

THE PROPRIETARY MACHINE: THE ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
OF EXPLOITATION IN MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

MEHMET YUSUF AKTAŞ

BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY

2025

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Thesis submitted to the
Institute for Graduate Studies in Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Political Science and International Relations

by

Mehmet Yusuf Aktaş

Boğaziçi University

2025

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The Ontological Foundations of Exploitation in Modern Political Thought

The thesis of Mehmet Yusuf Aktaş

has been approved by:

Assoc. Prof. Gaye İlhan Demiryol
(Thesis Advisor)

Assist. Prof. Volkan Çıdam

Assist. Prof. Adil Usturalı
(External Member)

May 2025

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Mehmet Yusuf Aktaş certify that

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ABSTRACT

The Proprietary Machine:

The Ontological Foundations of Exploitation in Modern Political Thought

This thesis argues that Western metaphysics links human supremacy and property to produce systematic domination. It begins with the longstanding Human/Animal divide: philosophers define the “proper” human by attaching extra traits such as reason, language, or morality, then push the remainder into an empty Animal category. It treats ownership as the defining signifier of proper humanity and explains how this identification turns anthropocentric exclusion into the legitimisation of exploitation. This ontological split mirrors the distinction between proprietor and property. The discussion traces how that division already stratifies humanity. It shows how Locke and Hegel recast this hierarchy by equating humanity with the capacity, right, and duty to own. Ownership starts with the body and reaches land, animals, and other people. The study names this chained logic the Proprietary Machine and lists five recurrent moves: enable appropriation, grant moral warrant, normalise violence, mould subjectivities, and police the proper/improper line. Close readings of Derrida, Agamben, Wynter, and Weheliye confirm the machine’s reach across eras and regions. The thesis supplies posthuman and animal studies a concrete lever, gives critical property scholarship an ontological account, and refines race and colonial critiques through a unifying mechanism, thus bringing together debates that rarely converge. Recognising the Proprietary Machine confirms that emancipatory politics must dislodge ownership itself rather than adjust its effects.

ÖZET

Mülki Makine: Modern Siyasi Düşüncede

Sömürünün Ontolojik Temelleri

Bu tez, Batı metafiziğinin sistematik tahakküm üretmek üzere insan üstünlüğü ile mülkiyeti birbirine bağladığını savunur. Tez, uzun süredir devam eden İnsan/Hayvan ayrımıyla başlar: filozoflar, akıl, dil veya ahlak gibi ilave özellikler atfederek “has” insanı tanımlar, ardından geri kalanı boş bir Hayvan kategorisine iterler. Mülkiyeti has insanlığın tanımlayıcı göstergesi olarak ele alır ve bu özdeşleştirmenin insanmerkezci dışlamayı nasıl sömürünün meşrulaştırılmasına dönüştürdüğünü açıklar. Bu ontolojik ayrım, malik ve mülk arasındaki ayrımı yansıtır. Tartışma, bu ayrımın insanlığı halihazırda nasıl katmanlaştırdığının izini sürer. Locke ve Hegel’in, insanlığı mülk edinme kapasitesi, hakkı ve göreviyle bir tutarak bu hiyerarşiyi nasıl yeniden şekillendirdiğini gösterir. Mülkiyet bedenle başlar ve toprağa, hayvanlara ve diğer insanlara uzanır. Çalışma, bu zincirleme mantığı Mülki Makine olarak adlandırır ve yinelenen beş işlemi sıralar: temellüke olanak tanımak, ahlaki bir gerekçe sağlamak, şiddeti normalleştirmek, öznellikleri şekillendirmek ve has/has olmayan çizgisini denetlemek. Derrida, Agamben, Wynter ve Weheliye’nin metinlerinin yakından okunması, makinenin çağlar ve bölgeler ötesine uzanan etkisini doğrular. Tez, posthümanist çalışmalara ve hayvan çalışmalarına somut bir kaldıraç sunar, eleştirel mülkiyet literatürüne ontolojik bir açıklama sağlar ve ırk ile sömürgecilik eleştirilerini birleştirici bir mekanizma aracılığıyla geliştirir, böylece nadiren bir araya gelen tartışmaları buluşturur. Mülki Makine’yi tanımak, özgürleştirici siyasetin etkilerini düzeltmek yerine bizatihi mülkiyeti yerinden etmesi gerektiğini teyit eder.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to those who have guided and supported me throughout this academic journey.

First and foremost, my deepest thanks go to my thesis advisor, Gaye İlhan Demiryol. Her guidance was instrumental in structuring this study, pushing me to channel my passion into a scholarly, cogent, and rigorous argument. Although my thematic direction diverged from her primary field, her unyielding theoretical prowess and incisive analytical mind helped shape it into a coherent and rigorous argument. I am immensely grateful for her patience and her ability to help me build a robust argumentative framework.

Volkan Çıdam treated every assignment I have provided as publishable and supplied insightful feedback. He and Demiryol shared every source that could guide me through this project's minefield and shaped habits that will support my future work.

Adil Usturalı, serving as external jury, read the thesis with care and, in the same room where he defended his doctorate six years ago, offered criticism that points to the road ahead.

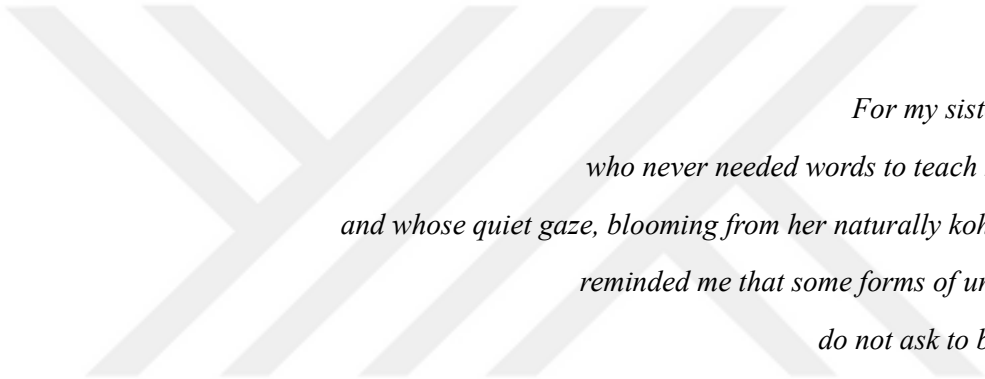
My earlier supervisors at Brighton, Andy Knott, German Primera and Mark Devenney, anchored my wish to read human history through exploitation in solid scholarship and still broaden my horizons with advice and steady encouragement. Zeynep Gambetti sparked my love for political theory and directed me to Brighton; without her guidance my academic path might have ended early.

I am profoundly thankful for my friends and colleagues who stood by me during stressful times. Şebın, Cemal, Begüm, and Ali Emre, some of the most knowledgeable individuals I know, provided immense emotional and practical

support. Their deep engagement with my ideas, their unwavering belief in the value of my work, their thoughtful gifts of foundational texts, and, most importantly, their enduring friendship have been pillars of my academic journey. At times, their enthusiasm and dedication to this project rivalled my own, and their empathy during setbacks was a profound comfort. It often felt like a collective endeavour, and for that, I will always be grateful. My thanks also go to my fellow Research Assistants, whose engaging debates, both related and unrelated to our work, significantly sharpened my academic thinking. I wish to thank Dilek, our department secretary, who met each anxious visit with calm. Finally, to Heja and Özge, thank you for creating a home away from home at your café, which served as my study sanctuary for countless hours. My sincere appreciation goes to the many others I cannot name here but whose support I sincerely value.

Lastly, and most importantly, I offer my heartfelt thanks to my family: Hüseyin, Naciye, and my wonderful sister, Çağla. I am incredibly fortunate to have such caring and attentive parents, who have consistently prioritized the well-being of their children. Their efforts to understand the perspectives I've been grappling with for years have been a testament to their love. My parents and sister offered unconditional support and understanding, especially during periods of intense study when I was less present. Their loving nature has shaped my worldview, teaching me that love and compassion, rather than profit and benefit, are the true cornerstones of human existence. They instilled this belief in me early on and have reaffirmed it through every challenge. This unwavering foundation of love and care has allowed my perspective to flourish, as I never doubted the primacy of compassion in defining a meaningful life.

DEDICATION



*For my sister-dog Arya,
who never needed words to teach me patience,
and whose quiet gaze, blooming from her naturally kohl-lined eyes,
reminded me that some forms of understanding
do not ask to be explained.*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Western philosophy is a map of divisions. At its core lies the human/animal divide. I argue that this boundary corresponds to the Cartesian split between body and mind, as well as the political division between proprietor and property. As discussed by Jacques Derrida (2008) Western philosophy traditionally defines the proper human against an empty category of animal, which in turn generates a whole range of nonhuman and not-quite-human alterities that could be owned and exploited. This distinction does not reflect a neutral ontological separation but instead stabilises hierarchies within the human itself. The proprietor/property distinction forms the second axis of this project's exploration of the metaphysical underpinnings of exclusion. Property relations are not viewed as political or legal constructs, but rather as ontological mechanisms that define the "proper human" through ownership. In liberal thought, ownership extends beyond external objects to include the body itself. This way, it grounds subjectivity in the act of possession. This framework establishes a hierarchical logic where the ability to own is equated with proper humanity and declares those excluded from ownership as expendable and justifies the commodification of life.

This project examines how these two distinctions, human/animal and proprietor/property, are intertwined with structures of exploitation. The claim that humans have a fundamental right to own is inseparable from the idea that they must first own themselves. Self-ownership is not an intrinsic attribute of humanity. This necessitates reinforcement through proprietary frameworks that differentiate between those who can fully possess themselves and those whose existence remains precarious. This threshold solidifies anthropocentrism in the political realm, as the

Proprietary Machine operates by managing access to ownership rather than guaranteeing it universally. The more a person owns, the more properly human they become. This logic extends beyond the human/animal divide and puts ownership as a foundation of political legitimacy and reinforces exclusion and hierarchy. Through these axes, governance mechanisms tie humanity's definition to acts of ownership and control, and structure it with systemic violence and exclusion.

1.1 The human/animal divide and the stratification of humanity

In the second chapter, I explain that in Western philosophy, the human is almost always defined by its difference from the empty category called the animal. This distinction is not neutral; in fact, it is a negative, antithetical definition that establishes and perpetuates hierarchical divisions among human populations. By establishing the human through what it is not, Western thought has historically generated alterities by determining which beings count as fully human and which are relegated to a status closer to the animal.

I show how Derrida (2008) critiques this division in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, challenging the homogenisation of animals into a singular, undifferentiated category. However, I argue that Derrida's critique, while incisive, falls short in showing how this foundational distinction separates the human from the animal while simultaneously generating stratifications within the human category itself. Instead of treating the human as a stable category later fractured by exclusion, one needs to acknowledge the fact that the human category was never homogenous to begin with. I argue that it was already stratified through pre-existing hierarchies, which the human/animal divide later stabilised and justified. This brings the chapter to critically engage with Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* (Heidegger, 2010),

illustrating how his framework privileges a narrow, Eurocentric model of human subjectivity and reinforces the exclusion of those who do not fit into the ideal of the rational, self-possessed human. Heidegger's notion of world-poverty exemplifies that this divide operates as a structuring logic that justifies exclusion by defining certain beings as ontologically incomplete and subordinate. By deconstructing these conceptual foundations, I clarify the political ramifications of anthropocentrism in justifying the subjugation of animals as well as structuring intra-human hierarchies based on qualities like language, reason, morality, and self-mastery. This chapter shows that the human/animal divide operates less as a neutral ontological distinction and more as a political mechanism for organising material inequality. It also establishes the foundation for the third chapter, which transitions from the conceptualisation of humanity to demonstrating how property serves as the principal signifier of the proper human.

1.2 Property, ownership, and the making of the Ownable

In the third chapter, I focus on a particular metaphysical construct that defines the properties of being human: the right to own. In Locke (1980) and Hegel (2013) humans are defined as superior to animals because they possess the ability and the right to own. This right to own is positioned as an intrinsic quality of humanness that grants humans ownership over their bodies and extends outward to the rest of the world, including animals, land, and even, historically, other humans. The human is the owner, and the owner is the human.

I argue that this definition is not limited to legitimising exploitation; it actively enables, systematises, and implants it as a governing logic. The distinction between owner and owned constitutes a primary axis of stratification that sustains

broader hierarchies and frames domination as both necessary and enforceable. It draws a line between those deemed fully human, whose right to property is unquestioned, and those excluded from that status, whose bodies and labour become sites of appropriation and control. The right to own represents a significant divide as it enables exploitation and promotes it actively. Ownership transcends being a privilege of humans and serves as a criterion for defining humanness. To be a proper human is equated with the acts of exercising control over the world, moulding it, extracting resources from it, and manipulating it according to one's will.

If language were the primary divide, animals would merely be voiceless and therefore excluded from political life. If reason were the measure, their existence would be bound to the regulations imposed by the rational man. If morality were the distinguishing factor, they would need to be controlled, disciplined, or civilised. But the divide of ownership operates more radically by positioning exploitation as legitimate and necessary. Property divides beings into owners and the owned. This division makes exploitation foundational rather than optional. The justification for human ownership of oneself and others rests on the premise that humans inherently possess the capability and right to own. When this capacity for ownership is considered the defining characteristic of humanity, nonhuman entities are consequently viewed as incapable of ownership, lacking such rights, and are relegated to the status of property, subject to human ownership. The world is split into two categories, and there is no middle ground: one is either a proprietor or property.

This logic extends far beyond the human/animal divide. When property becomes the signifier of being human, the more a person owns, the more properly human they become. This construct is not confined to philosophy as well. It

functions as a political and economic force that has driven conquest, colonial expansion, and environmental destruction. The ideological foundation of colonialism rests on the notion that humans, as owners, have a natural right to subdue the earth and extract from it. Because ownership is posited as the defining trait of humanity, domination becomes permissible but, more importantly, central to the realisation of humanness. The more land is seized, the more resources are exploited, the more civilisations are absorbed into the domain of ownership, the more humanity is realised. This is why space exploration is celebrated as a triumph of humankind; the possibility of colonising other planets is framed as an inevitable extension of what it means to be human, an act of progress. The logic of ownership inherently demands progression and expansion.

1.3 The proprietary machine

In the fourth chapter, I focus on the relationship between anthropocentrism and property, which ultimately generates the conditions of possibility and legitimacy of exploitation. The claim that humans have a fundamental right to own is inseparable from the idea that they must first own themselves. This notion, central to thinkers like Locke, frames self-ownership as a prerequisite for political legitimacy. The body becomes a form of property, defined by possession and the need for protection from others. Self-ownership is neither neutral nor inherent; it requires justification and continuous reinforcement through political structures like the social contract.

Moreover, self-ownership is never homogeneously distributed, as its very function is to create a threshold that stratifies who can fully possess themselves and who remains exposed to commodification. This threshold enables property to solidify anthropocentrism in the political realm, as sovereignty operates by managing access

to ownership rather than guaranteeing it universally. Once this framework is established, ownership forms the legitimate subject. The ownership of land, objects, resources, and even other people is a consequence of this status. The framework secures ownership and establishes it as the basis of political order. It perpetuates both exclusion and hierarchy.

Analysing the works of Locke and Hegel reveals that the concept of humanity transcends self-ownership and extends into the external world. What a person possesses becomes a part of them; property serves as an extension of the self, confirming and materialising one's humanity. Yet this extension is never impartial. It functions as a mechanism of differentiation, determining whose ownership is recognised as legitimate and whose existence remains precarious, always at risk of being turned into property. This logic is sanctioned and protected by the sovereign power, which grants individuals the right to own themselves and the external world in exchange for submission to political authority. However, this right is not extended equally to all. The social contract does not malfunction here; it reaches its intended conclusion.

But how does this logic account for colonial expansion and slavery? If every human had the right to own their own body and freedom, then slavery should be unthinkable. The social contract, which supposedly guarantees security and protection, also functions as a mechanism of exclusion. When an individual's rights are violated, when their life is taken, their property stolen, the one who commits the crime is punished, stripped of their belongings and freedom, and placed under sovereign control. The social contract is fundamentally premised on the notion that noncompliance leads to exclusion from the contract, while also being justified by the intrinsic rights to bodily autonomy and property ownership. This contradiction

reveals that the right to own is never simply a political guarantee; it is a contingent privilege that secures its legitimacy by establishing those who exist outside of it, those who remain ownable. Here, the political force of anthropocentrism becomes clear. Not all biological humans are equally recognised. Some are excluded from the domain of full self-ownership and rendered ownable. Hence the unequal grant of ownership is the contract's intended endpoint, not a deviation from it. Exclusion is written into the social contract from the outset.

Even those who possess the proper qualities of humanness are still subject to sovereign control, as their lives are transformed into objects of political management. Agamben describes sovereignty as a logic of exclusion. From the perspective of the Proprietary Machine, however, exclusion extends beyond political abandonment and involves the fabrication of ownability. It has to do with regulating who can own and who can be owned. This distinction elucidates the operation of sovereignty, not solely as a framework of bare life but as a system that generates and sustains proprietary divisions. The social contract appears as an agreement between equals, but in essence, it organises a hierarchy. Some are fully recognised as owners, while others exist in partial or denied possession, and their lives become subject to commodification, exploitation, and disposal¹.

The focus of this critique is the modern form of capitalist domination that arises when Western metaphysics, human supremacy, and private property fuse into a single ontological regime. Earlier sovereign power could hunt, tame, or seize, actions

¹ While the main text examines the proprietary hierarchy anchored in the classical social contract, other critiques show that the contract form also organises different axes of domination. Pateman (1988) argues that the pact rests on a prior sexual agreement that upholds male authority. Mills (1997) identifies a racial accord that establishes white supremacy. Decolonial scholars such as Quijano (2000) and Coulthard (2014) trace a "colonial contract" that legitimates Indigenous dispossession, while disability theorists including Tremain (2020) and Puar (2017) outline an "ableist contract" whose imagined contractor is autonomous and able-bodied. Together, these analyses suggest that gender, race, empire, and ability permeate the contract tradition from its inception.

kept episodic and linked to divine or feudal privilege. Modernity marks a qualitative break. Scientific reason, technical mastery, and the will to improve reappear as proofs of a higher mode of being and as warrants for ownership. At that point the Human / Animal divide and the legal idea of possession lock together. Humanity presents itself as a unique capacity-right-duty to appropriate, while everything outside that capacity sinks to the status of stock.

The rupture shows itself along two entwined axes. One axis shifts from hunting and sporadic animal use to industrial breeding and slaughter. Derrida notes this passage as a historical turning point. Animals move from occasional domination to permanent biological stock bred for consumption. Granting life or taking life, once a sovereign privilege, becomes continuous biopolitical management of living capital. A state of exception settles into a standing order where survival loses intrinsic worth and turns into commodity. Derrida traces this shift to what he calls *carnophallogocentrism*, a logic that privileges the male, the logos, and carnivorous mastery; I treat this same apparatus as one that abstracts the Animal and recasts it as property.

The second axis converts older ideas of possession into absolute private ownership. Locke offers a theological-secular rationale: God gave the earth to the industrious and rational, so labour that improves nature creates exclusive title. This claim reclassifies Indigenous territories judged waste or unimproved as vacant assets and reduces their inhabitants to savages who may be dispossessed or enslaved. Hegel strengthens the argument. The rational will realises itself by stamping purpose on external objects; property becomes the first actualisation of freedom. A person without property remains an abstract potential. Those who bestow soul on land or animals stand as world-historical agents. Together Locke and Hegel equate human

identity with proprietorship. The human is the owner; the owner is the human.

Communities not yet organised around property based civil life fall into ontological limbo and may be owned.

The proprietary code proves elastic. Formal abolition, decolonisation, and civil rights enlarge the group counted as proprietors, yet the owner / owned split endures. Chattel slavery mutates into carceral labour contracts and debt bondage. Public slaughter shifts inside industrial abattoirs. Algorithmic systems abstract entire populations into data sets for extraction. Each adaptation widens the circle of the proper human while preserving a margin of disposable life: billions of non-human animals, racialised bodies pressed into low-wage supply chains, ecosystems stripped beyond recovery. Within this structure Blackness functions as a fundamental exclusion that fixes the limits of the proper human through dispossession. Indigenous relations to land stand as evidence of incapacity. Subjects tagged idle or unproductive occupy the outer edge of personhood. The Proprietary Machine is neither blind to race nor neutral. It relies on racial and colonial difference to guard the border between owner and ownable and to renew its authority.

