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# Better Animal than Human: The Happy Animal and the Human Animal in the Renaissance Reception of Aristotle

## Introduction

“The human being is the unhappiest animal to be found in the universe”:<sup>1</sup> this drastic view of humanity is expressed not by a human, but by an animal

- I GELLI, Giovan Battista: *La Circe*, in: ID.: *Opere*, ed. by Delmo MAESTRI. Turin: UTET 1976, 299: “con ciò sia cosa che egli [l’uomo] sia il più infelice animale che si ritrovi nell’universo.”

In transcribing Latin and Italian passages, I have adopted the following criteria: punctuation was modernised; accents, apostrophes and capital letters were made uniform according to modern usage; u and v have been conformed to modern usage; &c > et (Latin)/e (Italian); h has been deleted in occurrences of cho/cha/chu and gho/gha/ghu (e. g.: anchora > ancora) but was retained when etymologically relevant (e. g.: humore > humore); abbreviations have been tacitly expanded. All translations are my own, if not stated otherwise. Research for this article was supported by the ERC Starting Grant Project 335949 “Aristotle in the Italian Vernacular: Rethinking Renaissance and Early-Modern Intellectual History (c. 1400–c. 1650)”. I wish to thank David Lines and Simone Bionda for their insightful comments; and the editors of the present collection for their careful reading of my text, and for their suggestions, which very much improved it.

I owe Thomas Ricklin the initial inspiration to research not just the human-animal differentiation in Renaissance philosophy, but its understudied ethical implications. This essay, as well as my forthcoming monograph *Renaissance Vegetarianism: The Philosophical Afterlives of Porphyry’s On Abstinence* (Legenda 2020) are rooted in his stimulating mentorship while I was Fellow at LMU Munich. Thomas himself touched upon the topic of the human condition in comparison to the animal one in several essays, to which I here refer the interested reader: *Orphée et les animaux de l’Antiquité tardive au XIIIe siècle*, in: *Micrologus* 8 (2000) (*The World of Animals and Human*

– the oyster – in *La Circe* (1549) by Giovan Battista Gelli (1498–1563). The work was inspired by Plutarch’s *Gryllos* (also known as *Bruta animalia ratione uti*), which narrates Ulysses’ conversations with one of his former comrades, whom the enchantress Circe had transformed into a pig. To Ulysses’ surprise, the human-become-pig, whose name is Gryllos, argues that the animal condition is happier than the human one, and that therefore he does not wish to accept Ulysses’ offer to regain his human shape. Plutarch, like Gelli, addresses in fictional form a number of philosophical issues regarding the definition of humanity against the backdrop of animality. In both cases, the physical transformation of humans into animals allows the transformed, hybrid creature to compare both lives – as human, and as animal – and to draw conclusions about their differences and advantages. In both cases, too, the comparison does not simply establish how humans differ from animals on the levels of the body and of the soul, but aims at discussing the practical outcomes of such a theoretical operation: is human life better than animal life, or are animals actually happier than humans?

In claiming that humans are the unhappiest creatures of all, the oyster in Gelli’s *Circe* voices a radically anti-Aristotelian position. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle had famously argued that happiness is linked to the exercise of virtue.<sup>2</sup> Happiness, or *eudaimonía*, is not equivalent to a cheerful state. For Aristotle, it is assessed on the basis of a person’s whole life, and can even be altered *post mortem* by certain events, which affect the memory or legacy of that person.<sup>3</sup> Humans only can be said to be happy in the proper sense of the word: “we do not speak of an ox or a horse or any other animal as happy, because none of them can take part in this sort of activity”,<sup>4</sup> a definition that is “in harmony with those who say that happiness is virtue,

*Society*), 47–64; *Femme-philosophie et hommes-animaux: Essai d’une lecture satirique de la Consolatio philosophiae de Boèce*, in: GALONNIER, Alain (ed.): *Boèce ou la chaîne des savoirs*. Louvain/Paris: Peeters 2003, 131–146, especially 141–144; *Gli animali di Lucrezio nella Firenze rinascimentale alla luce del Bosco in Fiamme di Piero di Cosimo*, in: MURATORI, Cecilia (ed.): *The Animal Soul and the Human Mind: Renaissance Debates* (Bruniana & Campanelliana, Supplementi, Studi 15). Pisa/Rome: Fabrizio Serra, 61–74.

