval conspiracy of the archaic nocturnal peace. Animal pneuma is its firstborn, a soul of living beings, the firstly inaugurated rhythm of night and day, life and death, and with them, joys and sorrows. We have seen that in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (among others), we can find the doctrine of the vital powers called five breaths, marking the beginning of epistemology in ancient India. But if we now turn even to the more original Vedic cosmological respiratory matrix—then the Creation hymn (called ‘Nāsadāsīya’ or ‘Bhāvavṛttam’ originating from the cca. 10th century BC) from the tenth maṇḍala of the *Rgveda* is a final example for our reflection on the connection between the world pneuma (marking the cosmological layers) and animal pneuma (marking the ontological layers). The first three stanzas of this hymn are crucial:

The nonexistent did not exist, nor did the existent exist at that time.
There existed neither the airy space nor heaven beyond.
What moved back and forth? From where and in whose protection? Did
water exist, a deep depth?

Death did not exist nor deathlessness then. There existed no sign of night
nor of day.
That One breathed without wind by its independent will. There existed
nothing else beyond that.

Darkness existed, hidden by darkness, in the beginning. All this was a
signless ocean.
What existed as a thing coming into being, concealed by emptiness—that
One was born by the power of heat [30] (pp. 1608–1609).

I have thoroughly analyzed this hymn elsewhere [31]. It suffices to say here that it is in this *breathing* of the One (Skt. *tad ekam*) that we can discern the first subtle movement before any other sign of life could be even anticipated or discriminated: the creation itself *breathes* gently and subtly and enables the very first germ of life to emanate from this originary respiratory tissue of the evolving cosmogonical matrix.

That One, breathing and pulsating even without wind, is now a sign of the immense external lung, a world pneuma, an ever origin of life: animal pneuma is now its visible manifestation, marking the inception of a *life* and its ‘phenomenologically’ mysterious (as in invertebrates, using integumentary surfaces, lungs, gills, tracheal systems etc. for breathing [32]) breath into any living being. This connection now enables a new respiratory and ecological alliance based on animal pneuma. Namely, according to Aristotle (*Generation of Animals*, 3.11) *all things are full of psyche*:

Animals and plants are formed in the earth and in the water because in earth water is present, and in water pneuma is present, and in all pneuma soul-heat (*thermotes psychiche*) is present, so that in a way all things are full of psyche ([18], p. 47) [33].

Thinking of this ontological trace-presence of a breathful life in every living being (even in an amoeba, using oxygen for internal respiration⁹), the new respiratory alliance

accounts for the breath of any living entity, thus pointing to a newly imagined respiratory bond with the living, an atmosphere of the respiratory multitude.

But to conclude now by returning to the Vedic hymn and its fourth stanza, these verses now reveal a fascinating and paradoxical idea—that the birth of that One (or world pneuma), in fact proceeds *from* the cosmogonical Warmth/Heat/Glow (Skt. *tapas*). And for the Vedic poets, this primeval Warmth has always already been revealed as desire, or love (*kāma*):

Then, in the beginning, from desire there evolved thought, which existed as the primal semen.

Searching in their hearts through inspired thought, poets found the connection of the existent in the nonexistent [30] (p. 1609)¹⁰.

Now, in their beautiful elaboration on God, humans, and animals, McDaniel and Simmons elaborate on a Whiteheadian notion of animals as concreting subjects, enjoying or suffering their feelings, making decisions, responding to various influences, including chemical processes in their bodies/organisms—as “living examples of the many becoming one” [35] (p. 234). But what strikes us is their claim that phenomenologically speaking, we can understand the variety of these experiences as an aesthetic richness—here viewed as harmony and intensity, or *beauty*. This beauty is not so much of a character of art but more of enjoying the world—where the pleasures of sleep are one of its forms. But then, surprisingly perhaps, yet in a logical respiratory key, McDaniel and Simmons conclude that animals are *carriers of a holy spirit*, “akin to the breathing, or *ruah*, of which the Bible speaks” [35] (p. 235). This observation is now fully attuned to what was argued in my attempt at a new respiratory animal phenomenology.