The Proprietary Machine links Western metaphysics, human supremacy, and property in a self-sustaining chain. Taken together, these themes crystallise into five interconnected operations. The Proprietary Machine (1) enables appropriation; it splits existence into proprietor and ownable object and thus turns land, animals, and many humans into commodities; (2) it grants moral warrant; ownership and reason signify proper humanity, so those judged proper command and consume; (3) it makes violence normal; law, markets, and science treat dispossession as routine; (4) it moulds subjectivities; freedom appears bound to mastery and accumulation, so worth equals property; (5) it polices the proper / improper line; colonial, racial, and species

hierarchies decide who may own and who must be owned. Modern progress narratives such as industrial prosperity, scientific conquest, limitless markets, celebrate perpetual appropriation. Species narcissism matches human flourishing with endless extraction. The Machine's five operations, enabling appropriation, granting warrant, normalising violence, moulding subjectivities, policing the proper / improper line appear here as traceable mechanisms of capitalist governance. A hierarchy once grounded in theology becomes secular, technical, and global until domination reads as duty. Reform that shifts property around while leaving ownership itself intact cannot break this architecture. Emancipation requires an ontological reorientation that rejects the equation of being with possessing and opens space for forms of life rooted in reciprocity rather than extraction.

1.4 Theoretical context and intervention

The contemporary scholarship that addresses structures of property, life beyond humans, and the mechanisms of exclusion is presented in three distinct but intersecting pathways: posthumanism, critical property theories, and colonial/black studies. This project positions itself at their convergence and claims that the Proprietary Machine proposes a synthesising perspective. The concept of property connects exclusion with the practice of reducing beings to ownable objects. The Proprietary Machine is defined as a dynamic apparatus that actively produces and reconfigures subjects and identities and outlines the boundaries of ownable and owner. Although this study engages insights from critical property theories and race/colonial theory, its primary intellectual ground lies in extending and grounding the critiques of human exceptionalism.

The first and the primary track encompasses posthumanist theories and the field of new materialism. Thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Cary Wolfe and Rosi Braidotti criticised prominently the humanist vanity of exceptionalism by deconstructing the stable and universal category of the human. Posthumanism reveals the anthropocentric biases that underpin Western metaphysics or the exclusionary construction of structural others against which the proper human is defined (Braidotti, 2013; Ferrando, 2020; D. Haraway, 2006; D. J. Haraway, 2008; Wolfe, 2003). New materialists, building on these critiques, emphasise the agency and vibrancy of matter and advocate for a shift away from subject-object dualisms and toward relational ontologies (Bennett, 2010; Braidotti, 2002). Even though posthumanism successfully diagnoses the ideology of human supremacy and new materialism offers alternative ontological frameworks, the following question still persists: How exactly does this abstract exceptionalism manifest in tangible, persistent systems of domination, exploitation, and dispossession on a global scale? This dissertation contends that the absent analytical connection is the pervasive logic of property, functioning through what I name the Proprietary Machine. Neglecting the foundations of exploitation that emerge from exclusion, political analysis fails to recognise the fundamental mechanism driving the quest for alternative frameworks, thereby disregarding the profound critique these frameworks intend to confront.

The second track is critical property scholars, ranging from C.B. Macpherson's concept of possessive individualism to Cheryl Harris's examination of property, systematically defines how ownership establishes social hierarchies. Harris(1993) explicitly characterises whiteness as property, distinguishing it as a right to exclude and underscoring that property law institutionalised racial hierarchy by defining who could own and who was owned. Brenna Bhandar (2018) expands

this argument to colonial contexts, demonstrating how colonial property laws generated racial subjects by directly associating the ontological status of humanity with the ability to possess property. However, these critical analyses frequently overlook profound metaphysical questions regarding why ownership specifically arises as the fundamental indicator of personhood and sovereignty.

This dissertation addresses explicitly this gap by examining the philosophical lineage of property through Locke and Hegel, illustrating that Western metaphysics initially characterises the Human by negating an indistinct Animal category and subsequently establishes ownership as the fundamental characteristic that elevates proper humans above a residual class considered appropriable. It offers essential property studies with an ontological basis, elucidating how the historical construction of property as a predominant social relation was made possible.

To explore this connection, my work employs a specific genealogical methodology and examines the foundational aspects of Western metaphysical and political thought. This dissertation's primary analysis is intentionally grounded in the works of thinkers such as Derrida, Heidegger, and Agamben, who deconstruct the Human/Animal binary and its biopolitical ramifications, as well as Locke and Hegel, who are instrumental in establishing the connection between identity, freedom, and property, alongside significant figures in Black studies who expose the racialised manifestation of these proprietary logics. This targeted engagement seeks to unearth the fundamental structure of the intellectual terrain that current critiques examine.

The third track of his project addresses the criticisms from colonial and race studies regarding theories of modern governance. This genealogical investigation is particularly relevant when examining how current theories of modern governance and its exclusionary principles are being reconsidered. Foucault's seminal analysis of

state racism and biopolitics, although innovative, has been critiqued by several scholars for rendering the population as homogenous, failing to comprehensively address the fundamental racial dimension that underpins and facilitates particular manifestations of biopower (Jackson, 2020; Mbembe, 2019; Stoler, 2004).

Simultaneously, and importantly for this thesis, Black studies scholars (e.g., Wynter, Hartman, Weheliye, Sexton) have presented significant critiques of theorists such as Agamben. Agamben's notion of bare life elucidates states of exception; however, his framework is frequently criticised for generalising this condition without sufficiently addressing the particular historical and ontological experiences of racialised chattel slavery and its lasting legacies (Hartman, 1997; Mbembe, 2019; Weheliye, 2014). These critiques reveal the ongoing role of racial-colonial logics in classifying certain individuals as intrinsically improper, comparable to property rather than as subjects excluded from political rights.

My thesis engages with this intricate intellectual landscape by asserting that the Proprietary Machine provides a more fundamental conceptualisation of these exclusionary logics. It states that the underlying framework of contemporary governance cannot be comprehensively understood without an ontological examination that emphasises the interrelation of anthropocentrism and property logic as mutually constitutive. The Proprietary Machine initiates with the metaphysical distinction between Human and Animal, subsequently illustrating how this distinction is operationalised via the capacity-right-duty to appropriate. It thereby offers a framework that exposes the historical creation of ownable life that encompasses animals, colonised territories, and racialised humans. Thus, it is able to rectify the deficiencies in Agamben's scholarship, as emphasised by Black studies, by explicitly incorporating the racial and colonial aspects of governmentality through

the framework of property and ontological impropriety. Additionally, it expands posthumanist critiques of anthropocentrism by demonstrating how this anthropocentrism manifests as a material force for domination through property relations.

Hence, my research seeks to improve the theoretical frameworks of contemporary governance. It expands the essential critiques of human exceptionalism by illustrating that the Proprietary Machine is the particular, historically established mechanism that transforms anthropocentric assertions into enforceable systems of ownership and control. The ontological separation of human from animal gains political and economic significance when combined with the ability and entitlement to possess, and ultimately, the duty to appropriate. This thesis reveals the persistent operational logic that sustains the hierarchies which posthumanism, new materialism, and critical race and colonial theories aim to deconstruct. It elucidates the profound ontological framework that underlies the possessive individualism contested by new materialists by demonstrating how this framework actively generates the ownable subjects and objects that inhabit our reality. Without comprehending the Proprietary Machine and its historical-philosophical framework, attempts to advance towards more relational or entangled ethics may underestimate the significant structural and metaphysical transformations necessary.

In conclusion, this thesis politicises Derrida, diversifies and contextualises Agamben, and provides an ontological foundation for race and colonial theories. The innovation of the Proprietary Machine concept resides in its integrative ability to elucidate the constitution of these seemingly disparate domains via a fundamental ontological mechanism. This dissertation asserts that to achieve a radical shift from

exploitative and exclusionary worldviews, as suggested by indigenous, posthuman, and new materialist theorists, it is essential to thoroughly comprehend and dismantle the Proprietary Machine that perpetuates division in our world.



CHAPTER 2

DECONSTRUCTING THE ANIMAL OTHER

This chapter examines the human/animal distinction inherent within Western philosophy. The subject at hand might seem as if animal studies should be the focus at first glance. However, it is not my intention to address the ethical consequences of this division over animals alone. This work does not concentrate on animal rights. Instead, it examines the philosophical works that challenge the categories of human and animal that underpin the subject-object relationships. I argue in this project that the human/animal divide corresponds to mind/body, subject/object and ultimately proprietor/property divisions. This chapter commences with an examination of the anthropocentric biases present in Western metaphysics, followed by an introduction to the idea of property in the subsequent chapter, and combining them in the last chapter to explain how the ontological exclusion of animals leads to the exploitation of othered humans.

Jacques Derrida's critique of Western metaphysics is central to this examination of ontological division. Derrida's seminar (2008) titled *The Animal That Therefore I Am* begins with interrogating the classification of the concept of Animal. It illustrates how the Animal Other determines the limits of the proper human. I must clarify that in Derrida's argumentation, and in mine, the premise is not that animals possess a wide range of capabilities inherent to human beings; thus, this distinction is fictitious. Or it is not the case that there is no distinguishing characteristic that separates humans from other beings. Nonetheless, Derrida sometimes diverges from the perspective I employ in the project, which is to show the problematic of exclusionary description of humans as a species. The fundamental common point of our approaches, however, is that defining the human by juxtaposing it against the

empty category known as the Animal has severe ramifications. Defining the human through its unique qualities has always been premised on a chasm between the categories of human and the rest of the creatures in Western metaphysics. The outcome, I argue, is a hierarchy dominated by proper humans between the two sides of this divide. I contend that this is what first enables and then justifies the conduct of humans towards other humans and nonhuman animals, because it hierarchically cements the essence of being human in a particular position.

2.1 The human/animal divide in Western metaphysics

To demonstrate the pervasive break between humans and animals, it is essential to analyse how the practice of animal categorisation influences nearly all ontological assertions in Western philosophy. In the aforementioned seminar, Derrida (2008, p. 5) posits that animals cannot be considered naked, as they exist in a perpetual state of nudity. Humans perceive nudity because they are conditioned to wear clothing. This argument by Derrida mimics the anthropocentric definitions of humans, as Derrida, too, establishes a clear separation between humans and animals. Derrida's argument, however, originates from being observed naked by a cat. Derrida acknowledges this divide by first recognising that cats possess vision; they are not solely conditioned to exhibit feline behaviours but have distinct senses of their own. By denying cats and animals in general the capacity to sense, comprehend, and act based on their perceptions, while attributing these abilities solely to humans, a hierarchical relationship is created between humanity and nature. Consequently, he critiques certain philosophers for never having been witnessed by a cat, illustrating that their failure to attribute perception to animals, alongside their comprehension of humans, arises from a distinction that encompasses all existence (Derrida, 2008, p. 13). The

majority of Western philosophers distinguish humans by their ability to discern existence and name existing things. The act of classifying animals as a category is a quality that humans attribute to themselves as a unique characteristic. Humans may occasionally identify as animals in biological contexts; however, the designation of the animal is applied explicitly to non-human animals.

Derrida states that, despite their differences, Western philosophers consistently prioritise the human by assigning it a unique, distinguishing signifier, such as reason, language, soul, or moral autonomy, that underpins their individual frameworks for conceptualising life (Derrida, 2008, p. 40). This signifier enables a foundational distinction between humans and animals, which allows nonhuman life to be grouped into a residual category defined by what it lacks. I argue that this distinction yields three main effects. First, it encapsulates the conviction that, similar to Adam, the first human, humans uniquely possess the ability to define and impose order onto the world through language and categorisation. It is as though entities in the universe await designation by the intelligent species destined to evolve. Humans position themselves at the centre of all classifications and assign labels based on this hierarchy. For example, observe how the vast animal kingdom, from caterpillars to orangutans, is grouped under the umbrella term animal, which is frequently contrasted with the human when emphasising the latter's characteristics and entitlements. With these humanist presumptions, humans are once again at the centre of the universe post-Copernicus. The second implication of this distinction is the fact that violence caused by the limitations it imposes on being proper does not target animals alone. As it designates certain qualities as human-making, the entities that lack those qualities are deemed inferior, even if they are biologically human. Third, I argue that this division contributes to a dichotomy of property relations in which the

more a creature conforms to the norm of human ontology, the more it is privileged to possess. I like to underscore that this is produced by the presumed abyss between the categories of human and animal. It follows from this ontological claim that the less humanlike a creature is, the more it should be considered as a potential property of the human, the proprietor. These three main consequences of anthropocentric ontology generate a way of thinking about existence that is based on exclusion and privilege, which I further explore in the subsequent chapters.

Although Derrida deconstructs this main trajectory of Western philosophy, he does not focus on its political impact on the lives of human beings. His critique quietly yearns for an approach that confronts the human category's fractures, which stem from the initial split between human and animal. To address this, one must examine how anthropocentrism initially categorises humans into proper and improper groups, and how this exclusionary classification subsequently legitimises exploitation through proprietary logic. I argue that there is another line of abyss that turns this exclusion into exploitation. It bases the ontology of human on a logic of property relations. The exclusionary logic of anthropocentrism, together with the relations of property, exposes human beings who are deemed not sufficiently human to violence. The rationale for colonial practices, slavery, and the treatment of immigrants and minorities is predicated on this hierarchical connection, which should be regarded as a continuum of violence-enabling systems. The commodification of the bodies of humans and the justification for the exploitation dimension are discussed in the following chapters of the project. This chapter focuses on anthropocentrism that generates the initial exclusion of some forms of being whose exploitation is legitimised by the second step, which is the property logic. This exclusionary logic also stratifies humanity, a concept that Derrida does not

explore in depth. To demonstrate how this seemingly abstract philosophical distinction evolves into a mechanism that enables and justifies exploitation, this chapter examines the first leg of the argument: the human/animal divide.

Given that the anthropocentrism critique does not contend that there is no distinction between humans and other species, what assertion does it propose instead? According to Derrida, there are several distinctions between humans and other species (Derrida, 2008, p. 126). The criticism is to show that the specific differences between humans and animals have universal implications for defining what it means to be human. This limiting conception of the proper human asserts that what distinguishes humans from other animals is their non-animal characteristics. This paradigm, while embracing the superiority of humans, also imposes a rigid and inescapable interpretation of existing as a proper human. Any ontology based on a distinction between humans and animals employs a limited conception of humanity, categorising all else as fundamentally animalistic.

It is evident that the argument does not deny the existence of distinctions between animals and humans; rather, it asserts that there is no fundamental distinction with the singular category of Animal, but rather a variety of disparities among specific species. Derrida proposes a break with the dominant philosophical tradition, which maintains that there is a fixed and essential abyss between humans and animals, a break that reveals anthropocentric subjectivity as historically contingent, conceptually unstable, and sustained through acts of exclusion. According to Derrida, the so-called dividing line is not a chasm with two sharp edges, with human and the animal on opposite sides (Derrida, 2008, p. 30). I agree with Derrida that no entity, such as the animal, exists beyond the scope of human perception. The category of the animal is a definitional shot in the dark. I argue that

what is not human is like a distorted reflection on a river: it offers no substance of its own, only a warped echo of the human. Whatever traits of humanity appear in it are deemed derivative, never as unique or integral as those claimed by the proper human. This structure defines the human through negation; the concept is incomplete because it rests on the disavowal of an unstable other instead of a positive essence.

The concept of humanity was predominantly shaped by the subjectivity of the Western rational man. When the concept of human is historically constructed by a civilization engaged in colonizing the Earth, the exclusionary and proprietary logics of that civilization inevitably overrepresent and distort this very category.

Overrepresentation, in this context, refers to the phenomenon in which the Western, white, masculine, rational subject positions itself as the central figure of the term human, establishing itself as the unchallenged standard. This process diminishes diversity and depicts all alternative existences as inferior or abnormal. The excess of its presence, intertwined with an assertion of proper humanity, inevitably produces the concept of an Other, whose exclusion is fundamental to the identity it represents. Essentially, what overrepresentation does is to fold the multiplicity of being human into its own silhouette and exclude the rest. The overrepresentation, together with the antithetical definition of the proper human, is bound to generate a human Other. A singular, overarching term that delineates human characteristics cannot be established independently of the category of Other; attempting to do so is destined to generate Otherness. As there are other potential conduits to comprehending existence, there are infinitely different ways of being human. What is proper to human, then, should not be confined to the figure of the Rational Man, particularly because this figure was defined by those who claimed to represent them. I argue that this overrepresentation coincides with the exclusionary logic of anthropocentrism.

Within this framework, those who do not conform to the silhouette of the rational man are marked as improper, a status aligned with that of the excluded animal. Hence the animalisation of the othered, and justification of its exclusion and exploitation.

2.2 Derrida and the limit of anthropocentric critique

As stated in the previous section, Derrida challenges Western philosophy's habit of drawing sharp distinctions between humans and nonhumans, which grant humans an elevated status. In this section, I argue that this critique must be conducted in a way that avoids certain pitfalls and necessitates a more robust framework for investigating the alterities that anthropocentrism generates within the category of the human. I contend that the ontological sedimentation of the definition of being human occurs at the expense of the othered through this process. The definition not only constrains our comprehension of existence but also positions humans at the apex of a hierarchy, gifted with the capability and privilege to dominate the rest. This is important to demonstrate because I claim that this first hierarchical moment of exclusion makes proprietary relations potentially exist. The fundamental nature of these relations exposes animals and the human Others to appropriation and exploitation. I contend that the alterities we observe within contemporary governance are generated by this exclusionary logic. Derrida's analysis of Western metaphysics aims to keep the proper human from subsuming the animal, yet it ultimately does not succeed. The primary objective of Derrida's seminar is to reveal that the distinction between humans and animals obscures the inherent cruelty and primal violence of humanity towards nature. This objective occasionally leads him to deviate from the fundamental insights derivable from his framework. I contend that the critique of

anthropocentrism needs to emphasise its exclusionary rationale. The criticism must persist in illustrating the fundamental nature of this logic, exhibiting a decisive moment for the otherisation of humans.

Derrida's initial argument concerns the normalisation and institutionalisation of violence against animals, which has escalated with technological advancements and industrialisation. (Derrida, 2008, p. 392). He asserts that the extensive subjection of animals signifies a historical turning point. This alteration corresponds to the mitigation of animal cruelty for the benefit of the proper human. The recent surge in violence against animals demonstrates that the gulf between humans and nonhuman animals has reached an unprecedented level.

To demonstrate the evolution of the ways in which humans engage with animals, I draw a comparison to the historical changes in managing human life. This comparison highlights how these changes have both facilitated and perpetuated a growing divide between animals and humans. The dissertation's scope does not encompass a comprehensive analysis of the parallels and distinctions in human-animal relationships or interpersonal dynamics. However, the purpose of drawing this parallel between the evolution of governance and the intensification of animal cruelty is to illuminate the shared mechanisms that structure both phenomena. What alterations occurred in the dynamic between humans and animals? Engaging in wildlife hunting involves both preserving and ending lives. It mirrors the traditional sovereign authority, namely the power to grant life and take it away. Taming can be compared to a form of control that dictates how beings should live according to a dominant logic of order, a precursor to more systematic forms of management. Domesticating and industrial farming of the animal might be seen as a normalisation of control, a process through which animals are no longer occasional resources but

permanently positioned as biological stock. The objective of this action is to form a stock from a herd. Here we can witness the reduction of animals' existence to mere commodities, perpetually bred and murdered for human consumption. The motives and strategies underlying animal cruelty have experienced a substantial shift, escalating to an extreme degree, similar to the rise of the political exploitation of life with the advent of capitalism. The exploitation of animal life, once occasional, is now established as a systemic necessity. Agamben's concept of the state of exception argues that biopolitics has been consistently underpinning political existence; however, modernity transforms the exception into a perpetual state (Agamben, 1998). For both humans and animals, existence is progressively regulated as just survival, devoid of inherent worth and treated as a commodity.