2 ARISTOTLE: *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by J. A. K. THOMSON. London: Penguin 2004, 16 (1098a16).

3 ARISTOTLE: *Nicomachean Ethics*, 22–26 (1100a10–1101b9).

4 ARISTOTLE: *Nicomachean Ethics*, 21 (1099b32–1100a1).

or a particular virtue; because an activity in accordance with virtue implies virtue".<sup>5</sup>

Aristotle is unequivocal: animals can in no way be happy.<sup>6</sup> Yet, for Renaissance readers, like Gelli, this is not a settled matter. What happiness is and how it can be attained are questions treated in many Renaissance works, in which humans and animals are compared in terms of 'happiness expectations'.<sup>7</sup> Many of them are written in the vernacular, and several include programmatically the term 'happiness', *felicità*, in the title. The reasons for the (frequent, not exclusive) choice of the vernacular relate not only to the genre and intended readership of the texts – these are often dialogues, literary fictions, summaries and commented translations –<sup>8</sup> but also to the significance of divulging philosophical theories of how to pursue happiness.

The use of the vernacular does not involve a mere simplification of the subject matter, but serves the purpose of disseminating theories designed to have a real impact on human life.<sup>9</sup> The emphasis on the author's literary efforts is a *topos*; yet, in the case of the topic of happiness, explaining how different theories can be put into practice within a good life, entails more than superficial rhetoric.<sup>10</sup> For instance, in the dedicatory letter of the *Circe*

5 ARISTOTLE: *Nicomachean Ethics*, 18 (1098b29–31).

6 On the animal-human differentiation in Aristotle see HENRY, Devin: *Aristotle on Animals*, in: ADAMSON, Peter/EDWARDS, G. Fay (eds.): *Animals. A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018, 9–26; and LASPIA, Patrizia: *Aristotele e gli animali*, in: CIMATTI, Felice/GENSINI, Stefano/PLASTINA, Sandra (eds.): *Bestie, filosofi e altri animali*. Milan: Mimesis 2017, 17–35.

7 For an overview of discussions on happiness in the Renaissance see POPPI, Antonino: *Happiness*, in: LINES, David A./EBBERSMEYER, Sabrina (eds.): *Rethinking Virtue, Reforming Society: New Directions in Renaissance Ethics, c. 1350–c. 1650*. Turnhout: Brepols 2013, 243–275. On the medieval debate on bodily and mental pleasures see BIANCHI, Luca: *Il vescovo e i filosofi. La condanna parigina del 1277 e l'evoluzione dell'aristotelismo scolastico*. Bergamo: Lubrina 1990, 153–159.

8 On the difference in audience between Latin and vernacular dialogues see COX, Virginia: *The Renaissance Dialogue: Literary Dialogue in its Social and Political Contexts, Castiglione to Galileo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008, 63.

9 On the theoretical challenges in understanding the scope and readership of vernacular philosophy see BIANCHI, Luca: *Volgarizzare: per chi?*, in: *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 59, 2 (2012), 480–495, here 487–488; and LINES, David: *Beyond Latin in Renaissance Philosophy: A Plea for New Critical Perspectives*, in: *Intellectual History Review* 25, 4 (2015), 373–389.