From the immense external cosmic lung to the immense compassion, as we argued. But there is a mystery of creation, signaling the world pneuma as being eternally grounded in *love*, similarly to the cosmico-ethical mystery of Nietzschean eternal recurrence. From within this eternal recurrence, evolutionary love will now flourish—in a promise of a future biocentric and breathful environment, signifying and bringing a new compassionate-respiratory alliance into the world.

Funding: This article is a part of the P6-0279 project “Liminal Spaces: Areas of Cultural and Societal Cohabitation in The Age of Risk and Vulnerability”, supported by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS).

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Respiratory philosophy or philosophy of breath is a new genre in philosophy, which, by analyzing the forgetting of breath, intervenes in the history of Western thinking and proposes new strategies for dealing with the *spirit-body-soul* problem. Predecessors of this genre are William James (*Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 1976 [1904–05] [7]), Gaston Bachelard (*Air and Dreams* 2011 [1943] [8]), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (*Phenomenology of Perception* 2012 [1945] [9]). Main contemporary representatives are Luce Irigaray (*The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, 1999 [1983] [2]), David Kleinberg-Levin (»Logos and Psyche«, 1984 [10]), Jacques Derrida (*Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, 1991 [1987] [11]), David Abram (*The Spell of the Sensuous*, 1997 [1]), and Peter Sloterdijk (*Bubbles/Spheres 1* 2011 [1998] [12])). My own contribution to this emerging field is *Breath of Proximity* from 2015 [13]. In the Japanese context, Tadashi Ogawa’s *Phenomenology of Wind and Atmosphere* is important (2021 [2000] [14]). Finally, »respiratory philosophy« was coined and first used by the Finnish philosopher Petri Berndtson in his 2010 essay “The Inspiration and the Expiration of Being” [15] and was further developed in his important 2023 work *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing* [16]. In this essay, an attempt at the respiratory animal philosophy is presented.