Like Derrida (2011), I also argue that something qualitatively new has emerged in modernity and that biopolitical management cannot be examined as an extension of earlier sovereign structures. It should be seen as a rupture through the development of the *phallogocentric* apparatus. Within this machine, the human subject asserts itself through the complete dominance and instrumentalisation of the nonhuman. Agamben's perspective, while accounting for the exclusionary dimension of anthropocentrism within human beings, insists too much upon a homogenous and eternal concept of exclusion that cuts through any other differentiating factors. In the final chapter, I elaborate further on the shortcomings I pinpoint in his theory. Derrida's analysis touches on the consequences of limiting the ontology of the human by excluding the animal. The second hypothesis of Derrida's critique concerns the abyss between nature and human:

Limitrophy is therefore my subject. Not just because it will concern what sprouts or grows at the limit, round the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what feeds *the limit*, generates it, raises it, and complicates it. Whatever I will say is designed, certainly not to efface the limit, but to multiply its

figures, to complicate, thicken, delinearize, fold, and divide the line precisely by making it increase and multiply. (Derrida, 2008, p. 397)

At the end of the first seminar, Derrida begins to openly problematise the divisive logic of anthropocentrism. He argues that the abyss that is assigned between human and nature is generative of a structure that limits the human as well. His main purpose is to multiply the trenches that were universalised and singular when defining the animal. As I claimed previously, Derrida often ambiguates this central point and its supporting argument. He contends that the definitive distinction between the categories of human and animal should be eliminated. It is essential to diversify these distinctions in a more accurate manner, according to him. What could be the rationale behind this move? It is not explicitly clarified by him. It is evident that the issue lies not in the notion that humans, as a singular species, possess unique qualities that distinguish them from other species. The hierarchy arises from specific differences that establish a distinct mode of existence, distinguishing humans from animals. Those dividing lines define the proper way of existing as a human. It is crucial to examine the fundamental points of divergence that ideologise and ontologise appropriate modes of human existence. Therefore, the critique must concentrate on the hierarchical dynamics that anthropocentrism establishes both within the human category and in the comprehension of life. It must establish that the assumption of specific distinctions between humans and other species has significant implications for defining the essential characteristics of humanity. Therefore, it is imperative to demonstrate that a singular point of division between humans and animals does not exist. The signifiers intended to define the inherent essence of being human homogenise the possibilities of existing. The complexities inherent in both sides of this split cannot be adequately captured through direct comparison.

2.3 The ontological violence of human distinction

When the logic of exclusion that defines the proper way of being human is placed at the centre of the critique of anthropocentrism, as I propose, it opens new avenues for examining how hierarchy, violence, and possession are sustained. The notion that humans are differentiated from other beings by their non-animalistic traits offers a constrained perspective on humanity. An ontology that begins with a distinction between humans and animals fosters a restricted understanding of humanity and classifies everything else as fundamentally bestial. I open the section with Heidegger because his project reveals the central problem I want to address he sets out to break with Western epistemology and ontotheology, yet he still writes a fresh metaphysics that rests on a strict human–animal divide. This tension makes his work an ideal starting point; it makes plain how even a thinker who criticises Cartesian dualism can reinstall the same exclusionary logic that sustains hierarchy, violence, and possession. Derrida critiques Heidegger's "Being and Time" in this manner. In his foundational work, Heidegger (2010) seeks to eliminate ontotheologies from philosophy, as he considers them the basis of Western thought. He contends that Western metaphysics conflates being with existence, thus restricting cognition to the domain of objects as a singular entity. For Heidegger, due to the lack of a definitive institution that constitutes human essence, Western philosophy has depended on theological and transcendental entities, such as deities, as the source of existence. He proposes an alternative method for defining the essence of existence to dissociate from the Cartesian heritage. According to his argument, the ability to understand and reflect on one's own existence is the distinguishing feature of a proper human. Heidegger (2010) puts forward that, unlike humans, animals inhabit a condition of poverty regarding their engagement with the world. Although they exhibit vitality,

they do not possess the ability to fully understand the concepts of time and existence as humans do. Derrida's opposition constitutes a thorough deconstruction of Heidegger's arguments, exposing the hierarchical Cartesian dualism present in his proposals. Derrida asserts that Heidegger's critique is ultimately inadequate; what he does is to delineate the essence of humanity through an alternative paradigm (Derrida, 2008, p. 407). From Derrida's challenge to Heidegger, it can be derived that the distinction between humans and animals arises from the logocentric tendencies common in Western philosophical discourse that seeks to define the essence of humanity. The lack of human essence is being compensated by its distinction from animal Others. Consequently, due to the absence of a singular defining characteristic for humanity as a species, there exists no predetermined essence of humans, leading to a logic of exclusion through differentiation. I agree that to transcend dichotomous ontological assumptions, as Heidegger attempts yet fails, one must depart from the doctrinal tradition that prioritizes human existence over other forms of being through distinctive abilities. Hence, in order to reveal the systemic violence exerted against the human Others, I argue we need to dismantle the exclusionary logic of Western metaphysics.

To address this fundamental hierarchical dualism, it is necessary to go beyond simplifying it to a biological continuity and a metaphysical opposition, as Leonard Lawlor elucidates in his article "Animals Have No Hand." Lawlor (2007) demonstrates how Heidegger's efforts to avoid deviating from the tradition are unsuccessful when it comes to Cartesian dualism. According to Heidegger, animals cannot be considered privileged beings since they lack the ability to reflect on their own existence. Consciousness of mortality compels humans to contemplate existence, making them proper sentient beings. By dismantling this differentiation

and introducing uncertainty and ambiguity, the entire framework of Heidegger's ideas on existence becomes unstable (Lawlor, 2007, p. 45). Heidegger argues that thinking is not solely a conceptual occurrence but rather necessitates a fundamental involvement with reality. In his view, genuine cognition precedes the abstract comprehension of existence, and the act of experiencing being necessitates more than plain conceptualisation (Heidegger, 2010, p. 13). Essentially, Heidegger contends that Western philosophy excessively prioritises rationality and cognition, neglecting the broader context that influences, creates, and constrains such cognitive processes, namely, the state of existing in the universe. This requires establishing a profound and instinctive connection with our own existence. According to Heidegger's perspective, animals, even if they possess the ability to understand their existence, have a limited understanding of the universe. Due to animals' lack of distinctly human experiences, consciousness of mortality, reflective contemplation on existence, and philosophical inquiry into being, a profound distance exists between them and humans. Heidegger elucidates this distinction by examining the presence of hands, which constitute a distinctive organ exclusive to humans. Hands, according to Heidegger, are not intended for grasping but rather for gesturing (Lawlor, 2007, p. 47). Lawlor asserts that the prehensile organs of nonhuman animals are diametrically opposed to those of humans. The hands are the means by which humans communicate and disclose the world.

It is important to question here whether it is this distinction of organs that generates the uniqueness of humans, or their usage by humans? Does the unique presence of hands in humans biologically determine their way of being? Does it only show the authenticity of human existence, or does it create the authenticity? For Heidegger, the difference between humans and animals is language, the complexity

and authenticity of comprehending their existence in connection with their surroundings. Lawlor demonstrates clearly that Heidegger argues animals are not able to do phenomenology as they lack the ability to access things as such. They are devoid of language, which transcends conceptual comprehension as it necessitates preconceptual engagement with existence and are unable to undergo the experience of being as such. Derrida queries how, by applying this logic, we can distinguish between living and non-living things. As for Heidegger, lifeless objects are without world, animals are poor in world, and humans are world-forming (Heidegger, 1995, p. 177). Being poor in the world and being world-forming is the abyss that separates animals from humans. According to Derrida, if animals are poor in the world, they must at least have some world, some spirit (Derrida, 1989, p. 48). Animals are different from stones, from the lifeless beings. They must contain some form of connection with existence, some spirit, but their connections must also be so limited that they must also be poor in the world. However, Heidegger rejects the idea that the difference between humans and animals is a difference of degree, i.e., he insists on the abyssal gap between humans and animals. The difference is not about the amount, but it is an essential difference. The animal lacks world, in other words, it is the lack of experiencing things as such that separates animals from humans. This difference is a lack of essence, not degree (Heidegger, 1995, p. 194). Humans have a distinctive relation with being. According to Derrida, in order to separate humans from lifeless beings, there must be an absolute difference; they must have a positive content of being, while also for animals this difference should amount to an infinite poverty from that of human experience (Derrida, 1989, p. 49). For Heidegger, animals can have some world, some power; however, that power is not actualised,

which represents the essential lack that they have. This also means humans, too, may be deprived of the world as their power may not always be actualised.

This critique is not in itself useful if one is not trying to refute the phenomenology of Heidegger. But it presents a useful method for analysing and dismantling a number of anthropocentric logics inscribed in philosophical thinking. I argue that what is attributed to the animals and not to the lifeless objects is contained in being human, since a part of the human is nature. Furthermore, for anthropocentrism to function, the human must be defined by a distinguishing trait, by something that sets it apart from the animal and establishes a hierarchy. However, this frequently results in a definition of what constitutes a proper human being. They are also available to different people in varying degrees. While rejecting a degree-based distinction between animals and humans, one denies being human to those who do not have full access to the attributions that actualise their humanness. Heidegger's argument seeks to avoid reducing the discussion to biological continuity while emphasising that the distinction is based on substance rather than degree. He employs a form of separationism characterised by a metaphysical opposition, which he initially aimed to dismantle through his argumentation against Western philosophy. Placing animals between the lifeless beings and humans requires a negation of animal life and a privation of human existence. Heidegger cannot avoid another form of anthropocentrism by contrasting human and animal through metaphysical frameworks. It necessitates the rejection of the majority of the inherent abilities of most animals to privatise human existence. For example, Lawlor's article (2007) illustrates that animals demonstrate auto-affection by recognising their own species, a capacity that Heidegger neglects when delineating their profound distinction from humans. It follows that dismissing this form of self-recognition as a

mode of experiencing being requires adherence to a metaphysical narrative in which human uniqueness is presumed and subsequently elaborated into a normative framework. I contend that this, in turn, creates a bias regarding what is appropriate for humans and what defines a human. The degree to which human populations recognise themselves as members of their species, reflect on death, connect with other beings, and engage in phenomenology varies. Heidegger would agree that every Dasein has the same existential structures in principle; what matters here is that appeals to unequal actualisation of those structures can still be used to rank beings and justify exclusion. Heidegger's project seeks to retrieve fundamental ontology from the primacy of epistemology and to describe a pre-conceptual, non-representational relation to world. Yet, by positing an essential gulf between humans and animals, he re-introduces a metaphysical opposition that undercuts this effort. The result is a framework that re-opens hierarchical gradations inside the human sphere rather than a clean, essential break between species.

2.4 The human/animal divide and alterity

This critique's significance for political theory should be examined by analysing the implications of establishing an ontology of the human based on a hierarchical relationship between humans and nonhuman animals. I suggest that this distinction reflects how philosophy constructs its arguments regarding what is inherent to being human, thereby generating various forms of alterity. The effect of ontological assumptions in philosophical traditions has concrete ramifications for political life. Excluding the animal, which was done intentionally according to Derrida, means excluding the animal within the human as an individual and as a category. This detachment from animality leads to the elimination of humanity's inherent nature.

Within this framework, nature is perceived as a collection of worldless or world-poor entities, forms of life upon which humans are justified in exercising their reason and will.

Demonstrating that animals are not as impoverished as commonly perceived is essential for understanding the meaninglessness of this categorisation. This prompts an inquiry into the necessity of such a prominent classification. The distinctions between species are so convoluted that it is difficult to justify categorising humans separately while classifying all other beings as mere animals. This division appears to be less a neutral classification and more an effort to elucidate what is assumed to be fundamental to the human condition. The endeavour to delineate humanity by its unique characteristics within the larger animal kingdom prompts a critical inquiry: Is this distinction essential? Do we not find that many of the traits considered intrinsic to humanity also include so-called ‘animalistic’ qualities?

For example, if, as Heidegger asserts, animals are deficient in their engagement with the world because they cannot perceive being, then humans are characterised as beings capable of experiencing existence. Accepting Marx's premise that animals produce solely for survival while humans produce for the sake of production itself implies that humans possess a unique capacity for creation, which in turn defines them by the way they produce.² Lacan posits that a subject's integration

² “The animal is immediately identical with its life-activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is its life-activity. Man makes his life-activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life-activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life-activity directly distinguishes man from animal life-activity. It is just because of this that he is a species being. Or it is only because he is a species being that he is a Conscious Being, i.e., that his own life is an object for him. Only because of that is his activity free activity. Estranged labor reverses this relationship, so that it is just because man is a conscious being that he makes his life-activity, his essential being, a mere means to his existence.” (Marx, 1988, p. 76)

into the Symbolic order, specifically language, defines humanity.³ If we accept this as fact, then language emerges as the primary signifier of humanity. In contrast, Freud argues that the emergence of the civilised self is due to the ego's effort to manage and suppress the drives of the Id, and that this internal regulation is essential to life in society.⁴ Within all these frameworks, a distinct characteristic is emphasised to delineate the human from the animal, thereby creating a hierarchy that favours attributes unique to humans over those that are shared or continuous with nonhuman life. The very essence of humanity resides in the lack of nonhuman animals. Western philosophy frequently characterises humans as distinct from animals, implying that they have an additional quality that distinguishes them. It positions humans as extra-animals: still animals, but with a twist, as if one more flavour had been added. I contend that this additional flavour then serves as the principal signifier of the ideal human, the distinguishing characteristic that confirms their supposed superiority, to the extent that the essence of humanity becomes indistinguishable from that singular flavour. The meaning of being human collapses into a particular signifier or capacity, one that is presumed to establish the peculiarity of the human so that the category of human is ultimately conflated with this single differentiating element. The inadequacy of these definitions of humanity notwithstanding, the method of contrasting an entity with its broader classification is an insufficient means of establishing its definition. By imposing such restrictions, the human condition is

³ “The essential I, art of human experience, that which is properly speaking the experience of the subject, that which causes the subject to exist, is to be located on the level of the emergence of the symbolic.” (Lacan, 1991, p. 219)

⁴ “Human civilization, by which I mean all those respects in which human life has raised itself above its animal status and differs from the life of beasts-and I scorn to distinguish between culture and civilization-, presents, as we know, two aspects to the observer. It includes on the one hand all the knowledge and capacity that men have acquired in order to control the forces of nature and extract its wealth for the satisfaction of human needs, and, on the other hand, all the regulations necessary in order to adjust the relations of men to one another and especially the distribution of the available wealth.” (Freud, 2001, p. 6)

elevated above that of animals and is framed as distinct and superior. The search for differences between humans and other species remains prominent. For example, if we take Derrida's observation (2008, p. 59) that the experience of nakedness appears to be unique to humans, it leads us to an important question: do shame, vulnerability, and the urge to cover one's body represent the essence of humanity? So far as we know, humans are the only species that reacts to nakedness with a sense of vulnerability. However, this does not justify claiming that shame over one's nakedness defines the proper human. The conflict between humans and nonhuman animals results in a distinct trait that is unique to the human species. When this opposition is linked to a hierarchical power structure, it becomes a justification to exert violence against nonhumans. Together, the distinction and hierarchy form a spectrum of violence that extends even within the human category. If only humans experience nakedness, the distinction becomes a capacity that separates, ranks, and disciplines.

Expanding the claimed capacities of non-human animals only exposes the arbitrary nature of this classification. To achieve a comprehensive grasp of this significant gap, it is essential to refrain from anthropomorphising or overanalysing the capabilities of nonhuman entities. The hierarchical juxtaposition of human ontology with an empty category produces a conceptual paradox that unsettles political-philosophical analysis. Because "the Animal" is constructed as a negative residue, everything that is not properly human, it has no positive predicates of its own. Philosophers fill the human side with changing identifiers (reason, language, moral autonomy, self-ownership, and so on) before sweeping the wide range of non-human life into a single remainder bucket defined only by its lack of whichever indicator is currently prevalent. Because the bucket's only content is

absence, it lacks internal coherence and cannot support any stable description. The result is an unstable concept that is still used to rank beings and justify domination. In contrast, “the Human” category is constantly replenished with criteria that fit a philosopher's framework and support their ontological claims, so it never settles into a fixed essence. The problem is not its fluctuating boundaries, but the fact that those boundaries retain normative power, which legitimises hierarchy. The distribution of unique human abilities is neither consistent nor comprehensive throughout the human population. The ontological dilemma defining human life stems from the lack of ontic substance capable of identifying the essence of humanity, its common characteristics, and its universality. The human condition is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a specific collection of qualities. To solidify the definition of humanity, the influence or pressure of categorisation necessitates a distinct separation from the ontology of other living entities, so distilling it into a crystallised essence. The depth of the chasm creates exclusion within the category, as human traits cannot be compressed to such a degree.

CHAPTER 3

THE CONCEPT OF PROPERTY

In the initial chapter, I outlined how in Western philosophy the human is defined by contrasting it with the empty category of the animal. The primary problem I identified is that this contrast establishes a hierarchical conception of existence and characterises humans based on their capacities. Ontological designations of being human often concentrate on specific aspects that distinguish humans from animals. Those specific aspects are claimed to be something extra that human beings possess inherently. The extra attributes of the human entity delineate what it means to be a proper human, necessitating the inclusion of elements that elevate it beyond mere animality. I argued that no singular capacity existed to distinguish humans from the heterogeneous category of animals (nonhumans). There exists a multitude of differences between certain species and humanity as a species. Singularising those differences fosters a biased comprehension of humanity and existence in general. The singular extra capacities considered to be exclusive to humans standardise being human since they define the essence of human, or in other words, indicate specific ways in which a human can be proper. I showed that, in Heidegger's philosophy, certain beings(nonhumans) are considered ontologically deficient, while humans are fully proper entities. Since not all humans conform to the Eurocentric, overrepresented categories of Western metaphysics, it inevitably stratifies humanity as well. The case of Heidegger illustrates that when such distinct and singular differentiations are in operation, they unavoidably create hierarchies within the category of human itself, even when framed as a critique of metaphysical ontology. I proposed that the antithetical definition of human creates hierarchies of being,

categorising individuals based on their capacity for a specific attribute of existing, portraying some more human and others, akin to animals, less human.

The second issue I focused on was that the hierarchy not only indicates human superiority but also legitimises its dominion over others. The capacity to reason, communicate, and possess morals are not neutral, distinctive characteristics of human beings. They constitute the underpinnings that grant rights to humans, which are denied to nonhuman animals and nature as a whole. Rights are contingent upon their omission from the Other, as this rationalises the infringement of the same rights that individuals have established for their own protection. While ostensibly universal, the construction of human rights ends up protecting some while making others vulnerable. In other terms, rights that emerge from these capacities are assigned exclusively to the proper human, granting privileges that exempt them from subjugation while exposing the “improper” to domination. This subsequently exposes the improper entities to the domination of the proper humans. Thus, these capacities and rights that they justify not only delineate humanity but actively function as instruments of privilege that legitimise domination. They secure protection for the proper human while sanctioning the exploitation of those deemed improper.

The synthesis of these two facets of anthropocentrism provides a fundamental framework for the mechanisms that facilitate and rationalise the exploitation of both humans and the environment. The extra capacities that distinguish humans from animals bestow rights upon the proper humans, exempting them from exploitation while permitting the exploitation of others. The Other here does not solely refer to nonhuman animals, as there is no definitive demarcation. Anthropocentrism’s capacity to produce human Others is evident in the histories of slavery, colonial rule,

incarceration, capitalist exploitation, racial segregation, gender oppression, caste hierarchies, and forced labour. The hierarchical comprehension of existence also outlines and engenders improper modes of existence for humanity, thereby exempting them from the privileges of the proper humans or in a more direct way, enabling their exploitation by rationalising it through anthropocentric signifiers. The notion of the ideal human, predominantly represented by Western white men, positions them as superior to others and facilitates the exploitation of marginalised groups, nonhuman animals, and the environment.