10 On the recourse to Aristotle in teaching how to live a good life see POPPI, Antonino: *L'etica del Rinascimento tra Platone e Aristotele*. Naples: La città del sole 1997, 32–55.

to Duke Cosimo I, Gelli writes that, even if humans can attain happiness, they nevertheless often reject the “high and divine things” where they might find it, and fail to look beyond the sensual realm, behaving like beasts. Through his dialogue, Gelli aims at “benefiting others as much as possible”, by showing in literary form how to unearth the path back to a properly human, as opposed to a beastly life.<sup>11</sup> As we will see, Gelli’s dialogue *I capricci del bottaio* (1546) also addresses the animal-human difference in connection to the meaning of human happiness.<sup>12</sup> This dialogue successfully reached an international audience, which further amplified Gelli’s appeal to the social value of discussing human happiness. Prince Ludwig I of Anhalt-Köthen (1579–1650) translated *I capricci* into German to enable further diffusion, and in his own commentary to the text he devoted a section to the concept of happiness as applied to humans and to animals.<sup>13</sup>

Vernacular discussions of human happiness thus gained currency in the Renaissance. The following case studies exemplify three different interpretations of Aristotle’s requirements for a happy life. Selective rather than exhaustive in approach, this essay provides a thematically-organized overview of Italian vernacular discussions across several genres, with special attention to the permeability of philosophical and literary forms. There are two main recurrent themes in all the works considered: first, humans and animals are compared in terms of their respective sensory experiences, because the body can play a key role in attaining happiness – or at least

11 GELLI: *Circe*, 292. On Gelli’s use of the vernacular see PULIAFITO, Anna Laura: *Filosofia, Letteratura e vita civile: Giovan Battista Gelli e il volgare*, in: *Modernidades* 11 (2011), 11–15, <https://revistas.unc.edu.ar/index.php/modernidades/article/viewFile/8304/9181> [accessed 16 November 2018].

12 GELLI, Giovan Battista: *I capricci del bottaio*, in: ID.: *Opere*, ed. by Delmo MAESTRI. Turin: UTET 1976.

13 GELLI, Giovan Battista: *Anmutige Gespräch Capricci del Bottaio genandt. Darinnen von allerhand lustigen und nützlichen Sachen gehandelt wird [...]*, trans. by Prince Ludwig I. Köthen: [Fürstliche Druckerei] 1619, 207–208 and 4 on the usefulness of the work. See also CONERMANN, Klaus (ed.): *Briefe der Fruchtbringenden Gesellschaft und Beilagen. Die Zeit Fürst Ludwigs von Anhalt-Köthen 1617–1650*, vol. 1 (1617–1626). Wolfenbüttel/Tübingen: Niemeyer 1992, 126 (online: <http://diglib.hab.de/edoc/ed000213/start.htm> [accessed 16 November 2018]), letter by Ludwig to Johann Ernst d. J. von Sachsen-Weimar (7 July 1619). On the international reception of Gelli see MIGIEL, Marylin: *The Dignity of Man: A Feminist Perspective*, in: MIGIEL, Marylin/SCHIESARI, Juliana (eds.): *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press 1991, 211–232, here 212.

can prevent one from attaining it; second, reaching happiness is viewed as a direct consequence of being endowed with rationality.

In the first scenario, on the commentary tradition on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, humans are significantly better placed than animals to reach happiness.<sup>14</sup> Bernardo Segni's work is the principal case study here. This is because, despite its general reliance on previous commentaries, it proposes a radical interpretation of the human-animal distinction. In the second scenario, covering eclectic responses to Aristotle's treatment of happiness, humans have the potential to reach happiness but encounter obstacles in realizing it. Here I consider two works by two Neapolitans – one in Italian, by Ciarletta Caracciolo, the other in Latin, by Simone Porzio. Despite stylistic differences, they share the view that reaching happiness is an on-going struggle for humans. The third scenario returns us to Gelli, whose dialogues *I capricci* and *La Circe* together offer one of the most comprehensive treatments of the issue of animal happiness. Despite being often regarded as works of little philosophical value, I show that Gelli develops a complex and original approach, using the dialogical form to stage thought experiments aimed at pinning down the exact line of demarcation between human and animal life. By giving animals a voice, Gelli eviscerates the possibility that humans are in fact the unhappiest of all creatures.

## I.

The first Italian translation, with commentary, of the *Nicomachean Ethics* was published by Bernardo Segni (1504–1558) in 1550.<sup>15</sup> Segni's interpretation of Aristotle is strongly Christianised.<sup>16</sup> For instance, he comments on Aristotle's statement that “the good for man is an activity of the soul in accordance

14 On the Renaissance commentary tradition and its medieval roots see BIANCHI, Luca: *Renaissance Readings of the Nicomachean Ethics*, in: LINES/EBBERSMEYER: *Rethinking Virtue, Reforming Society*, 131–167.