- 2 With hopeless hope, I am referring to the main message of Michael Marder’s beautiful book *The Phoenix Complex* (2023) [17].
- 3 For an extensive review and analysis of the Pre-Socratic views on the soul, see *The Life of Breath in Literature, Culture and Medicine*, Ch. 2 »Pneumatic Episodes from Homer to Galen« by A.A. Lang. See especially pp. 41ff. for Anaximenes, Heraclitus, Pythagoreans, Empedocles, Diogenes of Appolonia and Hippocrates [18].
- 4 Cf. on this Preface to my *Pragmatist Variations on Ethical and Intercultural Life*: In ancient Upanishadic philosophy, there is a beautiful passage explaining the hidden and obscure link (the meaning of the word *upaniṣad*, after all, refers to the “hidden teaching”) between the eye and the heart. Namely, the mythological person residing in the left eye, called Viraj (“the shining one”; being the wife of Indra, a god residing in the right eye, who is called “the one who kindles”) is recognizable by ordinary persons as radiance in an eye of a human person (or a non-human animal) while being alive, a radiance which slowly disappears in the moment of death. Death comes at the moment when a person is not breathing anymore. Viraj is thus a universal metaphor for the primeval experience (both prelinguistic and precognitive) of a *life* residing in the other person, whether a human or another sentient being. According to Indian teaching, Viraj’s residence during sleep is in the cavity of the heart, where *prana*, which is vital breath, or later, *atman* (the *self*), also resides. In a beautiful chapter in Irigaray’s book [i.e., *Speculum of the Other Woman*, L.Š.], called *Korē: Young virgin, Pupil of the Eye*, it is explained how the Eye (in its pupil, Korē) is able to concentrate the light from outside and direct it into the hidden cavities of the *heart*, cavities being understood here as the new locus of our sensitivities. All of our visceral reactions to the suffering of other persons (. . .), I believe, are related and channeled through this ancient and obscure teaching on the interiority of an Eye” [22] (p. xv). Cf. here Heraclitus’s aphorism on sleep and breathing (Fr. 129/DK 22 A 16): “For in sleep, when our channels of perception are shut, our mind is sundered from its kinship with the surrounding, and breathing is the only point of attachment to be preserved, like a kind of root (. . .) [23] (p. 205).
- 5 For an extensive analysis of this thought, see Petri Berndtson’s *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing* [16], chapter 3.
- 6 See the chapter »The Microbes and Pneuma That Therefore I Am« by Denise Kimber Buell from *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology* [27] (pp. 63–87). This essay tackles various pneumatic interactions on a plane of agential new materialism—where humans meet microbes and where once static and hierarchic ontological layers intermingle within a relational ontology: »Agencies that are not immediately or easily visible, such as pneuma and microbes, serve as effective examples for how we can shift our epistemological lenses toward such a relational ontology« (p. 64).
- 7 Derrida also mentions the obsession of many of the Jewish writers and thinkers (such as Kafka, Singer, Canetti, Horkheimer and Adorno) with the animals, signifying the relatedness of their suffering and Jewish experience: »Victims of historic catastrophes have, in fact, felt animals to be victims also, comparable up to a certain point to themselves and their kind« [6] (p. 105).
- 8 In her book, Irigaray shares the following personal experience with us: »For my part, I remember having helped an old dog who was almost dying by allowing the dog to have a share in my yoga practice. The animal had perceived my breathing from the other side of the house of the friend with whom I was staying; being unable to see me, the dog still came to lie next to me and adopted the rhythm of my breathing. At first, this irritated me because I was very tired myself, but ultimately, I accepted this presence because of compassion. I find these personal stories a wonderful testimony to the universal bond that can exist thanks to compassion« [5] (p. 46). This particular testimony might, at first glance, indicate an anthropocentric posture towards an animal, in this case, a dog. But with her other stories of animals helping her with their compassion, Irigaray inaugurates an ethics of compassion, which is revealed from the co-shared milieu between living beings.
- 9 I have often meditated on a possibility of a radically ontologico-ethical immersion into the ‘other’—i.e., into the being that cannot be properly or *humanely* imagined in any similarity to ‘ourselves’ whatsoever. Based on the animal pneuma, and reminiscent of the Schopenhauerian Will, there is now a phenomenological possibility of acknowledging any living organism as a respiratory encompassed part of the world pneuma and manifested in any of its variations throughout the ontological (phenomenologically often still largely mysterious or undisclosed) layers of animal pneuma. Let me here offer Jay McDaniel’s beautiful concluding thoughts from *Divinanimality*: “All life is animated. Each and every living being—from the smallest of microbes to the largest of mammals—carries a desire for satisfaction relative to the situation at hand. This desire is his or her ‘spirituality’ and also his or her ‘animality’. Spirituality and animality are not two. Animality, then, is what links us with our closest biological and spiritual kin: the other-than-human animals. It links us with an Animality at the heart of the universe, whom some address as ‘God’ and others as ‘the Soul of the Universe’ and still others as ‘the Tilting toward Love. (. . .) Every actuality is an act of making a world out of the multiple influences that shape life” [34] (pp. 261 and 271).
- 10 The translation was modified here: the genitive absolute structure in the verse namely allows for both interpretations (“from thought there evolved desire” as well as “from desire there evolved thought”) and I stand with the interpreters who affirm the priority of desire (*kāma*; love) over thought (*manas*)—for example, Griffith, Edgerton and Ježić (cf. also the cosmogonical role of *éros* in Hesiodus here).

References

1. Abram, D. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human-World*; Vintage Books: New York, NY, USA, 1997.
2. Irigaray, L. *The Forgetting of Breath in Martin Heidegger*; Mader, M.B., Translator; The University of Texas Press: Austin, TX, USA, 1999.