Deconstructing anthropocentrism and trying to dismantle it from our understanding of life opens up modes to live and make live in ways that are otherwise unthinkable. It displays and provides us with an enhanced ethical framework for assessing principles that gave rise to human rights, international laws, social relationships, and everyday morality, ranging from veganism to nationalism. To this end, in this chapter, I analyse a particular way in which human identity is anthropocentrically formed. I argue that property functions as a fundamental structuring force in the formation of human identity. Inspired by Agamben's term (1998) the anthropological machine which reveals how human identity is constructed by excluding the nonhuman, I introduce the term *Proprietary Machine*. It refers to an ideological mechanism through which the proper human subject as a category is produced by excluding and objectifying the Other. Within this context, property does not function as a legal or material construct. Proprietary machine is an ideological mechanism that establishes who is deemed proper and owner, and who is classified as an object, resource, or outsider. Property in Western metaphysical tradition is taken as a foundational signifier of what it means to be fully human. In

this chapter, I focus on property as the main signifier of the proper human that defines human exclusivity and superiority from the rest.

3.1 Why property?

Why focus on property? As I have explained, singular anthropocentric signifiers generate (1) hierarchies both across forms of life within life and among humans within that category, (2) enable the exclusion of the less proper humans, nonhuman animals and the environment. I want to focus on one particular signifier of the proper human, which is ownership. The concept of property is twofold here. The first facet is the right to own, and the second is the capacity to own. All anthropocentric signifiers share this dual nature. The capacity of humans that other entities lack turns into entitlement. The capacity to reason, which animals lack, grants humans the right to manage, rule, and, if necessary, for human survival in proper ways, to exploit the rest. It does not directly lead to exploitation, but it makes Others open to exploitation, or in other words, renders them exploitable (a condition from which proper humans are exempt). The capacity for language as well is a signifier that affirms human superiority, but it does not directly mean that humans could and should exploit the rest. The capacity to own, however, grants the rights to define and modify the Other, making it vulnerable to or an object of exploitation. Within this conceptualisation, humans are world-forming; they have the capacity to own and manage land and properties. The ones that lack this kind of capacity are potential victims of commodification. Humans are the proper owners, and the rest are the ownable entities. This is what makes property, as a signifier, distinct from the rest of the signifiers. (1) It has a direct connection to exploitation, serving as a signifier that establishes a hierarchy indicating the superiority of the proper human and the

inferiority of the Other, (2) and it acts as an enabling and justifying mechanism for exploitation of the Other by the proper human. More concisely, the concept of property does more than indicate superiority; it also justifies and grants the right to dominate, exploit, extract, and commodify nonhumans, as these actions are designated as the main signifiers of the proper human.

Property is treated in this thesis not as a normative ideal or legal construct, but as an ontological mechanism that actively shapes the category of the human through its lived, ideological, and exclusionary operations in this chapter. It is examined through its manifestations in common sense and the dominant ideological position it occupies. It pertains to the regulation of life as we know it. There may be numerous other approaches for defining property that are not central to the ontology of the human category, or several other ways to define what is proper to humans. The purpose of this chapter is to show that the dominant ideology of modern societies rests on an understanding of human beings through their capacity to own. This identification of the proper human takes historical form through a conceptual distillation visible in the works of liberal thinkers, where property becomes central to the formation of subjectivity and the justification of exploitation.

The classical definition of private property entails the idea of exclusion. William Blackstone famously described the right of property as “that sole and despotic dominion which one man claims and exercises over the external things of the world, in total exclusion of the right of any other individual” (Blackstone, 1973, p. 304). Owning is described as an inherent power to exclude others from exerting their will on the same object. We observe a comparable definition in John Locke as well:

Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his

own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state nature hath placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other men. (Locke, 1980, p. 19)

Locke argues that through labour humans can make nature their own property, which means it is being removed from the common right of other men. This relies on the argument that humans are superior to other beings through their capacity to make nature into their own property, an issue that I explore further in a subsequent section dedicated to Locke's theorisation. More precisely, this demonstrates that the classical liberal understanding of property is based on an exclusionary logic. It stands to reason that if you own something, others do not. It is only your property in the sense that it is subject to your will alone. Property, in Locke's view, is also central to the formation of civil society and governance. He argues that "The great and chief end, therefore, of men's uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property" (Locke, 1980, p. 66). Property is not only a facet of the necessity to manage life; it stands as the principal objective for the execution of governance that structures civil society. Property as a signifier of the proper human is the one that assigns it a political subjectivity within a society.

Considering these observations, I assert that property is the main signifier of the proper human that enables, justifies and reinforces exploitation of the Other because: (1) it has a direct connection to the objectification and exposure of the Other to exploitation, (2) it is intrinsically exclusionary (3) it underpins political subjectivity.

3.2 What it is not: Property beyond legal, social, and historical constructs

Property, at first glance, appears to be a notion primarily related to economics that should be defined within the frameworks of law, social constructions, and historical

legacies. This research concentrates on a more fundamental aspect of property, rather than its ontic forms, looking at its culpability in the development and preservation of the contemporary ontology of the human and hierarchies of life. Property is a legal and social institution with specific historical roots, including feudal tenures, private ownership, colonial practices, and capitalist modes of appropriation. These roots contribute uniquely to contemporary understandings of rights, ownership, and social organisation. Even so, the concept of ownership, especially as an indicator of capability, a source of rights, and an instrument of exploitation, pertains to a more profound ontological basis. I use property in the strict sense of modern capitalist private ownership. This institution links full personhood to the legal capacity to appropriate, exchange, and alienate things, land, or even bodies. Earlier regimes drew the line elsewhere. Classical Athens, for instance, recognised a male as a citizen only when he held a dwelling inside the polis, showing that the property/person nexus shifts with each historical formation. My analysis concentrates on the capitalist variant because its abstract, market-mediated logic generalises the proprietor as the normative human and casts every non-proprietor, human or otherwise, as ownable. I argue that this form of property acts as an ideological machine that generates subjects authorised to own and objects rendered ownable. While property evidently functions through concrete institutions, my focus is on its dialectical operation as a signifier particularly within capitalist ownership. It is taken as a symbolic mechanism that generates the proper human subject by negating and objectifying the Other.

Agamben's anthropological machine offers a conceptualisation that is parallel to mine, but where he investigates the human/animal binary, I look at the owner/ownable. I theorise that the Proprietary Machine is a way to conceptualise the logic of ownership as the axis of exclusion. Property in this framework is taken as a

condition of subjectivity under anthropocentrism. To be a human is to be an entity whose existence is premised on the right to claim, enclose and exclude. This status is not only contingent on material ownership, but it is ontological in a way that grants autonomy to humans and defines the rest as a resource or a threat to the proper order of things.

This analysis reveals the property's foundational role in naturalising hierarchies of being by abstracting it from its empirical entanglements. Property within the framework of the proprietary machine does not only distribute the rights and resources. It produces the ontological categories of subject and object, human and non-human. Its violence does not lie in the discrete acts of dispossession (though they are its symptoms) but in its capacity to frame ownership as the main signifier of being human. The extent of these categories and the elements that fit within them are likely to change over time; however, the underlying divisionary logic remains relatively consistent since the introduction of capitalism. At the very least, the direction of its effect remains unchanged. Colonialism and chattel slavery might appear as relics of the past, yet the exclusionary mechanisms that sustained them persist by adapting to new epistemic conditions. Western democracies and capitalist systems today may reject overt bodily commodification, but this ostensible progress does not dismantle the Proprietary Machine. It only expands the criteria for inclusion within the category of the proper human. To be an owner (or owned) is no longer defined solely by race or legal personhood, yet the industrialised slaughter of nonhuman animals, the carceral exploitation of labour, biopolitical management of populations and the algorithmic abstraction of dispossession reveal how exclusion evolves rather than vanishes. These contemporary forms do not mark a rupture from history but expose the elasticity of property's logic. The same violence that once

openly traded human beings now operate through subtler hierarchies of disposability. Extending the category of the owner does not eradicate the exclusionary logic of property.

To clarify property as a concept, we need to move beyond treating it as a legal or historical construct. If we regard property only as a tool of exclusion, we miss its more fundamental role. The Proprietary Machine frames property as a force that continuously produces subject and object. It serves as an ideological mechanism that constructs the human owner by positing a discardable other as ownable. Property materialises through concrete laws and practices while simultaneously operating as a symbolic mechanism that (re)produces the divide between owner and owned. Its legal-institutional form and ontological signification are co-constitutive: each sustains the other, together generating the hierarchies my critique targets. In this sense, property functions as a machine that perpetually generates meaning and political divisions with tangible consequences for exclusion and hierarchy.

3.3 What it is: An ideological apparatus

I have established what property is not. I now move on to articulate in more detail what property is in this project's theoretical context. As we have mentioned before, the concept of property is twofold here. First, the capacity to own and second, the right to own. The former refers to a presupposed qualification of certain beings, proper humans, to be owners. This ability emerges from the anthropocentric assumptions about the hierarchy of life. Humans who have the capacities of rationality, language, morals and agency additionally have the capacity to own things. The right to own then follows from this logic. The capacity turns into a right (to own) as any other anthropocentric signifier of the proper human, as we have

established. The right to own means that the capable entity that can own has superiority over the rest. That superiority justifies the commodification of life beyond proper human life. In traditional discourse, these go hand in hand. Which results in the animals, environment and sometimes human Others being deemed as less capable and inferior who do not have the right to own even themselves. They are categorically denied the capacity to own. Consequently, by exposing their existence to this hierarchical understanding of life, the categorisation of beings in the framework of ownership justifies their objectification.

The word property itself etymologically alludes to this connection. It derives from the Latin *proprius*, which means one's belonging or characteristic of a given person ⁵. In the former, it is explicitly denoted as it is generally conceived: a possession that is held by a person. In the latter, it signifies an abstract trait particular to an entity. Proper also means that something is literal and strict, or in other words, full and true. In this project, property is then conceptualised as encompassing both possessing tangible objects and abstract aspects reflecting its etymological origins. Another significant semantic dimension is the relational construct of "proper to someone." A belonging is proper to someone as they possess it, while an attribute is proper to someone (or something) as it constitutes an integral component of their identity. Historically, the designation of something as proper to someone signified its status as an intrinsic element of their identity and their legitimate possession. Consequently, from its linguistic derivation, property inherently carries both the

⁵ proper pert. to oneself or itself or to a person or thing particularly XIII; strictly pertaining; thorough, complete; excellent, fine XIV; specially adapted XV (cf. the adv.). ME. propre – (O)F. – L. proprius one's own, special, peculiar, prob. f. *prō priūō* as a private or peculiar thing. Hence properly XIII (appropriately, fittingly). So property ownership (esp. private) XIII; thing or things owned XIV; attribute, quality; property; portable article for a dramatic performance XV. ME. proprete – AN. proprete, (O)F. propriété – L. proprietās propriety. (Hoad, 1993)

connotation of an attribute or extension of a person and the implicit notion of exclusivity, as it simultaneously denotes that which is not proper to others.

This dissertation shows how political theorists of modernism designated a central position for the concept of property in their definitions of human subjectivity. The capacity to own is often used as a legitimation for human sovereignty over subjects and objects, and as a justification for the capacity to categorise them. I present John Locke and G. W. F. Hegel as symbolic figures rather than as objects of full exegetical study. Both articulate a conception of property that constitutes personhood itself, a view that later underpins bourgeois ideology. By contrast, Hobbes and Kant largely confine property to the legal sphere, treating it as an arrangement among pre-existing persons. Locke and Hegel therefore offer the clearest vantage for analysing how the Proprietary Machine fuses ownership with the idea of the proper human. Both thinkers spell out the legalised face of possession: they recast the earlier metaphysical claim into a fully articulated right of private property. In doing so, they supply the modern definition and implementation of ownership that later regimes take for granted. They are utilized as taking a spoonful from a rich soup to sample its flavour. The soup is the historical continuum of anthropocentric and proprietary ideology. They are taken as the representatives of its ingredients. By distilling their thought specifically on property and humanity, I aim to reveal structural patterns that run through the tradition they epitomize. In both of their main theses the connection between the concepts of property and subjectivity is central in a way that it is indispensable. We can for example see in Marx anthropocentric tendencies. However, his theories overall do not fall apart when we dismantle his definition of being a proper human. I do not delve deep into the nuances of their systems of thinking here because my aim is strategic and illustrative.

I illustrate how the same assumptions about ownership, humanity, and exclusion appear in Locke's and Hegel's canonical liberal texts and show how these formulations scaffold the idea of the proper human that underpins the modern world. More importantly, the purpose of their usage is to show how anthropocentric definition of life together with the centrality of ownership in human subjectivity can turn into an enabling mechanism for exploitation. Hence the term Proprietary Machine.

In Western metaphysical tradition the capacity to own has often been presented as a defining characteristic of subjecthood. Only certain beings are deemed capable of possessing. For example, infants, or "insane" in many legal systems historically lacked the full capacity for ownership. Animals themselves are property and not capable of owning. The anthropocentric hierarchy generated a category of less-than-humans which denied some humans personhood and ownership as we can observe in histories of slavery. The capability to own is equated with being recognized as a full person, an entity with the agency to possess. We will see Hegel and Locke insist that the ability to appropriate things from the world is a natural capacity that human beings possess. This particular capacity differentiates humans from other entities, living or not.

Property is also formulated as a right that human beings possess, and it is denied to other entities. It is proper for humans to own things, and it is a right to be protected. In liberal philosophy, property is regarded as a fundamental human right. For example, Article 17 of the 1789 French *Declaration of the Rights of Man* designates property as an "inviolable and sacred right" (National Assembly of France, 1789). Article 17 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* similarly

asserts a universal right to property ownership.⁶ When discussing property as a right, we denote the normative assertion that ownership is warranted and requires protection and recognition.

Ultimately, property can be understood as the interplay between capacity and right. It signifies the distinctive quality of humanity, characterised by the ability to possess. This capacity translates into the right to own that must be protected with societal and political endorsements. This dual understanding of property helps us comprehend how it functions as an ideological structure. We will see that defining who has the capacity and right to own is essentially the same as defining who counts as properly human and free. It also generates the opposite by implying that those deemed incapable of ownership lack the right to own and are exempt from protection against being commodified. They are cast into a subordinate category of ownable things, which exposes their existence to being appropriated. I explore more into how property is reckoned as the signifier of the proper human in major thinkers and how those definitions support this ideological machine that generates the hierarchies of life in the next section.

3.4 Property as a capacity, right and signifier of the proper human

The connection between the contemporary human identity and ownership is fundamental. In Western philosophy, a proper human being is often equated with owning oneself and the world. Property as a concept operates as a signifier of the proper human by delineating who is a subject and distinguishing them from the objects and less-than-humans. It is used to signify the proper human being in

⁶ United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948, Article 17: “Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.”

opposition to the ownable other. As we have clarified in the previous section, this comprehension of life in a hierarchical sense derives from the division between the ones who are capable and granted to own, whereas those who lack these are positioned as inferior or as things.

C.B. Macpherson elucidates how classical, and Enlightenment philosophers articulated this connection with clarity. He notably articulated the concept of *possessive individualism* in the 17th century, wherein the individual is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, and on this basis is free (Macpherson, 1990, p. 263). In this view, to be human is to be an owner, first of oneself (self-ownership) and by extension of external property. Macpherson summarises that tradition: “The human essence is freedom from dependence on the wills of others, and freedom is a function of possession. Society becomes a lot of free equal individuals related to each other as proprietors of their own capacities and of what they have acquired by their exercise” (Macpherson, 1990, p. 3). Here, owning property (including one’s person) is equated with being a free, fully realised human. The phrase “freedom is a function of possession” is telling; lacking property means lacking the full status of a free subject.

Although Macpherson's work has faced significant scholarly criticism and has been largely dismissed since its initial publication, there are numerous insights to be collected from it (Berlin, 1964; Dunn, 1969; Tully, 2003; Viner, 1963; Waldron, 2007). His notion of possessive individualism serves as a normative critique of 17th-century theorists that diminish society to simply market interactions to promote an ultimately possessive individualistic society. Many scholars have argued that he misconstrued the historical context, misrepresented key arguments, and selectively ignored counter evidence (Breakey, 2016). While Macpherson’s argument that

possessive individualism was a central assumption of the 17th century has been met with scepticism, it nonetheless reveals the centrality of property in comprehending and conceptualising individual rights and liberties. Despite the critiques, he provides a substantial outline for understanding how the centrality of property in defining what it means to be human can transform into a worldview that appropriates entities. This perspective can be seen as an ideological machine that commodifies life, where the ability to own and control property becomes a defining characteristic of human existence. While 17th-century philosophers may not have consciously sought to create a market-oriented society, the impact of their ontological assumptions is evident in a world that relies on ownership. Contrary to Macpherson, I hold that early-seventeenth-century thinkers locate property's force not in the organisation of markets or the sale of persons as commodities. They adopt a deeper stance that names the fully recognised human as the one who owns and treats every other being as available for appropriation. This stance is historically contingent, forged within a specific moment, yet it later supplies the ground on which capitalist institutions rise. A profound ontological comprehension of existence facilitates the appropriation of territory, commercialisation of life, exploitation, and the inevitable degradation of the environment. Hence, I would not call this possessive individualism, although it would generate market-based relationships within the society in long term that depend on the production of possessive individuals. I call this dynamic *possessive speciesism*: a historically specific fusion of property logic with the human/animal split that authorises domination. The label names a contingent strategy, not an inherent essence, and keeps its critical edge by pointing to the social practices that generate it.

3.5 Locke and property as the signifier of the proper human

Locke's notion of property is fundamental to his understanding of what it entails to be a legitimate human who has exited the state of nature. In the *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke has a chapter named "Of Property". In that chapter, he asserts that the earth was bestowed upon humans with reason to make use of it for their survival and benefit. Locke begins with the premise that the earth is held in common under natural law, yet this immediately raises a contradiction. If the earth and its fruits belong to everyone, how can an individual use and consume anything without violating the rights of other human beings? To answer this question, he introduces the concept of property as a natural right that comes with owning self. He argues, "Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person" (Locke, 1980, p. 19). He continues by arguing that the labour and work of one's body are by right his possession. Locke's concept of self-ownership subsequently serves as a rationale for the possession of property beyond one's physical being. Removing an object from the use of the commons and improving it with effort turns it into private property in a legitimate way. Self-ownership of individuals inherently provides the right to possess property, and this particular mode of ownership legitimises exclusion, as I elucidate in the subsequent paragraphs.

Locke presents appropriation as an ordained use of human faculties. "God and his reason commanded him to subdue the earth, i.e. improve it for the benefit of life, and therein lay out something upon it that was his own, his labour" (Locke, 1980, p. 21). Locke's assertion implies that the ability to utilise reason and engage in productive labour establishes property rights and necessitates that individuals possess property effectively. Humans, unlike inferior irrational creatures, are rational agents

capable of making the world their own. The idea of dominion over earth, then, is justified first by self-ownership and second by the right to own objects that comes from the capacity to reason. He asserts:

Thus the grass my horse has bit; the turfs my servant has cut; and the ore I have digged in any place, where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property, without the assignation or consent of any body. The labour that was mine, removing them out of that common state they were in, hath fixed my property in them. (Locke, 1980, p. 20)

From this quote, it is evident that Locke utilised the conception of owning one's own labour to justify the appropriation of animals, land and other objects. To legitimise the ownership of the fruits of one's labour, he asserts that the objects upon which I exert my effort also belong to me. In essence, Locke proclaims the self-evident principle that individuals possess ownership of themselves and their labour to rationalise the transition from a communal state of the earth to a legitimate establishment of private property through the application of one's labour, or that of employed individuals, to shared resources.