15 On the Latin and vernacular reception of the *Nicomachean Ethics* see LINES, David A.: *Aristotle's Ethics in the Renaissance*, in: MILLER, Jon (ed.): *The Reception of Aristotle's Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013, 171–193.

16 On Segni's *Ethica* see especially LINES, David A.: *Rethinking Renaissance Aristotelianism: Bernardo Segni's Ethica, the Florentine Academy, and the Vernacular in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, in: *Renaissance Quarterly* 66 (2013), 824–865.

with virtue”,<sup>17</sup> as follows: “the truly happy and truly highest good is nothing other than GOD”.<sup>18</sup>

Segni grants to humans exclusively the capability of attaining happiness. In his account of Aristotle’s conception of happiness, he emphasizes two aspects. The first is the role of rationality, a specific power of the soul to which happiness is linked and that humans do not share with animals. In his commentary, he writes that “happiness occurs in active life, in which one exercises moral virtues, which are formed in the appetite that obeys reason.”<sup>19</sup> Virtue, in his view, is thus the result of the negotiations between desires and appetites on the one hand, and rationality on the other. Ultimately, he concludes, “happiness is an operation of the reasoning soul *in actu*”.<sup>20</sup> The second aspect to which Segni draws attention is the connection between pleasure and the experience of happiness. Segni does not simply support the Aristotelian opinion that it is not entirely a choice of the individual to become virtuous and thus happy, because external factors such as the shape and health of the body have a significant bearing on the outcome. He goes beyond this view in that he even stresses that the human body is better suited for feeling pleasure than animal bodies. To demonstrate this, he compares how sensation works in humans and in animals:

This reveals the excellence of the human being over the animal also in feeling, as the animal does not in fact enjoy any other pleasure in sensation other than what derives from the sense of touch, and it feels the other sensations almost as derivative from that one. For example, among smells, the animal does not sense those that are only pleasurable to the brain, or if it does, it does not take pleasure from them [...]. On the other hand, the human being feels the pleasure of this sense, and of the others, for their own sake, and not as derivative of touch. [...] But even in the sense of touch the human being is more perfect than all the animals, and in fact he is superior to them even in this, while they are superior to him in the others. For instance the eagle has sharper eyesight than humans, and crows and dogs can smell from further, and in the same way dogs are superior with regard to hearing. Therefore the human being is endowed

17 ARISTOTLE: *Nicomachean Ethics*, 16 (1098a16).

18 SEGNI, Bernardo: *L’Ethica di Aristotele tradotta in lingua vulgare fiorentina et commentata per Bernardo Segni*. Florence: Torrentino 1550, 47: “il veramente felice e il veramente sommo bene non essere altri che DIO”.

19 SEGNI: *Ethica*, 48: “la felicità darsi ancora nella vita attiva, nella quale s’esercitano le virtù morali, che si fanno nell’appetito ubbidiente alla ragione.”

20 SEGNI: *Ethica*, 49: “la felicità è un’operatione dell’anima ragionevole in atto.”

with great prudence because he has a very sharp sense of touch, as one finds explained in the books *On the Soul*, in the *Problems*, and in the *Parva naturalia* [...].<sup>21</sup>

This passage is a comment on Aristotle's discussion of temperance (*sophrosýne*) in book 3 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>22</sup> Aristotle had explained that it would be meaningless to accuse somebody of being intemperate with regard to smells (for instance indulging in the smell of flowers). In the case of smell, just as with hearing and seeing, the path to intemperance begins when the sensation triggers an association with the desire to touch or taste something, as taste is a kind of touch. The smell of flowers might stimulate an association with cake, and this image could then prompt over-indulgence in eating the cake: only in this respect can smell be connected with intemperance.