3. Klages, L. *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*; Erstes bis viertes Buch; H. Bouvier u. Co. Verlag: Bonn, Germany, 1969.
4. Klages, L. *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*; Fünftes Buch; H. Bouvier u. Co. Verlag: Bonn, Germany, 1966.
5. Irigaray, L. *A New Culture of Energy: Beyond East and West*; Columbia University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2021.
6. Derrida, J. *The Animal That Therefore I Am*; Fordham University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2008.
7. James, W. *Essays on Radical Empiricism*; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 1976.
8. Bachelard, G. *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*; DIHC: Dallas, TX, USA, 2011.
9. Merleau-Ponty, M. *Phenomenology of Perception*; Routledge: London, UK; New York, NY, USA, 2012.
10. Kleinberg-Levin, D. Logos and Psyche: A Hermeneutics of Breathing. *Res. Phenomenol.* **1984**, *15*, 121–147. [[CrossRef](#)]
11. Derrida, J. *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 1991.
12. Sloterdijk, P. *Bubbles/Spheres 1*; Semiotexte: South Pasadena, CA, USA, 2011.
13. Škof, L. *Breath of Proximity: Intersubjectivity, Ethics and Peace*; Springer: Dordrecht, The Netherlands, 2015.
14. Ogawa, T. *Phenomenology of Wind and Atmospheres*; Marinucci, L., Translator; Mimesis International: Sesto San Giovanni, Italy, 2021.
15. Berndtson, P. The Inspiration and the Expiration of Being. In *Thinking in Dialogue with Humanities: Paths into the Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*; Novotny, K., Hammer, T.S., Gleonec, A., Specian, P., Eds.; Zeta Books: Bucharest, Romania, 2010; pp. 281–293.
16. Berndtson, P. *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing*; Routledge: London, UK; New York, NY, USA, 2023.
17. Marder, M. *The Phoenix Complex*; The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 2023.
18. Fuller, D.; Saunders, C.; Macnaughton, J. (Eds.) *The Life of Breath in Literature, Culture and Medicine: Classical to Contemporary*; Palgrave: Cham, Switzerland, 2021. [[CrossRef](#)]
19. Josephson-Storm, J.Ä. *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*; The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 2017.
20. Falter, R. *Ludwig Klages: Lebensphilosophie als Zivilisationskritik*; Arnshaugk Verlag: Neustadt an der Orla, Germany, 2015.
21. *Upāniṣads*; Olivelle, P., Translator; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 1996.
22. Škof, L. *Pragmatist Variations on Ethical and Intercultural Life*; Lexington Books: Lanham, MD, USA, 2012.
23. *The Presocratic Philosophers*; Kirk, G.S., Raven, J.E., Schofield, M., Eds.; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1999.
24. Levinas, E. *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond the Essence*; Lingis, A., Translator; Kluwer: Dordrecht, The Netherlands, 1991.
25. Merleau-Ponty, M. *Phenomenology of Perception*; Landes, D.A., Translator; Routledge: London, UK, 2012.
26. Detela, J. *Moss & Silver*; Miller, R.; Jamnik, T., Translators; Ugly Duckling Presse: Brooklyn, NY, USA, 2018.
27. Buell, D.K. The Microbes and Pneuma That Therefore I Am. In *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology*; Moore, S.D., Ed.; Fordham University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2014; pp. 63–87.
28. Durham Peters, J. The Media of Breathing. In *Atmospheres of Breathing*; Škof, L., Berndtson, P., Eds.; SUNY Press: Albany, NY, USA, 2018; pp. 179–195.
29. *Holy Bible (The New Revised Standard Version)*; Thomas Nelson: Nashville, TN, USA, 1989.
30. *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*; Jamison, S.W.; Brereton, J.P., Translators; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2014; Volume III.
31. Škof, L. *God in Post-Christianity: An Elemental Philosophical Theology*; SUNY Press: Albany, NY, USA, 2024; forthcoming.
32. Bell, H.J.; Syed, N. Control of breathing in invertebrate model systems. *Compr. Physiol.* **2012**, *2*, 1745–1766. [[CrossRef](#)]
33. Aristotle, Generation of Animals. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle*; Barnes, J., Ed.; Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, USA, 1995; Volume 1, pp. 1111–1218.
34. Mc Daniel, J. Epilogue. Animals and Animality: Reflections on the Art of Jan Harrison. In *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology*; Moore, S.D., Ed.; Fordham University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2014; pp. 261–275.
35. Mc Daniel, J.; Simmons, J.A. So Many Faces: God, Humans, and Animals. In *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology*; Moore, S.D., Ed.; Fordham University Press: New York, USA, 2014; pp. 223–240.

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.