Locke conceives the life, liberty and property as the natural rights of human beings. The natural rights do not originate from societal norms; rather, they are inherent rights of men. Nonetheless, his statements suggest that there are appropriate methods for utilising land, although all humans inherently possess the capacity to own those lands. The ability to possess does not automatically translate into the entitlement to ownership. The common property that is not enriched and enclosed by the rational man is a waste, according to him. He asserts:

God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life, and convenience. The earth, and all that is therein, is given to men for the support and comfort of their being. And tho' all the fruits it naturally produces, and beasts it feeds, belong to mankind in common, as they are produced by the spontaneous hand of nature; and no body has originally a private dominion, exclusive of the rest of mankind, in any of them, as they are thus in their natural state: yet being given for the use of men, there must of necessity be a means to appropriate

them some way or other, before they can be of any use, or at all beneficial to any particular man. The fruit, or venison, which nourishes the wild Indian, who knows no inclosure, and is still a tenant in common, must be his, and so his, i. e. a part of him, that another can no longer have any right to it, before it can do him any good for the support his life. (Locke, 1980, p. 18)

This long quote is to be examined thoroughly. The indigenous populations, according to Locke, are still living in the state of nature. They do not have systems of ownership. This meant that they had not fully utilised the land through agriculture and industrialisation. Such division profoundly impacted European perceptions of indigenous populations and those who abstained from European agricultural practices. Locke's reasoning suggests that the indigenous people, characterised by their lack of enclosure and reliance on foraging the earth's natural abundance, exists as a "tenant in common" devoid of a properly established ownership of land. Locke acknowledges that the wild Indian holds a property right over the deer he hunts or the fruit he gathers, as his labour makes it his; yet he still insist that these people have not permanently claimed the land in a way that enhances its value. Land that is not permanently improved is essentially regarded as waste. Hence, Locke contended that when colonial planters enclose and cultivate land, they effectively enhance the earth's productivity and "increase the common stock of mankind" (1980, p. 24). The indigenous inhabitant, having passed away as nature intended, cannot justly protest, as there remains ample and equally valuable resources available for others once the industrious settler has claimed what is usable (Locke, 1980, p. 22). Locke posits that an individual who opposes the appropriation of uncultivated land seeks to benefit from another's labour, to which they are not entitled, rather than making an independent effort to reap rewards from the earth.

According to Locke, the proper human is the one who mixes his own labour with nature to turn it into property, from common to private. The earth is already

bestowed upon humans as species but a rational and calculating human would yearn for a system where he can protect his life, land and liberties which he calls as property in general (Locke, 1980, p. 66). So, we may deduce that Locke's argument is based on a conception of the human being as having (1) reason, (2) the ability to freely exert it on nature, (3) the power to convert nature into property, and (4) the right and tendency to preserve it.

These attributes have distinguished proper civilised humans from the broader human species. Just as humans are considered superior to animals due to their capacity of ownership, they are hierarchically stratified based on their ability to enhance and monopolise resources. According to Locke, although the land is given to human beings in common by God, it was not given to lie barren. God “gave it to the use of the industrious and rational” (Locke, 1980, p. 21). Lockean property theory clearly establishes a hierarchy that grants rights to the industrious improver that are not afforded to the idle non-improver. The full enjoyment of natural rights, including the security of one’s belongings, relies on their appropriate implementation. Humans as a species have the capacity to own, yet to properly own requires a trajectory of development that leads to civilisation. This perspective stratifies human beings into savages and civilised people. Since the capacity to own is proper to humans, a proper human is compelled to own properly. Thus, civilised people defined through their traditions, laws and regulations concerning property rights are superior to those that do not have the concept of property. In Locke’s ideology, first, life is stratified into the owner and the owned. Then the owner (human species) is stratified into proper owners of civilised people and savages who do not respect property rights. I assert that, ultimately, the improper humans are to be counted as ownable.

The process by which some human subjects become ownable in Locke's political ontology does not result directly from his agrarian theorisation but rather unfolds through a discernible, critically constructed chain of inference. Fundamentally, Locke's property theory reduces the ontological status of those who disregard the rational and industrious transformation of the commons. This abstention is seen as a failure to utilise the faculties characterising proper humanity. The refusal or inability to enclose and cultivate land is interpreted as a sign of underdevelopment, irrationality, or disinterest toward the pursuit of improvement. These figures are consequently perceived by those who adhere to this view as lacking the attributes that justify their ownership. Their distance from property makes them seem lacking, outside of the bounds of the proper human. Through this chain of reasoning, it becomes evident that Locke's theory treats this lack as a justification for dispossession. The failure to own properly is taken as a disruption of the natural order, which must be corrected through appropriation.

Thus, when indigenous populations resisted the enclosure and agricultural transformation of lands designated as waste by colonial settlers, such resistance could be framed as the initiation of a state of war. Consequently, these settlers might legitimise their ensuing actions as the prosecution of a "just war" against these so-called aggressors. According to Locke's reasoning on servitude, those who "by [their] fault forfeited [their] own life, by some act that deserves death" (1980, p. 17) may be held in a continuous "state of war" and stripped of their liberty (1980, p. 18). Within this framework, those subdued in territorial conflicts can be interpreted as having given up their right to freedom. By opposing what Locke presents as the natural logic of property, they create a situation in which enslavement is justified. In this way, they become ownable within the framework of Locke's thinking.

The differentiation based on capacity, which stems from a deficiency of essence (of animals), culminates in a differentiation of degree. To secure their property (life, freedom, and possessions), humans must shift from shared ownership of the Earth to enclosed ownership by surrendering their absolute freedom to a higher authority. It can be argued that Macpherson may overstate certain economic generalisations, such as the characterisation of societies as market relations within the context of early modern political theories, especially in the case of Locke. However, the importance of property in Locke's work becomes evident when we examine it from an ontological perspective. Macpherson's reading is decisive when property is framed as a market-juridical category; once the focus shifts to property as the ground of subjectivity, his framework fades, though his stress on property's centrality signals why the ontological question matters. It is evident that in Locke and in other early modern philosophers, property is construed as a fundamental aspect of human subjectivity. Even if Macpherson's claims about the history of capitalism are open to contestation, his observation of the centrality of property remains valid. It illustrates and substantiates my assertion that property is a structural determinant of contemporary human identity. Hence, the significance of conceptualising the Proprietary Machine.

Locke's overall thesis depends upon the claim that exerting labour upon nature is a prerequisite of being a proper human. This generates, both ontologically and historically, a discardable form of humanity whose possessions (including their freedoms and bodies) become exposed to appropriation. If the earth belongs equally to all humans, on what basis are colonial practices justified, and what forms of exclusion enable this justification? To begin with, his theory creates a division by categorising existence into those who possess and those that can be possessed. The

Proprietary Machine is this precise logic that functions by dividing beings into owners and ownable entities. This division is not a social relation but an ideological distinction that results in a structural mechanism that reproduces and polices the borders of the proper human as the one who owns. Second, although inherently being the owners of the material world, some people do not have the capacity to own the land properly according to Locke. Those people subsequently fail to exert their labour on it to turn it into property. So, the categories of owners and objects do not remain limited to, or correspond directly to, humans and the rest. Failure to enclose and exert your will on land properly justifies the colonial dispossession and the commodification of land and life. The capacity to own does not immediately turn into the right to own, which supposedly all humans must be granted. The gap between this inherent capacity and the right to own is the concept of the proper. Properly owning something cannot be generalised neutrally in both ethical and cultural dimensions. This version of defining human, then, is clearly overrepresented, although it is supposed to encompass all humans.

In conclusion, Locke's property theory crystallises the proprietary ontology of Western metaphysics: by tying full humanity to self-ownership and the right to appropriate, it supplies liberal political thought and colonial practice with a shared foundation. It is not a theory of economic rights or governance alone, but a theory of what it means to be a proper human: an entity that possesses itself and a portion of the world. Locke established a hierarchy by linking humanity to ownership, reason, and labour, thereby positioning the property-holder as the normative individual while implicitly relegating those excluded from the property system to a subordinate status. The worth of individuals is implicitly linked to their productive utilisation of nature. This observation substantiates the notion of the Proprietary Machine within Locke's

political ontology, which serves as a structuring principle that categorises individuals and groups into owners and the owned. Reason, labour, and property form the triad that validates an individual's status on the human side of the ledger, while the lack of these attributes diminishes one to a status comparable to that of animals or inanimate objects. An in-depth analysis of Locke's writings demonstrates that the act of combining labour with land serves as a fundamental rationale for inequality, which ultimately legitimises private ownership domestically and the colonial subjugation internationally. Locke's philosophy demonstrates that property and identity are intricately connected, wherein the possession of property denotes legitimate personhood, while its absence may result in a reduction to mere property.

3.6 Hegel and property as the signifier of the proper human

To understand the philosophical depth of the Proprietary Machine, we must turn to G.W.F. Hegel. More than any other philosopher, Hegel systematised the idea that to be a person is to be an owner. More particularly, he argued that in order for one's subjecthood to be realised, it needs to extend its existence over the material world and own things. His framework proposes that a person must acquire external objects to realise their free will. Shlomo Avineri (2003, p. 135), in his analysis of Hegel's philosophy, argues that property is an integral part of his general philosophical anthropology, a conclusion that my study both affirms and extends. Although Hegel is not the only figure shaping proprietary thought, his choice of founding humanity on the concept of property reinforces and systematises the exclusionary logic that underpins the Proprietary Machine. As a wave shaped by the vast ocean of Western metaphysics, its peak continues to drive the current that propels the Machine forward.

Hegel's idea of property is articulated in the section named “Abstract Right” in the *Philosophy of Right* (1996). Property is not only instrumental; Hegel refers to it as “the first actualisation of freedom” (1996, p. 41). In essence, property is not only a means to sustain life or provide enjoyment; it is an inherent objective of free will, signifying that I am a purposive agent capable of exerting my will onto the world. Hegel maintains that “It is in possession first of all that the person becomes rational...” because property surpasses and substitutes the subjective phase of personality (1996, p. 55). In other words, without property, the person’s freedom remains merely an abstract potential. The above statement anticipates the Machine's fundamental action: to make the propertyless ontologically inconceivable as proper humans, thereby legitimising their subjugation. Existing as an idea makes a human being different from a human, thus proper. Hegel suggests that when my will appropriates an external being, I am actualising my freedom and achieving a tangible existence as a rational being. Before then, I exist just in the abstract.

Moreover, Hegel explicitly associates the ability to possess, together with the rational will it signifies, with the distinction between humans and animals. The following paragraphs clarify how the distinction between humans and animals serves to define humanity in Hegel’s philosophy. The differentiating feature between humans and animals is the ability to reason, which confers rights, and the capacity for ownership inherent to human beings. Ultimately, this capacity evolves into the right to assert ownership over everything else. The progression from thought to will, and from will to property, serves as the philosophical engine driving the Proprietary Machine. This right comes from ownership being the primary signifier of the ontology of the human. Through an engagement with four of Hegel’s major works, mainly *Philosophy of Right*, but also the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*

and *Philosophy of Mind*, we can examine the classic philosophical form of the Proprietary Machine.

According to Hegel, there are several properties of the human that separate it from and elevate it above the natural world. Nonetheless, they all converge on the capacity to reason, which legitimises the hierarchical interpretation of existence and hence the subjugation of inferior creatures. In *The Encyclopedia Logic*, he insists that animals “see only the singular”, whereas the human grasps the universal: “...the human being distinguishes itself from the lower animals by thinking, then everything human is human because it is brought about through thinking, and for that reason alone” (Hegel, 1991, p. 25). The line serves as the metaphysical gatekeeper of the Machine. Thought transforms into the criterion one must navigate to be recognised as human. He reinforces the point a few pages later: “Similarly, it is his identity as consciousness of himself that distinguishes man from nature in general, and particularly from animals, which do not achieve a grasp of themselves as I” (Hegel, 1991, p. 181). Consequently, the inherent framework of animal cognition is portrayed as inadequate for recognition, allowing ownership to fulfil the remaining purpose of domination. Hegel spells the implication out:

The animal is also in-itself something universal, but the universal as such is not [present] for it; instead only the singular is ever [there] for it. The animal sees something singular, for instance, its food, a man, etc. But all these are only something singular for it. In the same way our sense experience always has to do only with something singular (this pain, this pleasant taste, etc.). Nature does not bring the nous to consciousness for itself; only man reduplicates himself in such a way that he is the universal that is [present] for the universal. (Hegel, 1991, p. 57)

According to Hegel, because humans alone think universally, they alone possess free will; he therefore joins thought and will: “Will without freedom is an empty word, and freedom becomes actual only as will, as subject ... The will is a special way of thinking; it is thought translating itself into reality” (Hegel, 1996, p. 28). Thus, the

Machine aligns authentic agency with the ability to project thought onto the world, while ownership solely represents the formalisation of that projection. He adds in the *Philosophy of Mind*: “The animal, by contrast, because it does not think, is also incapable of having a will” (Hegel, 2012, p. 206). By negating the agency of animals, Hegel provides the philosophical justification for regarding their existence as sheer material. In this framework, what animals lack is the capacity to extend their thought into the external world, that is, the will. While animals lack this capacity for thought, they exist purely as elements within the environment, passively awaiting the imposition of will by those deemed proper beings. This connects to the split that a human-centred ontology establishes between the possessor and the possessed.

Hegel posits that, while animals possess their bodies, because they lack will and reason, they hold no rights even to their own existence. Consequently, Hegel explicitly establishes the distinction between humans and animals based on proprietary subjectivity. Humans are entities that consciously appropriate; animals mostly consume by instinct and cannot truly own. Indeed, in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel addresses the status of animals in a striking addition: “Animals do in a manner possess themselves. Their soul is in possession of their body. But they have no right to their life, because they do not will it” (Hegel, 1996, p. 59). The Proprietary Machine acquires its ethical justification: even those who are most intimately in their own existence remain susceptible to appropriation if they do not possess the appropriate rational capacity. In other words, due to the absence of purpose, will, and rational thought in animals, their responses(actions) to the external environment are seen as just reactions. Their existence becomes inadequate, transforming them into empty vessels for the utilisation of proper humans.

If we adhere to the rationale that humans can possess property due to their rationality, and thinking is only realised through exerting one's will, it follows that they must possess ownership as a manifestation of their free will to be fully realised as proper subjects. The same capacity of free will gives humans an absolute title to property. Here it is stated explicitly by Hegel:

A person has the right to direct his will upon any object, as his real and positive end. The object thus becomes his. As it has no end in itself, it receives its meaning and soul from his will. Mankind has the absolute right to appropriate all that is a thing. (Hegel, 1996, p. 57)

This statement weaves existence and authority together. The metaphysical supremacy of will is directly transformed into a justification for asserting dominion over the entire non-human realm. Hegel does not only suggest that human beings have the right to own everything else he also specifically mentions that this comes from their capacity to will. One can conclude that, according to Hegel's framework, what distinguishes humans from lesser entities is the capacity and right to own. This is essentially stating that ownership is one of the major signifiers of being a proper human. Proper in the sense that it allows a human owner to express their autonomy, realise their rationality, and integrate into society. He asserts: "...the human being distinguishes itself from the lower animals by thinking, then everything human is human because it is brought about through thinking, and for that reason alone" (Hegel, 1991, p. 25). He pushes the contrast further: "Even in the most perfect form to which nature raises itself, in animal life, the Concept does not attain to an actuality resembling its soulful essence ... This first happens in the mind" (Hegel, 2012, p. 12).

The primary distinction undoubtedly lies in the ability to reason according to Hegel's theorisation. However, as previously established, the conceptualisation of property as a secondary argument for human supremacy has tangible ramifications.

Additionally, actualisation of this primary distinction according to Hegel's assertions is only possible through possession. Hence, property turns into the actualisation of being a proper human. Hegel famously adds a vivid metaphor that when he tames an animal or cultivates land, he bestows it with soul. He states, "When the living thing becomes my property, it gets another soul than it had. I give it my will" (Hegel, 1996, p. 58). This demonstrates how ownership infuses the object with the owner's own soul in his framework. These assertions link claims of dominance to the justification and enablement of violence against inferior entities: either to appropriate one's land, body, and freedom and transform them into resources, or to guard one's property and make the other into an enemy.

The capacity and right to own is clearly described by Hegel as essential signifiers of being human, more particularly a human who has achieved subjecthood. Possession itself does not immediately translate into the right to own in Hegel, similar to Locke. Because animals lack will, they do not have the right to possess even their own body and life in Hegel's metaphysics of anthropology. In Hegel's framework, animals are devoid of the self-reflective will that would elevate them to the status of subjects; thus, they reside on the object side of the equation, existing for human purposes. He posits that in our engagement with objects and beings (including animals), we are in fact, enhancing their existence, actualising their inherent potential.⁷ On the other hand, humans have will and reason and therefore have the right to place their will in anything. All entities are potentially property, since a thing (an external object) inherently lacks an intrinsic purpose; it is, as Hegel posits,

⁷ "The object taken into my possession receives the predicate "mine," and the will is related to it positively. Yet in this identity the object is established as something negative, and my will becomes particularized as a want or desire. But the particular want of one separate will is the positive, which satisfies itself; while the object is negative in itself, and exists only for my want and serves it. Use is the realization of my want through the change, destruction, or consumption of the object, which in this way reveals that it has no self, and fulfils its nature." (Hegel, 1996, p. 67)

external to itself and devoid of rights. Only entities with rational will own their own purposes; hence, people are capable of assigning meaning to an otherwise purposeless object. “A man may own anything, because he is a free will, and is therefore self-contained and self-dependent. But the mere object is of an opposite nature” (Hegel, 1996, p. 57). From Hegel’s reasoning, one can deduce that he posits free will and reason as the distinctive attributes of humanity, which legitimises the appropriation of all other entities. This is why he can say without hesitation: “Every man has the right to turn his will upon a thing or make the thing an object of his will ... to set aside the mere thing and recreate it as his own” (Hegel, 1996, p. 57). This appropriation is a privilege and ability of individuals; but more importantly, it is the sole means through which one can truly affirm one's existence as a subject. In other words, to be a proper human, one must exercise control over the natural world. Consequently, in Hegel’s philosophy, property serves as a capacity, a right, and a signifier of the proper human essence.

In summary, Hegel provides the grand philosophical blueprint for the Proprietary Machine’s conflation of property and human identity. He shows with explicit arguments that subjectivity is ownership in action, and that freedom is the power to appropriate. He elevates this to world-historical significance: humanity distinguishes itself from the animal and progresses beyond “savage” life precisely by developing the institution of property (and the rational state predicated on it). In doing so, Hegel enshrines an anthropocentric hierarchy. Rational property-owning humans stand categorically above animals and also above those humans not yet in possession of a property-based civil society. One can easily discern the ways in which such a framework serves to justify colonisation, imposing property and order

upon lands perceived as vacant or savage, as well as exclusion, whereby full personhood is denied to those considered unfit for the rightful exercise of freedom.

We can observe both in Hegel and Locke the gap between the inherent features of humans and the ability to properly use them. Property is depicted as inherent to humans, and it is what separates them from animals. Animals cannot own, and humans can. Following from that, we observe they define property as what makes humans realise their subjecthood. In order to exist in the real world and be recognised as a person, humans must own. They should manifest their will towards the external world. My principal assertion is that in Western philosophy, certain modalities of human existence possess the ability but lack the will to assume legitimate ownership. There are incorrect modes of being human that have not adequately presented their existence to the external world, hence have failed to attain complete subjectivity. As I have contended, anthropocentric definitions of life are bound to create hierarchies within the human category. The Proprietary Machine represents a distinctive manifestation of anthropocentrism that results in (justification of) exploitation. The stratification of existence, particularly among humans, through the notion of property, as I elaborate in the subsequent section, legitimises the appropriation of their possessions: their lives, freedoms, lands, and bodies. For the reason that owning properly grants rights to appropriate the animals and inferior human beings that do not properly own things. Failure to possess property properly prevents one from attaining a status exempt from appropriations.

From Locke to Hegel, modern political theorists displayed a recurring pattern. Their theories presuppose that property distinguishes the proper human as the one who owns (and cannot himself be owned). The consequence is that those who can be owned or cannot own property are, by that fact, evaluated as less than

fully human or outside the circle of proper humanity. This rationale has historically validated the denial of full personhood to specific groups. Political participation frequently depended on property ownership. Conversely, individuals devoid of property were regarded as dependent, deficient, or even analogous to property itself. Enslaved individuals were legally designated as property and were excluded from the classification of humans. Throughout various historical periods, women, prohibited from possessing property in their own right, were regarded as extensions of their husbands or fathers rather than as independent entities. Animals have historically been regarded as property and persist in facing industrial exploitation. Animal rights are based on the notion of property rights, viewing animals as possessions to be owned.