Aristotle claims that this connection between smell and touch/taste works in exactly the same way in humans and animals: a lion is attracted by a certain smell because it suggests that an antelope is near, raising the hope of eating it soon. But it does not enjoy that smell *per se*, nor will it linger on it. Aristotle remarks on the fact that the problem with intemperance is that it makes us act like animals.<sup>23</sup> Intemperate human beings act like animals in that they enjoy certain pleasures too much, not too little,<sup>24</sup> even if it is true that somebody who indulges too much in the pleasure of eating will not appreciate the different tastes anymore.<sup>25</sup> Aristotle does not suggest

21 SEGNI: *Ethica*, 162: "Mostrasi qui l'eccellenza che è infra l'huomo et l'animal bruto ancora ne' piaceri che derivan' da' sensi, ove il bruto non sente invero altro piacere ne' sensi di quello che deriva dal tatto, e gli altri quasi nella più parte sente in ordine a questo; verbigratia il bruto infra gli odori non sente quegli che solamente servono a confortare il cervello, o se e' gli sente e' non ne piglia piacere [...] dove all'incontro l'huomo sperimenta i piaceri di questo senso e degli altri per loro stessi, e non in ordine al senso del tatto [...]. Ma nel senso del tatto ancora è l'huomo più perfetto che tutti gli animali bruti, anzi in questo vince egli tutti gli altri, così come in tutti gli altri egli è vinto da loro, veggendo l'aquila più acutamente dell'huomo, e i corvi, et i cani più da lunge odorando, et medesimamente vincendolo i cani nell'udito. Per la ragione adunque che l'huomo ha il senso del tatto esattissimo viene egli ad esser dotato di molta prudenza, sicome di ciò se ne rende ragione ne' libri dell'Anima, ne' Problemi, e ne' Parvi naturali".

22 On this see RICHARDSON LEAR, Gabriel: *Happy Lives and the Highest Good: An Essay on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2006, 162–165.

23 ARISTOTLE: *Nicomachean Ethics*, 77 (1118a23–26).

24 ARISTOTLE: *Nicomachean Ethics*, 77 (1118b2–4).

25 ARISTOTLE: *Nicomachean Ethics*, 77 (1118a26–27).

that animals, unlike humans, are unable properly to enjoy certain pleasures, namely those that according to Segni are more connected with an intellectual than a bodily enjoyment. For Aristotle, the crucial difference is between temperate and intemperate people (the latter behave like animals); Segni, on the other hand, turns this discussion into an argument in favour of the excellence of humans over animals.

In *Nicomachean Ethics* X.5 (1176a5–29), Aristotle claims that each animal species enjoys certain pleasures and not others, while in the case of humans the enjoyment of pleasure is specific to each individual. Commenting on this theory, Segni underlines once more that animals are not free in their actions, and that they are “acted upon” rather than being active subjects: they follow “natural instinct”.<sup>26</sup> This is a theory with an established tradition. In the *Summa Theologiae* Thomas Aquinas had insisted on the fact that animals do not desire willingly, because they are moved by natural instinct (*instinctus naturae*).<sup>27</sup> Albert the Great had already explained that animals are guided by instinct: they do not make judgements regarding smells, as humans do, but only appreciate them as anticipations of taste.<sup>28</sup> In Eustratius’ commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Segni would have also read that according to Aristotle “from these senses, namely sight, hearing and smell, animals do not derive any pleasure, except accidentally (*ex accidente*). Indeed dogs do not rejoice in the smell of hares like humans do in that of flowers, nor the lion in the call of the oxen like humans in songs.” Eustratius had concluded that the pleasure in which it is possible to be intemperate

26 SEGNI: *Ethica*, 518: “che li piaceri ci son proprii negli individui, e non nella spetie intera. Et questo nasce perche li bruti operano per instinto naturale. Onde si può me’ dire che e’ sien guidati, che e’ guidino le loro attioni.”