In conclusion, property serves as an indicator of who is regarded as a fully human entity. The ideal human within an anthropocentric, proprietary framework is the proprietor: the individual who possesses dominion over themselves and, ideally, over external entities. This concept reinforces anthropocentric hierarchies and enables their expression by linking humanity to ownership and control. Humanity's alleged singular capacity to possess and dominate the environment (and other entities) serves as evidence of human superiority. Consequently, property-as-signifier reinforces the idea that humans, particularly those who possess property, are the legitimate rulers of the world, positioned above hierarchies that marginalise property-less individuals, animals, and nature to inferior, excluded roles.

3.7 Property as the justification of exploitation

I have established the reason this project does not take property as a neutral legal or economic concept. The notion of human in modernity was structured together with

the systems of property and generated an ontologically proprietary understanding of life. This stratified conception of the human underlies the processes through which certain people were reduced to commodified bodies. This argument was similarly articulated by prominent scholars. Sylvia Wynter argued that the notion of man in Western modernity was constructed as the entity entitled to govern the world and dominate its territories and inhabitants (Wynter, 2003). The rest was demoted to the category of the less-than-human. Wynter demonstrates that the figure of Man is introduced as a secular version of the Christian god, where humans are able to shape their own nature, and where they have the ultimate authority. The sovereignty of humans, from this secular perspective, does not require validation from a higher authority, as individuals inherently possess a claim to ownership of the world. This claim had to be based on something secular, thus the introduction of the capacities that differentiate humans from the inferior entities that they reign over, or simply humanism. A humanism that coincided with the colonial expansions and stratification of the modern human into racial and ethnic hierarchies, which justified, enabled and reinforced the domination and exploitation of non-European people by Western men. Wynter explains how the overrepresentation of the human by the Western man marginalises other ways of being human:

The West would therefore remain unable, from then on, to conceive of an Other to what it calls human - an Other, therefore, to its correlated postulates of power, truth, freedom. All other modes of being human would instead have to be seen not as the alternative modes of being human that they are "out there," but adaptively, as the lack of the West's ontologically absolute self-description. (Wynter, 2003, p. 282)

Instead of admitting there are non-Eurocentric or non-ratiocentric (which is once more a notion that is disproportionately represented by the post-Christian culture of Europe) ways of being human, the West defines the Other through what they lack from their definition of Man. In other words, Western ontology idealised a proper

way of being human and anything that falls out of that is deemed as inferior and lacking.

Property as well played a central role in justifying the otherisation and exploitation of the Other. According to Wynter, the capacity to annex and control territory became a signifier of power and consequently humanity. The indigenous people's dispossession was rationalized by their classification as inferior beings (Wynter, 2003, p. 263). The claimed absence of rationality among non-European people justified and enabled enslavement and serfdom. The capacity to extract income from individuals and commodify human bodies became a signifier of the ideal human. Ultimately, this proprietary logic reinforced the ontological and socioeconomic hierarchies of the colonial endeavour. I argue that within this framework exploitation through exclusion cannot be seen as abnormalities. It is fundamental to how Western people entitled themselves metaphysically as the real owners of the world. This way of understanding the world justified the colonial expansion and exploitation of the property-less bodies of non-European people. When the human is defined through having the intrinsic capacity and right to own, ownership becomes a central indicator of being a proper human. It not only justified but also encouraged the exploitation of nature and other humans. The subjugation of human Others was not only necessary for survival but also for claiming authority over the world.

The anthropocentric proprietary machine should not be perceived solely as a justification for exploitation. Instead, it operates as a self-consuming cycle, similar to the figure Ouroboros, where its logic perpetuates its own validity. The Eurocentric humanism defined a secular, empowered vision of being human which relies on the superiority of humans over the rest. This superiority depended on certain qualities

that both enabled and gave the right to dominate the world. This (1) justified the domination, expropriation and exploitation of non-human nature. Yet, by defining proper humanity through these exclusionary traits, it (2) marginalised alternative ways of being human such as those aligned with indigeneity, ecological interdependence, or non-Western epistemologies. (3) This extended the justification of exploitation to include those deemed less-than-human. (4) It normalized the commodification of human bodies and systemic violence against anyone deemed improper. Enslavement, displacement, and objectification became permissible, as those excluded from full humanity were rendered ownable.

Ultimately, the system closed its loop. (5) to be counted as a proper human within this paradigm required participation in exploitation. The proprietary machine by identifying things as either owner or ownable justified, enabled and encouraged the exploitation of humans. It is evident that both anthropocentrism and proprietary ideology are culpable in this process. This ideological apparatus emerged simultaneously with/in colonialism, transforming ontology into a mere instrument of exploitation. The distinction between objects and subjects is intertwined with a hierarchical comprehension of life that aligns with the practical requirements of colonial pursuits. It transformed the Other into possessable entities and, through years of practice and rationalisation, imprinted the norms of appropriate humanity through exploitation and expropriation.

Critical theories in Black Studies show the ways in which property instrumentalised the stratification of human category particularly in the racial dimension. Brenna Bhandar (2018) examines the interconnection between the modern conceptions of race and property laws. According to Bhandar, European imperial expansion was only possible through the strong idea of property that was

utilised to transform and manipulate land and resources. She claims that "...the evolution of modern property laws and justifications for private property ownership were articulated through the attribution of value to the lives of those defined as having the capacity, will, and technology to appropriate, which in turn was contingent on prevailing concepts of race and racial difference" (Bhandar, 2018, p. 4). Similar to the logic that I demonstrated above, the racialised bodies of the colonised people, whose property and freedom were expropriated, were otherised through the capacity and right to exploit the propertyless, improper people. The settlers categorised indigenous people as inferior and commodifiable. The idea of improvement of the land and technology, as we have seen in both Hegel and Locke, was used as an excuse for imperial expansion and forceful appropriation of land that was deemed to have "no lords" because of the improper usage of it. She continues: "The colonial encounter produced a racial regime of ownership that persists into the present, creating a conceptual apparatus in which justifications for private property ownership remain bound to a concept of the human that is thoroughly racial in its makeup" (Bhandar, 2018, p. 5). Examining colonial practices reveals that the intrinsic right to ownership was never extended to all humans. The capacity and right to own are invoked to justify both the act of expropriation and the suffering of the Other.

On the other side of this coin lies the importance of protecting the property. Both Hegel and Locke build their arguments on the claim that property constitutes a capacity and a right that necessitates protection; thus, the existence of a sovereign arises from the imperative to safeguard it. I have identified a gap between the inherent capacity and the right to own in both Hegel and Locke. This gap accounts for the stratification produced by their anthropocentric views within the privileged

category of the human. It emerges precisely from their evaluation of the effectiveness of land and property utilisation. The inherent capacity to own does not immediately translate into the right to ownership. There seems to be a proper way of utilising the land in order to be worthy of having the right to protect it from other people.

Civilised people who respect the laws of property have the right to protect their belongings. Because they perceive the benefit of enclosing and enriching the land they own, which will lead to more efficient resource production and development.

The extra that proper humans have over the less-than-humans is the capacity of civilisation, civilisation in the perspective of the Western metaphysics, which is highly dependent on the concept of property. Civilisation was founded upon the concept of property, as property is understood to be the very condition of civilisation's existence. Bhandar's analysis of colonial property laws demonstrates that the lack of such laws among indigenous populations was used to justify their classification as savages. She gives the example of Joseph Trutch, who was a colonial administrator in British Columbia, who shaped the land policies of the colony. "In either case, in Trutch's view, aboriginal people lacked the very capacities defined by Locke as the conditions for proper human subjectivity" (Bhandar p.58), which is the capacity for ownership that is required for the emergence of civilisation. The Indigenous people were defined as unproductive and therefore less-than-human, which justified the expropriation of their land and displacement. "The creation of an epistemological framework where people came to be valued as economic units set the ground for a fusing together of ownership and subjectivity in a way that had devastating consequences for entire populations who did not cultivate their lands for the purposes of commercial trade and marketized exchange." (Bhandar p.35). The figure of the savage, representing a less-than-human status, was employed to justify

the displacement of these people and the colonisation of their lands. The identity of the civilised proper humans was constituted concurrently with the ability to own property. The construction of the proper human we take for granted today was fundamentally connected with the colonial practices and the anthropocentric world view that those colonisers had while justifying their appropriation. Just as the category of the Animal was negated when generating the category of the proper human, the indigenous people and black people enslaved by the colonisers played a key role in the creation of the proper human. One of the key distinctions between those people and the colonisers was the absence of the concept of property as it was identified by the colonisers themselves. This dynamic altered the existence of the Other, converting their bodies and land into commodified raw materials. The Black Pessimist scholars emerged specifically from this concept of social death, claiming that the ontology of the human being in Western metaphysics not only excludes Black people but also is based on an omission and negation of their existence (Patterson, 1985; Sexton, 2011; Wilderson, 2010). Modernity transformed the category of the human into a racialising assemblage, structuring hierarchies that determine who is fully human, less than human, or nonhuman (Weheliye, 2014). One of the main dividing lines was the concept of property, between the ones who can own property who are proper humans and with the ones who could become property who was closer to the animals.

This further illustrates that property needs to be regarded as an ideological mechanism rather than merely a matter of materials and economy. The justification does not only entail the land and the bodies, but it functions through the creation and reinforcement of a social and symbolic life. Property, in a deeper and broader context, establishes a framework for the proper. It functions as a structuring

mechanism that creates hierarchical subcategories within the human species and legitimises the subjugation of entities perceived as closer to animal/object/property by those regarded as closer to human/subject/proprietor. The exclusionary logic inherent in both the anthropological and proprietary machine, which grants the right to exclude, enclose, and engender the life and the material world, becomes a template for the colonial practices. Colonial practices in the aftermath articulated the framework for the way in which we comprehend life and existence, being a subject, being a citizen, together with those mechanisms. They all collectively sanctified the unequal arrangements as the natural order of things.

The distinctions between human/animal and proprietor/property are the two axes that enabled the Proprietary Machine to emerge. These axes, intertwined with the histories of colonialism, slavery, and racialised exclusion, illuminate how modern governance perpetuates systems of domination. This framework positions nature as property and the 'proper' human as inherently entitled to ownership. It thereby makes the exploitation and domination of less human and non-human entities, and the conquest of nature are signifiers of being human itself. Through these axes, proprietary mechanisms tie humanity's definition to acts of ownership and control and then inscribe systemic violence and exclusion within their very existence. These categories enable the conditions of possibility, or make potentially exist, the right to exploit, exert violence upon, manipulate, and control nature, non-human animals, human Others, and the Other within the individual, the body and biology of the human.

3.8 Understanding the World through the proprietary logic

What does locating the foundational role of property in our understanding of the world reveal? How does it clarify the structures of contemporary existence? What function does proprietary logic serve beyond the historical examples already explored? The functionality of the proprietary machine extends far beyond land and goods. It penetrates the ontology of humans. It orders things into ownable entities and owners in a sense that a new element entering this discourse would then be bound to fall into one of these categories. This ontological framework casts the world as a collection of distinct objects whose significance is defined by their potential to be owned, controlled, and exploited.

The logic of property is inscribed in our understanding of progress, knowledge and destination as a species. This reasoning has its beginnings in the ontological premises of modernity. Since the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment, Western metaphysics has increasingly depicted nature as an inactive object, distinct from the human subject, set for comprehension and possession. Philosophical dualisms, exemplified by Descartes' distinction between mind and body or subject and world, established a framework for seeing the universe as a collection of objects external to and accessible by the observing (and owning) subject. The emergence of empirical science and capitalism mutually reinforced this perspective: to possess knowledge was, by implication, to categorise and exploit it. Adorno and Horkheimer note in their critique of Enlightenment rationality that the motivation behind modern knowledge is not objective comprehension but rather domination: "What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings. Nothing else counts" (Horkheimer et al., 2002, p. 2). To comprehend the nonhuman existence as potential property to be owned and

manipulated transformed not just lands, but also bodies, ideas and lives into objects. To be a proper human is recognised as being as far from nature as possible and having the capacity to be not bound by its laws. A forest is timber to be managed effectively, and reforestation is the way to tackle deforestation's dire ramifications.

Elizabeth Povinelli demonstrates that worldviews are not born in a vacuum; they emerge out of the practices of power and retrospectively legitimate them (Povinelli, 2016). The colonial legacies, capitalist commodification, and scientific classification fostered an ontology that transformed land, bodies, knowledge, and life forms into resources and proprietary units. This ontological framework not only legitimises, facilitates, and renders the extraction and exploitation of all resources desirable, but it also regulates their boundaries. It renders ownership and manipulation a virtue, continually justifying itself through the notion of progress. It affirms appropriation as the fundamental method of human activity.

The notion of humans as a species is a dangerous and detrimental interpretation of existence. Anthropocentrism is founded upon the firm conviction that humanity possesses a shared foundation that facilitates collective advancement. *The Anthropocene* is the result of human beings' belief in progress and the human species' supposed privileged position. The proprietary rationality equates human flourishing with perpetual appropriation, which depends on constant expansion and exploitation. This necessitates a critique of anthropocentrism that fundamentally questions the proprietary logic. The order of things that emerges out of this logic can have dire consequences but also is not even questionable in the common sense of ordinary people. It is inscribed in citizenship, national belonging, family ties, the possession of rights, the cultivation of capacities, the escape from natural law, and the pursuit of progress, whether scientific, technological, or the increasing mastery

over our own bodies. It includes better identification of our defects, their cures, the optimisation of being itself, and the ever-expanding mechanisms of protection from harm. It is a covert and subtle process for generating meaning that nourishes our narcissism, both individually and collectively as a species. It is a species narcissism

Ultimately, this ontological critique exposes the fundamental ways in which proprietary logic has invaded human subjectivity and metaphysics. The modern human subject struggles to envision freedom without ownership, or progress without the expanding conquest of nature. Rephrasing the question in ontological terms exposes the extent to which the language of ownership is established in the narrative of existence. The objective of this critique, then, is to denaturalise this discourse and demonstrate that the world may be understood in alternative ways. The goal is to convince people that “Man” and “proprietor” are not synonymous with a proper being. Alternative ontologies that are not based on proprietary divisions are both possible and extremely necessary. Only by seeing proprietary rationality as a historically contingent configuration of meaning, rather than the culmination of rational growth, will we be able to release its grip on our imagination. The goal is not only to overthrow an economic system, but also to undergo an ontological reorientation. It is to break free from the tyranny of proprietary logic and rethink the world and ourselves in terms that embrace diversity, relationality, and reciprocal belonging over the polarities of owner and owned.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROPRIETARY MACHINE

You taught me language; and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse.

(Caliban, *The Tempest*)

Caliban's anguished lament in *The Tempest* (Shakespeare, 1921) epitomises the way in which propriety is utilised as a weapon for subjugation and appropriation. I wanted to turn to this compelling allegory that depicts a European ruler, Prospero, stranded on an island occupied by a native creature. Caliban, the offspring of a Moroccan witch, is portrayed as mute, devoid of human virtues, and uncomfortable with the sun, which symbolises knowledge. He embodies the uncivilised and the primal. Prospero attempts to educate Caliban by teaching him language and the ethical values of civilised society. As I have mentioned, when he allegedly attacks Prospero's daughter Miranda, he is immediately enslaved. Prospero's method of punishment does not involve confining, imprisoning, or executing Caliban. Instead, he transforms him into an instrument for his own purposes, akin to a slave. Once Prospero determined that Caliban lacked the necessary qualities for becoming a proper human, he deprived Caliban of his privileges, including the right to possess his own body and exist as a free individual in his own homeland. Caliban's inability to conform to the standards for proper humanity, which include being rational, civilised and virtuous, declared him categorically ownable. Rather than being expelled as an adversary or executed as a threat, he was possessed by Prospero.

This moment of being subjected to the elimination of self-ownership exemplifies the exact functioning of what I term the Proprietary Machine. This

operation goes a step further than excluding and appropriates that which has been excluded. Caliban is not transformed into bare life, as Agamben would put it; rather, he is diminished to a life that can be possessed, the ownable life. His enslavement is a failed inclusion, a moment of deliberate ontological misrecognition that takes away his potential to exist as a subject and turns him into property.

The resemblance between the name Caliban and the term cannibal is not coincidental. Shakespeare's intellectual framework is shaped by the early modern debates on civilisation and savagery, which were contested by Michel de Montaigne's profound essay, *Of Cannibals* (c. 1580). In the essay, Montaigne critiques the arrogance of European colonial endeavours by reflecting on the lives of the Tupinamba people of Brazil (Montaigne, 1993). He claims that those wrongly labelled as savages possess greater justice, courage, and honour than those referred to as civilised. Shakespeare likely accessed this essay via John Florio's 1603 English translation, and Caliban can be interpreted as a representation of the cannibal figure, characterised as subhuman, lacking autonomy, and reduced to a mere resource.⁸ *The Tempest* illustrates the severe repercussions of European norms and universals imposed on indigenous populations. The rationale for racial segregation, framed in terms of morality and the protection of women's bodies, remains relevant. Black men were often inaccurately accused of sexually assaulting white women. This constituted a racist trope employed to rationalise segregation, violence, and lynching. This logic continues to be used today in struggles over bodily autonomy. For example, certain trans-exclusive feminist arguments invoke the need to protect women's bodies as a rationale to legitimise the exclusion of trans women from public

⁸ Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is often read with Michel de Montaigne's essay *Of Cannibals*, notably in John Florio's 1603 English translation. The editors point out that Gonzalo's statement is based on Florio's version, and Caliban's name refers to the cannibal character. (Shakespeare, 1921, p. xlvii)

spaces. Emphasising the moral values that trans women allegedly undermine results in legitimising their segregation and the denial of their bodily autonomy and freedom. These anxieties about the already excluded individuals might be arising from their marginalisation, but they serve to justify further exclusion of the already otherised. Nevertheless, even if we take the accusations against the ‘Calibans’ of the world at face value, we must examine the reactions of the ‘Prosperos’. Instead of killing or banishing, Prospero enslaves Caliban, not to educate or rehabilitate him but to appropriate his body and take away his freedom. Caliban is deprived of the privileges that come with being eligible to be equal to the proper humans.

The definition of a proper human includes certain privileges, which are revoked when one ceases to meet the criteria of propriety. The arbitrary signifiers of the proper human do not only make appropriation potentially existent but also provide justification for its presence. Residing within the enclosure of the proper human makes one a subject that has the right to protect their life and freedom. Taking away those rights is considered a violation of fundamental human rights. This enclosure, however, is far from being neutral. It actively legitimises exploitation, manipulation and control of the elements that reside outside. More precisely, it generates a system where some lives are more valuable than others. The lines that draw the boundaries of this enclosure are also not natural nor preordained. It originates from the perspectives of the ‘Prosperos’ of the world who wield power to define what constitutes a proper human. The lines are drawn based on their own values, biases and self-interests. Furthermore, it is grounded in their own way of comprehending life. Prospero’s perception of Caliban as an animal or brute dictates Caliban’s fate. The worldview of Prospero establishes whether Caliban is a human

being who deserves the right to exist freely and with dignity or a being who can be enslaved and exploited.

This outlines the rationale behind what I refer to as the Proprietary Machine. Montaigne critiques the colonial gaze, while Shakespeare dramatises its functioning; this project situates this violence within a structural and onto-political framework. To comprehend this mechanism, it is essential to examine the ontological distinction between the proper human category capable of ownership and the improper entities subjected to violence. The Proprietary Machine operates by connecting two orders of thought: anthropocentrism that establishes human exceptionalism through the exclusion of the non-human and not-quite-human life; and proprietary logic, which transforms said exceptionalism into a right of control, appropriation and exploitation. What emerges out of their combination is a system of exclusion that frames a world defined by ownership. This chapter is to articulate this proprietary logic, including its philosophical origins, historical processes, and long-term ramifications.

Against the existing framework of Agamben's Anthropological Machine, which concentrates on the human/animal dichotomy and the generation of bare life, I contend that the Proprietary Machine provides a more accurate and comprehensive analysis. It identifies a mechanism that operates not only through exclusion but also through domination by means of inclusion. Whereas Agamben demonstrates how life may be stripped of political significance, I examine how life is assigned worth through the notion of property, and how this designation promotes the exact inequalities that it pretends to universalise.

4.1 The Proprietary Machine: Property as ontological capture

This section provides a clear explanation of the term that has been referenced throughout this thesis. The concept of the Proprietary Machine alludes to a pervasive apparatus of meaning and domination that arises from the convergence of anthropocentrism and property logic. It operates as a cultural, ideological, and normative system that perpetually categorises entities according to an anthropocentric standpoint and organises their status within a hierarchy dictated by property and ownership. This conceptual machine generates a worldview that places humanity at the centre as the exclusive owner of the world, while other beings and certain people are perceived as objects to be managed and exploited. The Proprietary Machine conceptualises life and existence through ownership, thereby normalising relationships of domination and establishing a system in which values and privileges are allocated based on one's hierarchical position. The anthropological machine defines the human through the negation of the animal. It answers the question “What is human?” with: the non-animal. As explained in the first chapter, in Western metaphysics the human is often defined as something more than animal. The additional qualities attributed to humans, such as reason, language, and morality, are taken to signify their uniqueness and, consequently, their value. Because the human is also defined as the owner, a second negation occurs and commodifies the rest. The Proprietary Machine, in turn, answers the question “What is nonhuman?” with: property.

The Proprietary Machine is responsible for putting anthropocentrism's abstract process into action. The claim of human superiority finds its concrete expression and historical specification precisely in the logic of property. As both a legal and conceptual framework, property provides the necessary apparatus for

asserting control, defining ownership and excluding others from access to and use of land, resources and their own bodies. The relationship between anthropocentrism and property logic is one of operational necessity. The conceptual idea of human superiority, the right to control and exploit, requires a concrete mechanism for its enactment. However, this mechanism not only facilitates exclusion but also transforms it into domination by normalising hierarchies of propriety and legitimising the capture of life itself. Property logic thus serves as the principal means by which the anthropocentric ideology is made socially legible and materially impactful, while at the same time enforcing a violent dichotomy between owners and the ownable.

This idea builds upon Giorgio Agamben's framing of the Anthropological Machine; however, it extends and departs from it in decisive ways. Agamben's concept, as articulated in *The Open: Man and Animal*, explicates the ways in which Western philosophy produces the category of the human via a variety of inclusions and exclusions (Agamben, 2012). It functions by separating man from animal and thereby producing a space of indistinction wherein certain creatures are rendered neither fully human nor simply animal, but as entities in limbo. The anthropological machine is essentially a logic of defining what is human by what it is not. It describes human subjectivity by excluding the natural, primitive, and animalistic ways of being, as they are seen as inferior. It is a core component of the larger metaphysical machine that controls the intelligibility and operativity of Western society. The primary purpose of this machine is to produce the notion of the human being. Within its operation, humans are at the top of the hierarchy of life, and those who are closer to animality are exposed as bare life, that is, life stripped of political meaning, life that can be controlled, exploited and even taken without punishment. Agamben

(1998) argues that such a machine operates undetectably as a cultural, normative logic that perpetually generates this binary division between human and animal.

The Anthropological Machine functions through a process of inclusion and exclusion. By establishing a foundational divide between human and animal life, it defines the human. This dividing line is not preordained but constructed by the machine itself. The machine operates by constantly separating and opposing humans to their own (bare) life. Its function is defined by an inclusive exclusion, where an element, such as animality or bare life, is included in a system exactly by being excluded from its proper category. Bare life does not exist as it is, but rather it is “an index, a logic or an economy” (Primera, 2019, p. 5). It is life included in the political system only through its exclusion, as it is stripped of political form. This operation is described by Agamben as the differentiating structure through which metaphysics and biopolitics operate. The modern version of this machine is described as producing the outside (nonhuman) by excluding the animal aspects of humans. It works as a process of animalisation that attempts to mark what is purely animal versus what is human within a human subject. Agamben’s ultimate goal is not to restructure or redefine the human/animal distinction or find brand new articulations. He aims to comprehend the ways in which this machine works in order to be able to stop it (Primera, Forthcoming). The stakes of this apparatus are both ontological and political. The machine defines the conditions of political life by producing the division between *bios* and *zoē*. According to Agamben, Western politics depends on this separation. The human becomes political by distinguishing itself from its own bare life and preserving that relation through exclusion. This separation functions as a structural operation of sovereign power. Sovereignty acts through the designation of what remains excluded as bare life. The machine functions as a biopolitical

mechanism that connects the production of humans to practices of domination. It is neither external to power nor reducible to symbolic classification. It organises the field in which inclusion and exclusion become politically operative.

The Proprietary Machine takes the anthropological machine's logic of inclusion and exclusion and introduces it with the logic of property. Agamben focused on the division between the human and animal as foundational for modern governance, particularly Western biopolitics. The Proprietary Machine demonstrates that this division has always been intertwined with the questions of ownership and control. Having established that the human is defined against the empty category of animal in dominant Western tradition, this framework further shows that the human is simultaneously equated with ownership since it is the one and only entity that possesses rationality, soul and capacity for self-possession. In contrast, the Animal and by extension the less-than-human are situated as entities that can be owned. The introduction of the logic of property enhances Agamben's concept, or any criticism of anthropocentrism for that matter, by illustrating how marginalised humans are regarded as objects for use, exchange, and domination by those regarded as proper humans. The discussion of property extends the inquiry beyond the human-nature dichotomy, questioning who possesses ownership rights and, more critically, the rationale behind such rights. In other words, it examines the division that justifies its violence against the marginalised, not only via hierarchical supremacy but also by asserting that humanity is fully realised only through the right to ownership within the frameworks of existence. This application illustrates the ontological justification of violence against animals, land, the environment, and marginalised individuals in the interest of designated proper humans.

By integrating and emphasising the significance of the property logic, the theory of the Proprietary Machine facilitates a more thorough analysis of the system that enables, justifies, and regulates exploitation. This perspective shows that, to be fully human, means implicitly (although sometimes more explicitly than not) to have dominion, to have the capacity to own property, which may include human beings. On the other hand, to be classified as less than human is to be rendered as available and exposed to appropriation. The ontological supremacy of the human justifies exploitation in concrete ways. If certain beings are inherently inferior and lack the capacity of reason, language and soul, it follows from this logic that they exist for the sake of superior beings. This clearly demonstrates the impact of philosophical anthropocentrism, beginning with Aristotle's hierarchy of life, followed by Descartes' establishment of mind/body dualism, and extending to modern Western philosophy, which commonly posits human superiority over animals and nature. These sedimented assumptions and propositions intersect seamlessly with the logic of property. European metaphysics has long maintained that humans have this exclusive right to treat nature as a possession. The amalgamation of these two prevailing paradigms of comprehending life and existence creates a worldview in which the control and exploitation of specific life forms is perceived not as an ethical violation but as the natural order of things.

4.2 Colonial entanglements: Ownership, land, and the legacy of violence

The aforementioned order of things is enforced and reinforced by the ideologies, cultural narratives, laws and institutions that police the boundaries between who is an owner and who is ownable. As demonstrated in the preceding chapter, Enlightenment philosophers like Locke contended that property originates from the labour of

individuals interacting with the environment. This assertion seemingly highlights human freedom; nonetheless, it implies that land not cultivated in a Eurocentric settler manner is inherently waste and open for expropriation. The anthropocentric presumptions that only particular types of human usage of land confer ownership follow this understanding of property. It gives colonists the excuse to declare large areas terra nullius, or no one's property, open for conquest, and it subtly derides indigenous or non-Western methods of relating to land.

The Proprietary Machine continues to regulate exploitation by defining what constitutes a legitimate and justified claim. It persists in subtle ways and breaks out of its veil at times of political crisis, conflict of interests and activities seemingly contradicting the principles it supposedly embodies. Despite seemingly and at times stubbornly criticising their colonial past, the principles of Western hegemony can easily align with ongoing colonial endeavours. This does not mean that the nodal points of Western democratic ideals simply coexist with actions that contradict them. It means the opposite: these values do not contradict appropriation and exploitation. The democratic ideals of Western powers are built on the idea of property and ownership. Within that framework, appropriation is only condemned when it lacks justification. Exclusion and exploitation are normalised within the boundaries of propriety, even for entire societies. The colonisers represent the civilised and proper humans, who have the right to own and exploit. At the same time, the people outside this category are judged too close to nature, not properly human enough to possess sovereignty over their lives and land. When the exploited assert their authority and autonomy, the Proprietary Machine characterises their resistance as illegitimate and an uprising against the natural hierarchy, which warrants suppression by force. The machine's boundaries are not blind to history or race. They have been imposed

throughout the history of modernity. Enslaved individuals were regarded as property rather than persons under the law, and any attempts to defy this classification prompted severe punishments. These punishments are legitimised by the categories, and they in turn serve as an intimidating or justifying strategy for further violent exploitation. The machine possesses mechanisms that guarantee the preservation of its categorisations in place.

The historical entanglement of the proprietary logic with colonialism and modern governance cannot be overstated. The colonial endeavours beginning from the fifteenth century have been driven not only by brute force and greed but also by a deep-seated ontology that made such exploitation and violence potentially exist and legitimate. The Western colonisers navigating Africa, Asia and the Americas operated under anthropocentric convictions that they believed they were higher forms of life encountering wild and uncivilised beasts. This led to the perception of these lands as barren and underutilised, presenting raw resources available for acquisition. The indigenous populations were perceived as elements of nature to be regulated, dominated, or as potential subjects for conversion and assimilation into the Western conception of civilised society. The proprietary aspect of this process was also not concealed. Charters and papal decrees explicitly permitted European kings and companies to acquire entire continents and oceans as property, treating the lands and their inhabitants as transferable assets (Anghie, 2005; Williams, 1992).

Colonial rhetoric commonly referred to natives in terms that denied them full subjecthood and proper humanity. They have categorised them as savages, brutes, primitives and bestial beings. Their land was alienable property, and their bodies can be exploited as labour or commodities. In this colonial discourse and narrative, we can observe the anthropological machine's dehumanising function, rendering the

colonised as quasi-animals, which justified and enabled the transformation of people and land into property to be owned and consumed. The Proprietary Machine in this context operated as a world-making device, which converted entire lands and people into legible as property. The logic of property not only enabled exploitation but actively rewrote the very ontology of the colonised territories, ripping them off from any inherent value other than profit. Most importantly, this appropriation most of the time was presented as benevolent or necessary, as it enabled those lands to be utilised and the people to be civilised. From the viewpoint of the Proprietary Machine, this is a clear justification of invasion, slavery, and exploitative pillage, stemmed from the anthropocentric and proprietary conviction that the subjugated are inherently destined for such an existence.

Although formal colonialism has been substantially eradicated and overt legal slavery abolished, the Proprietary Machine continues to pervade modern existence in more subtle and insidious ways. The classifications and hierarchies established in earlier periods, including the distinction between human and animal, owner and owned, white and black, superior and inferior, have left an enduring impression on contemporary institutions and collective consciousness. We may not openly discuss the distinction between savages and civilised individuals within the framework of Western hegemony; when societal functions operate normally, the separation remains nuanced, but I argue it is still there. Non-Western cultures are seen as underdeveloped and inferior, while the principles of Western hegemony are presented as the only standard for democratic ideals. The Global North has a disproportionate share of wealth and resource consumption, derived from the exploitation of land and labour in the Global South. Although the Western world has welfare laws and partly safeguards environmental and animal rights to a degree, the legal position of land

and animals remains that of property and resources intended for efficient use. The concept of progress is inserted into the understanding of a proper, civilised existence for humanity. The discourse around conservation often refers to natural resources as assets to be managed for human benefit, a formulation that indirectly reestablishes nature as a repository of commodities. These are the remnants of the proprietary logic that is cultivated by the colonising and otherising legacies of the West. The fundamental relationship between the powerful and proper human and the Other persists, characterised by ownership and the owned. The shortcomings of Agamben's anthropological machine are addressed by the Proprietary Machine to demonstrate that these divisions are not always explicit and are influenced by race and history, shaped by colonial practices that regulate life in a normative manner in the contemporary world. The exposure to bare life does not indiscriminately categorise individuals but rather appropriates them by drawing on historical experiences, establishing a perspective on life that normalises appropriation itself.

4.3 Metaphysical foundations: Reason, dominion, and the proper human

To be able to pinpoint why this machine has such tenacity, we need to seek the ontological presumptions about reason, nature, and human superiority that underpin its operation. The framework of modern Western metaphysics is substantially connected to this matter. Classical and medieval philosophies, together with the European Enlightenment, produced several foundational arguments on the essence of life and humanity's role within it. Humans were characterised as the animal rationale, the immortal soul, the spark of divine logos. However it was constructed, something inherent and essential signified their differences and separated them from other creatures. Philosophers have persistently sought to articulate what is distinctive to the

human condition, what sets humankind apart. By designating reason, the capacity for language, or moral virtues as the proprium of humanity, philosophers effectively diminish the ontological significance of all other entities that do not possess these characteristics. This resulted in relegating improper ways of being to a subordinate ontological status. The improper was thereafter available for appropriation by the privileged entity referred to as the human. The inquiry into the definition of the proper human inherently entails a narcissistic claim of superiority. Elements that lie outside the established norms of propriety are regarded as instruments for the use of those within the circle. Descartes established a clear distinction between mind and body, aligning this division with the concepts of subject and object, as well as proprietor and property. He asserted that animals functioned solely as automata. This cognitive shift transformed animals into things that may be used and exploited without ethical consideration. Or at least it sedimented this way of comprehending life. The animals' voices were dismissed as reactions, while human utterances were interpreted as responses. Once life is defined through a particular attribute, even those who biologically or historically fall within the category are subject to internal hierarchies. The divide is not absolute; it is a gradient, a classificatory instrument for ranking life by degrees.

This Cartesian ontology categorises existence into two types of substances: thinking minds and matter, as the extension of their cogito. This move produced a perfect schematic for the proprietary logic. Only human cognition possesses itself and, consequently, can and must own property to actualise its subjectivity as a proper human being. Enlightenment humanism was influenced by this line of thinking, which further advanced this perspective. Immanuel Kant, who championed the unique moral quality of humans, believed that this dignity only belonged to rational

beings, whereas animals, who lack autonomous reason, had only relative value similar to objects that can be used as means to human ends. Within his paradigm, humans possess no direct obligations toward animals whatsoever. The only possible rationale for abstaining from cruelty towards animals is that such violence would corrupt their character and incline them to harm other humans. Many of his contemporaries also viewed non-European peoples through a hierarchy of maturity. In their view, Europeans epitomised intellectual existence, while others exhibited primitive barbarism and were unqualified for complete self-governance. I wish to emphasise the importance of clarity in analysing modernity through a property-based framework. This perspective, which brings together Enlightenment thinkers in a selective and composite manner, does not intend to reduce the intellectual contributions of Kant or his contemporaries to mere expressions of Anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism, nor does it aim to promote some kind of species/cultural relativism. Their work retains its intrinsic value, even when one of its foundational assumptions is critically dismantled. Their perspective may still be employed, so long as we remain aware of and capable of deconstructing the underlying anthropocentric and proprietary worldview entrenched within them. It is important to note that I do not assert that Enlightenment thought has transmitted its racist preconceptions into contemporary life in an unaltered form. There is now more room for inclusive and diversified approaches to existence, even if this potential is not always realised. However, to pinpoint the nodal points of the Western hegemony that still in subtle ways produces the discriminatory, otherising and marginalising ideas, we need to dismantle the foundational pillars of exclusion and exploitation. This legacy of anthropocentric and proprietary thought continues to shape the political and

ontological frameworks of the present as a foundational structure that silently organises contemporary exclusions and legitimises domination.

While exclusionary logic is highly dependent on anthropocentrism, the exploitation is dependent on proprietary thinking. This dependence normalises exclusion and obscures its origins by establishing the standard and subjecting the abnormal to the risk of being discarded within the system. The more overt forms of exclusion are manifested through violence against elements that are alien to this structure or that challenge its fundamental assumptions. During times of crisis, the inclusiveness of the Western political framework often ceases to function effectively. When political concepts such as democracy, equality, and justice encounter these struggles, the Proprietary Machine reemerges, absorbing the excluded and integrating them into its own system of signification. The types of violence that have become normalised and those that emerge solely in emergencies only appear to contradict the foundational principles that underlie them. Comprehending the violence in its actions necessitates the acknowledgement and dismantling of the violent, exclusionary, and exploitative foundations and presumptions of these concepts.

These ontological hierarchies did not emerge spontaneously during the Enlightenment; rather, they became more systematically established in that period onward. Medieval thought in Europe had the *Great Chain of Being* image of the cosmos where every entity had a fixed position, God above, humans in the middle, animals and plants below and so on. That chain of being proposed a cosmic hierarchy of propriety wherein the lower serves the purposes of the higher. Medieval law and traditions were already treating animals and some classes of people as the property of those above them. The modern period mainly secularised and intensified this order. Scientific anthropology has replaced the deity that allocated meaning and value in a

tangible manner. The perception of superiority was attributed to traits such as intelligence rather than the hierarchy of creation. This analogy by Arthur Schopenhauer illustrates the situation effectively: “I should liken Kant to a man at a ball, who all evening has been carrying on a love affair with a masked beauty in the vain hope of making a conquest, when at last she throws off her mask and reveals herself to be his wife” (Hicks, 2023). The perspective of human superiority over nature in humanism remains largely consistent with medieval and classical thought. The human occupies a more central position in Modern philosophy, as its value is no longer derived from the Divine but is self-assigned. The qualities that helped humans kill the god, in turn, became the very qualities that made them superior to animals and nature and granted them the right to own everything.

The Proprietary Machine has been sustained by several philosophical assumptions that render its operation both legitimate and inevitable. The worldview that reason and mastery promote one to a higher mode of existing, the understanding of nature as a landscape behind the human activities, and the domination of nature as an inherent right, these ideas construct a significant section of modernity. They are reinforced by supposed successes of the so-called human species, progress in science and industry, which creates a feedback loop where might is taken as proof of right. Contemporary discourse views the expansion of human control and manipulation of nature, encompassing genetic engineering and space colonisation, as both necessary and beneficial. The proprietary logic persists in enabling, justifying, reinforcing, and encouraging control, transformation, and advancement, even when it necessitates exploitation and appropriation. Challenges to this perspective, including environmental ethics, animal rights, and indigenous philosophies, are often dismissed based on assumptions that humans are destined to dominate the world, with their

superiority regarded as an ontological certainty and property as a natural extension of that certainty.

This is precisely why the concept of the Proprietary Machine is important for understanding and analysing the relationship between property, exploitation, and contemporary ontological frameworks. It demonstrates that the exploitation of the Other is not simply a collection of isolated moral failings or coincidences, but rather it arises systematically from our conceptualisation of reality and the position humanity is allocated. The anthropocentric and property-oriented ontology of modernity generated a condition in which domination became structural and normalised. The Proprietary Machine allows us to observe the intersections of racism, misogyny, environmental degradation, and economic exploitation within a comprehensive framework, wherein property logic functions as one operative dimension alongside patriarchal, capitalist, and anthropocentric perspectives, each structuring existence through various, frequently overlapping mechanisms of exclusion and control. They are profoundly interlinked with this overarching apparatus that assigns differential value and rights across species and populations. This is not to suggest the Proprietary Machine is the foundation of all these dynamics, nor that these otherisations are devoid of their distinct genealogies and structures. It is to propose that any intersectional criticism against the structural exploitation must account for the recurring patterns enabling and legitimising such acts of violence. In this regard, the concept of the Proprietary Machine diverges from that of Agamben's anthropological machine. Agamben's framework focuses on a singular originary division that inevitably and continuously generates identity. In this next section of the chapter, the critiques against his theorisation and how Proprietary

Machine can address them in a more comprehensive way are explained in great depth.

4.4 The anthropological machine and the limits of Agamben's frame

The notion of anthropological machine defines a philosophical logic through which the human is produced over a strategic exclusion of the animal. In *The Open: Man and Animal*, Agamben claims that Western philosophy describes human identity by drawing a foundational split between human and animal life (Agamben, 2012). As I explained in a previous section, this machine functions in two historical modes. A pre-modern version that humanises the animal and a post-Darwinian version that animalises the human. In the former, those deemed Others, such as barbarians, infidels or slaves, were perceived as animals in human form. In contrast, the contemporary machine operates by dehumanising certain individuals, categorising them as either not fully human or as possessing animalistic traits. Agamben effectively addresses the missing element I perceive in Derrida, as his framework elucidates the intersection of the human-animal dichotomy, penetrating the category of the human itself. This enables us to analyse the mechanisms of slavery, exploitation, and exclusion within political institutions and ideologies. However, Agamben's vision, in itself, carries its own limitations (Devenney, 2022, p. 48).

Jacques Derrida, particularly in his seminar *The Beast and the Sovereign*, criticises and responds to Agamben's framing of the human animal divide. (Derrida, 2011). Derrida challenges the presuppositions of Agamben's anthropological machine on both philosophical and ethical grounds. Primarily, Derrida interrogates the integrity of the category of the Animal as discussed in the first chapter of this project. The term animal represents a singular categorisation of a diverse array of

organisms, which constitutes an unjustifiable simplification. The sharp binary between human/animal anthropological machine relies on is fundamentally unstable. Derrida proposes deconstructing the machine rather than halting or transcending it, thereby revealing its incoherence (Derrida, 2008). He argues that demonstrating the multiplicity within categories can facilitate the dissemination of the binary. Derrida incorporates the exploitation of animals into the critical and ethical examination of anthropocentrism. The exclusion of animality functions less as a discrete political or conceptual act than as an underlying structural logic that conditions hierarchies in both symbolic and legal-political orders.

Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysical divide between human and animal, alongside Agamben's critique of sovereignty's role in excluding bare life, informs my argument that the human/animal distinction serves as a foundational framework for internal hierarchies within humanity. The exclusionary logic inherent in anthropocentric metaphysics establishes a structure for violence against marginalised groups, including women and minorities, by associating them with nature or animality. It also sets the conditions of possibility of contemporary biopolitics in that it installs violence in the very idea of proper humanity.

The Proprietary Machine goes further by explaining why, despite such instability, the human/animal divide persists so strongly in practice. Derrida exposes the conceptual flaws in the binary (Swiffen, 2012); the Proprietary Machine identifies the apparatus that keeps the binary in place. It proposes that a power structure, a property-centric mechanism, perpetually reproduces the human/animal (and subject/object) dichotomy, as this division facilitates exploitation. In summary, although the concepts of "human" and "animal" are intellectually ambiguous, society operates under the assumption of a strict divide, as viewing certain species as inferior

to humans legitimises their use as property. The Proprietary Machine thereby enhances Derrida's deconstruction with a constructive theory on the utilisation of the binary. Derrida prompts a reevaluation of our ethical considerations toward animals, while the Proprietary Machine highlights the necessity of deconstructing the owner/ownable dichotomy to eradicate the exploitation inherent in that binary.

4.5 Race and coloniality: Anti-Blackness, property, and historical specificity

Agamben's theory of anthropological machine and bare life has faced critiques from scholars who argued that it identifies a homogenous way of functioning that dismisses the questions of race, colonialism and historical specificity. The universal structure of exclusion that Agamben's theory proposes remains Eurocentric and overlooks historical regimes of power, such as racial slavery, colonial conquest, etc., that have shaped who counts as fully human. The anti-colonial philosophers discussed in the previous chapter, who examined how Western metaphysics and especially early modern political theory are thoroughly marked by anthropocentrism, identify a similar shortcoming in Agamben's work. Sylvia Wynter argued, for instance, that Agamben's Eurocentric concept of the human neglects the racial-colonial construction of Man (Wynter, 2003). She asserts that Renaissance humanism, Enlightenment rationality, and homo economicus disproportionately represent one group of people as if it were universal humanity. This overrepresentation was only possible by reducing colonised and non-white peoples to less-than-human status. She contends that Agamben's concept of bare life overlooks the historical contexts in which Indigenous and Black peoples were systematically excluded from the definition of humanity. According to her, the exclusion of the animal is not the origin of the human category, but it is the anti-Blackness that forms

the human. He accuses Agamben of seeing the dimensions of race and coloniality as add-ons to modern governance, while they are fundamental.

Alexander Weheliye engages with Agamben's concept of bare life in *Habeas Viscus*, arguing that it overlooks racial issues in theory, despite drawing on racialised examples. Weheliye demonstrates that modern processes of reducing humans to bare life have always been entangled with race (Weheliye, 2014). Plantation slavery serves as a prominent example of the transformation of black bodies into property. Weheliye critiques Agamben for neglecting the significance of race. Agamben conceptualises bare life as the elimination of racial distinctions; however, Weheliye argues that race continues to influence bodies even in a state of bareness, and that modern power generates bare life through racialising logics. Brenna Bhandar (2018), a critical legal scholar, presents a different analysis that illustrates the ways in which the property domain links with the colonial law. Within the context of the Proprietary Machine, the centrality of property responds to these criticisms against the anthropological machine. While explaining how the exclusion turns into exploitation, the framework shows its *raison d'être*, direction, and tenacity. Agamben's framework lacks the strategy behind the functioning of the discriminatory machine, as his theorisation of the machine is sterile and impacts people homogenously.

According to Agamben, the anthropological machine serves as evidence that the creation of bare life, or the notion of life as a political object, did not originate in modernity but has merely intensified over time. Both Foucault and Agamben identify a significant transformation in the governance of life during modernity. However, whereas Foucault emphasises the biopolitical turn toward the management of populations, Agamben insists that this shift continues a more ancient metaphysical tradition that always already subordinated life to sovereign decision. Yet, as German

Primera(Forthcoming) argues that both thinkers fail to account for a decisive rupture within modernity: the production of Blackness. Agamben's Eurocentric historiography, his confinement to the territorial and philosophical boundaries of Europe, blinds him to the colonial and racial regimes that fundamentally reshaped the very concept of life and the modalities of power.

Primera, drawing on Black studies and Afropessimist theory, insists that Blackness is not merely a sociological category but the foundational site through which modern governance was organised. Following thinkers such as Achille Mbembe (2019), he argues that slavery, the plantation, and the colonial enterprise produced a radical transformation in how bodies were governed as property. From the vantage of the Proprietary Machine, this transformation cannot be understood without situating the colonial appropriation of Black bodies as central to the development of property-based governance. Through chattel slavery in particular, the private logics that defined and justified ownership of things, land, and animals were extended to humans. (Similarly, industrialisation has changed how humans interact with nonhuman animals.) This expansion of property over the human Other was realised in its most intense form outside Europe, on the bodies of African slaves, indigenous peoples, and colonised populations.

Primera further illustrates that Blackness operates as the ontological foundation of humanity. It is a fundamental exclusion that delineates the parameters of the proper human through a rationale of dispossession. This is consistent with Frank Wilderson's claim (2010) that Blackness is not simply excluded but rendered asocial, abject, and ontologically incompatible with humanity. According to Wilderson, the Black individual is not regarded as a citizen deprived of rights, but rather as a non-subject whose absence becomes the prerequisite for humanity itself.

Wilderson characterises social death as an irreversible ontological state resulting from the plantation system, rather than a mere transient social status; it is a perpetual corpse that both supports and haunts existence. Not just within the classical philosophical tradition but also in critical theorists such as Foucault and Agamben, the histories of Blackness are omitted, despite constituting some of the most direct and violent manifestations of how life and human bodies have been rendered governable, ownable, and disposable under modern regimes of power.

Primera's examination draws on Hortense Spillers's notion(1987) of the zero degree of social conceptualisation. Spillers claims that Black flesh is devoid of cultural significance and rendered as indistinct material. He characterises this reduction as a violent act of naming that converts human beings into abstract, possessable flesh, that severs them from historical and symbolic frameworks of significance. I contend that this reduction is facilitated and sustained by proprietary logic, which delineates what is appropriate for humanity based on ownership. The Proprietary Machine recognises this shift in the way power operates over human populations and offers a more thorough view of contemporary governance. I agree with Primera that the emergence of the category of Blackness does not contradict Enlightenment ideals of freedom and equality. It is their condition of possibility. The proprietary logic that underpins modern governance depends on a division between the proper and the improper. The Enlightenment marks the first major intensification of this logic, where the improper is excluded in a way that enables its appropriation as the ground upon which the proper human is affirmed.

Collectively, anti-colonial critiques demonstrate convincingly that the anthropological machine fails to account for how signifiers such as race, colonisation and ownership have substantially constructed the category of the human. Agamben

seeks to delineate the formation of bare life as a universal mechanism applicable to all, corresponding to his examination of philosophical and legal instances such as ancient Roman law and Nazi camps, which abstract from material realities and specific bodies (Primera, 2019). In the process, he disregards and eliminates the distinctions among gender, religion, nationality, and race. The exclusionary logic of modernity has consistently targeted specific groups, including Black individuals, indigenous lands, colonized populations, and non-conforming genders. Agamben's theorisation risks a misleading universalism by neglecting the particularities of exclusion and exploitation. The conclusion of these critiques is that any theoretical framework designed to explain the distinction between humans and non-humans must be revised to incorporate the realities of race-making, colonial conquest, and property relations. These elements are central to the historical deployment of biopolitics, rather than being supplementary.

Agamben's examination of the inclusive exclusion of bare life does not address the significance of proprietary relations. He does not conceptualise modern governance in terms of ownership and possession. Nevertheless, as I have articulated in the previous sections, the history of the excluded as bare life is often the history of those who were commodified or reduced to property. The Other is not merely cast aside from the realm of politics; rather, the Other is actively and forcefully integrated into the very structure of an economic and social system, existing as property. In a comparable manner, the so-called savages and indigenous populations whose territories were usurped were exterminated in some cases. In others, they were subjected to enslavement or forced into systems of labour. The concept of the anthropological machine fails to adequately address the intricate mechanisms underlying the ownership and commodification of the bodies of those rendered

excluded. It cannot address the penal system that reduces individuals to mere bodies, stripped of their freedom, with their labour quantified as a mere fraction of that of a free civilian. It cannot account for the commodification of women's bodies, the industrial killing of animals and racial disparities perpetuated by the machine. The metaphysical categories addressed, such as human/animal, bios/zoe, and citizen/homo sacer, require a concrete method for analysing the operation of this system, one that is informed by the specific histories of exclusion and exploitation.

In this regard, while Agamben's theorisation offers a framework for understanding the production of dividing lines in ontology, it does not adequately explain the reasons for their production or their operationalisation within specific systems of domination. The existence and continued presence of the machine, as argued by several scholars mentioned above, is linked to histories of exploitation, a position with which I agree. The European imperial expansion, capitalist accumulation, colonial endeavours, slavery, and gendered exploitation necessitated rationales for dispossession and enslavement. Those rationales were anthropocentric and were implemented through property relations. In this way, one can observe the reason why the concept of property is strictly entangled with anthropocentric thinking, both at the foundations and in its implementation.

4.6 Ownable life

The previous section demonstrated how Agamben's framework disregards material realities as well as racial and historical specificity. In this section, I demonstrate how the Proprietary Machine, as a framework, can fill in what the anthropological machine is missing. While Agamben focuses on how beings are reduced to bare life by being excluded from the category of the human, the Proprietary Machine shows

how beings are assigned value through property logics. They are not abandoned, but they are turned into ownable and exploitable entities. This represents a form of inclusive exclusion that rationalises domination. This allows my framework to centre on the history of racial enslavement, colonialism, and settler violence, in which humans were structurally and systematically converted to objects. This perspective integrates critiques of Agamben's universalism while considering colonial legacies. I contend that the machine should not be perceived as a generator of arbitrary and disposable excess, which allows power to exert violence upon individuals indiscriminately. It converts potential victims of violence into objects that can be violated. The ancient and philosophical figures, such as Homo Sacer, do not adequately address how the exclusion of marginalised groups serves as a mechanism for justifying exploitation. In colonial histories, the exclusion and dehumanisation of specific groups is frequently succeeded by the appropriation of their bodies and lands. This machine is neither blind to the race nor is it non-strategic. The centrality of ownership offers a more historically grounded and conceptually precise account of how domination operates. It illustrates that hierarchies are maintained not only through dehumanisation but also by assigning individuals differential degrees of access to property and subjectivity. It extends beyond the human-animal dichotomy, illustrating how all excluded categories have been exposed to commodification and objectification. It categorises entities into proprietors and property rather than distinguishing between humans and other living beings. Instead of universalising an abstract way of structuring life, it learns from the histories of appropriation to explain the reasons and operations of exclusion. While Agamben interrogates how life can be stripped of political meaning and how it can be discarded and abandoned, I demonstrate the mechanisms through which it can be appropriated and utilised. The

process of capturing and instrumentalising is not secondary but central to the political order we inhabit.

The objections of anti-colonial scholars to the anthropological machine suggest that there is a rationale for its operation and its focus on certain individuals. They argue that the anthropological machine neglects to recognise that anthropocentrism functions as a justification for colonial pursuits (Bhandar, 2018; Mbembe, 2019; Weheliye, 2014; Wynter, 2003). Bringing property into the picture reveals the strategic use of anthropocentrism. Furthermore, Agamben's framework lacks how that machine is reinforced and sustained by racial discrimination, slavery and colonialism. The concept of property illustrates the discrimination faced by colonised black bodies for the purpose of appropriation, and the machine has learned from these historical legacies. The machine was never blind to race, and its racist vision influenced modern governance, in which we experience governmentality in a mass and ostensibly homogeneous manner, but it quietly develops disparities that exacerbate racial distinctions.

This project can be summarised as the politicisation of Derrida's perspective, as well as the diversification and decentralisation of Agamben's theorisation, which moves beyond post-structuralism and into critical engagement with anti-colonial thought. I believe that in order to theorise anthropocentrism as a justification for exploitation, we need an ontological examination of the concept of property. And we observe in the histories of slavery and colonialism that it is, in fact, used as justification for appropriation, expropriation, manipulation, exploitation of the land, animals and not enough humans. The proprietary machine takes into account that the division of life and stratification of human category is dependent on property logic.

The Proprietary Machine encompasses more than simply a mechanism of justification. Property logic where humans are hierarchically superior to the rest enables the appropriation and exploitation in more than one dimension. In its most basic form, the Proprietary Machine's construction and operation can be described as follows.

First, it makes exploitation potentially exist as it produces the conditions of possibility through excluding certain entities and reducing them to property. Second, it justifies these actions by legitimising the right to exploit otherised beings, appropriating their bodies and land. This justification is grounded in the right to own, the capacity to reason and its accompanying authority and the ideals of efficiency and progress, all tied to the signifiers of the proper human. Third, the Machine reinforces systemic violence by generating a structure in which the exploitation of the less-than-human entities becomes normalised. It constructs its own values of production, exploration and exploitation by inserting them into its operational logic. Fourth, it shapes the subjectivities that allow its continuation. Appropriating from the lesser beings is not only normalised but promoted. The ability to manipulate nature and bend it to one's will becomes a signifier of proper humanity. The narrative of the human species battling nature takes on the tone of nationalistic pride. It legitimises the drive to exploit and alter the natural world. Finally, it polices the boundaries of its ideological hegemony. It defines what is proper and exposes what is deemed improper to the violence of the proper. To be improper within the logic of the Proprietary Machine is to have one's body, life and freedom subjected to its effects.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The Proprietary Machine concept elucidates why solely moral appeals for reforming our treatment of others frequently fail when they do not confront fundamental ontological assumptions. While appeals to kindness or rights are valid, if society unconsciously maintains a hierarchy that deems certain lives as inherently lesser or views the Earth simply as an object, exploitation will persist. Movements advocating for animal rights challenge the long-standing perception of animals as mere tools. However, these advancements remain fragile and incomplete as long as the fundamental anthropocentric and proprietary hierarchy persists. This is evident in how economic or scientific justifications, framed as beneficial to humans, often take precedence over the welfare of animal life. Calls for social and economic justice may prompt reforms; however, the global system frequently reestablishes patterns of exploitation in different forms, such as labour outsourcing to less prosperous areas or new forms of debt and dependency. This occurs because the underlying rationale of regarding certain individuals and locations as resources remains largely unchallenged. The Proprietary Machine's endurance means that it adapts to surface changes. Dismantling it requires more than adjusting laws or attitudes; it demands a fundamental rethinking of how we categorise reality and a willingness to challenge the deep-seated belief that domination is justified by superiority or by necessity.

By integrating insights from Indigenous philosophy and other non-Western perspectives, we also see that the Proprietary Machine is not a universal or inevitable way of structuring reality, but a historically contingent one. Indigenous worldviews have frequently rejected the sharp anthropocentric divide and the notion of land and

life as property. Many Indigenous philosophies understand humans as relatives among many living kin, rather than masters of the world. Land is often seen as a sacred commons or an ancestral trust, not something that individuals own. Animals and plants may be regarded as teachers, spirits, or persons in their own right, deserving of respect. These perspectives show a radically different ontology, one of relationship and reciprocal obligation rather than ownership and dominion. The existence of such worldviews both outside and before the dominance of Western modernity underscores that the proprietary logic is not written into the nature of things but is a cultural configuration that gained power through historical force.

For example, anthropologist David Graeber and archaeologist David Wengrow have recently argued in *The Dawn of Everything* that human societies did not follow a single track toward ever-greater hierarchy or private property (Graeber & Wengrow, 2021). Their research shows that throughout prehistory and history, many communities organised themselves without rigid social classes or exclusive ownership of land, and that egalitarian, communal forms of life persisted even alongside urbanisation or agriculture. Inequality and proprietary regimes were not an automatic outcome of human development; rather, they arose in particular contexts and were often consciously resisted or avoided by people with alternative values. Graeber and Wengrow even document how early modern European thought was influenced by indigenous critiques. Reports indicate that Native American leaders were perplexed by the French colonists' preoccupation with wealth and domination, which in turn stimulated Enlightenment discussions regarding freedom and equality (Graeber & Wengrow, 2021). Such evidence reinforces how contingent the rise of the proprietary order has been. It might have been otherwise: different ontologies and social logics were not only possible but were actually practised and eloquently

defended. The eventual global dominance of a property-centred, exploitative system was a result of specific historical forces (colonial conquest, epidemics, industrialisation) overwhelming those other possibilities, rather than any natural fate of humanity.

Indeed, part of the violence of colonialism was directed at these alternate ontologies. Indigenous peoples were pressured or forced to adopt European-style property regimes (for example, through the imposition of private land allotments and markets) and to accept anthropocentric religions and education systems that placed man above nature. The Proprietary Machine, to sustain itself, had to marginalise or erase competing ways of being. Yet Indigenous voices persisted and today offer crucial conceptual resources for imagining a world beyond the proprietary paradigm. They illustrate that our ontological assumptions are not fixed, we can envision our relationship with nature as kinship rather than ownership, and our interactions with other humans as coexistence within a network of relationships rather than as competition for resources or domination.

In conclusion, the concept of the Proprietary Machine is indispensable for grasping how deeply intertwined the idea of property is with structures of exploitation and with modern philosophy's ontological scaffolding. This indicates that beneath seemingly distinct injustices, such as the subjugation of colonised peoples, the commodification of animals and nature, the stratifications of race, class, and gender, and the alienation prevalent in capitalist economies, there exists a shared framework. This framework systematically classifies and arranges entities by merging an anthropocentric divide with a logic of ownership.

This machine has operated as a hidden engine of modern history, giving philosophical sanction to brutal realities by making them appear natural and

necessary. Recognising it urges us to reconsider the most basic categories through which we understand the world: “Human,” “Animal,” “Nature,” “Property,” “Owner,” “Object,” and so on. It asks that we interrogate the historically imposed meanings of these terms and acknowledge their role in legitimating domination. Only by doing so can we begin to imagine an alternative mode of thought and existence that is not bound to the Proprietary Machine’s anthropocentric and proprietorial calculus but instead attends to the intrinsic worth of beings and the possibility of relationships untethered from possession. This is a profound philosophical and ethical task. The task it provides us with is to envision an ontological shift in which the value and meaning of existing as a human being is no longer to be master and owner, but rather a cohabitant of a shared world, respecting the manifold forms of life and being that constitute our reality.

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