27 THOMAS AQUINAS: *Summa Theologiae*, in: ID.: *Thomas Aquinatis Opera omnia cum hypertextibus*, ed. by Roberto BUSA, <http://www.corpusthomicum.org> [accessed 16 November 2018], Prima pars secundae partis, q. 12, art. 5: “Et hoc modo etiam bruta animalia intendunt finem, in quantum moventur instinctu naturali ad aliquid.” And *ibid.*, q. 15, art. 2. On the concept of *temperantia* in relation to the enjoyment of pleasures see THOMAS AQUINAS: *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, lib. 2, lect. 8. On the human-animal difference with regard to incontinent behaviour and temperance see PICKAVÉ, Martin: *Aquinas on Incontinence and Psychological Weakness*, in: HOFFMANN, Tobias/MÜLLER, Jörn/PERKAMS, Matthias (eds.): *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013, 184–202, here 193 and 200–201.

28 ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *Super ethica*, in ID.: *Opera omnia*, XIV.I, ed. by Wilhelm KÜBEL. Münster: Aschendorff 1968, 201.



are bestial, and not appropriate to rational creatures.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Donato Acciaiuoli's commentary (derived from Argyropoulos' lectures) also explains that temperance and intemperance apply to those passions that we share with animals, and not to hearing, seeing and smelling, from which the animals derive pleasure only indirectly when they lead to enjoying touching or tasting, which are common to all creatures.<sup>30</sup> Walter Burley, too, had stated that those who follow their bellies are *bestiales*; yet, he had also remarked on the fact that animals cannot be said to be incontinent, because they do not have "universalis opinio". Only humans, therefore, can pursue those bestial pleasures to the excess of incontinence.<sup>31</sup>

Segni's interpretation is mostly in line with these commentators; but he strongly emphasizes an element that imparts his own distinctive interpretation to the Aristotelian text: he views animals as radically less able to enjoy bodily pleasures than humans. According to Segni, *if* animals have any capacity to feel a sensation derived from hearing, seeing or smelling, they do not derive pleasure from it, a claim that to contemporary readers has almost a Cartesian flavour: it implies that animals can feel without having full awareness of the sensation.

This same view is put forward in *Della filosofia morale libri dieci* by the Dominican Siense Felice Figliucci (1518–1595), published two years after Segni's *Ethica*, in which Aristotelian ethics is discussed in the Platonic,

29 EUSTRATIUS/ASPASIUS/MICHAEL EPHESIUS: *Aristotelis Ethicorum Moraliu Nicomachiorum libri X una cum [...] graecorum explanationibus*, trans. by Johannes BERNARDUS FELICIANUS. Basel 1542 [?] (facsimile reprint ed. by David A. LINES. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann 2006), 126a (*Liber primum moralium nicomachiorum cum Eustratii [...] explanatione*): "Ex his autem sensibus, id est visu, auditu et olfactu, neque a caeteris animalibus ullam percipi voluptatem inquit, nisi ex accidenti. Non enim ita leporum odore gaudent canes, ut florum homines, neque leo vel voce bovis ita oblectatur, ut homo cantilenis". On Segni's favourite commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics* see LINES: *Aristotle's 'Ethics' in the Italian Renaissance*, III.

30 ARISTOTLE: *Ethicorum ad Nicomachum libri decem, Ioanne Argyropylo Byzantio interprete [...] Paris: Roigny 1541*, 58r: "talis odor est delectabilis ratione epularum quae referunt ad alium sensum; et ostendit non in hominibus solum, sed etiam in belluis fieri et evenire, ut voluptates quae percipiuntur a visu, auditu et odoratu percipiuntur per accidens. Nam canis non gaudet odore leporis per se, sed propter esum. Similiter leo gaudet voce bovis non per se, sed per accidens, quia ex tali voce percipit adesse nutrimentum. Idem sit in visu".

31 BURLEY, Walter: *Expositio per decem libros ethicorum Aristotelis*. Venice 1521, 62v; and 120v–121v.

dialogical form.<sup>32</sup> The main character in the dialogue, modelled on the figure of the Sienese humanist and founder of the *Accademia della Virtù* Claudio Tolomei,<sup>33</sup> states that in the case of animals, such as for instance a dog, the smell of the prey “has the power to make itself felt, but not to please”.<sup>34</sup> In Segni’s terms, the difference between the human and the animal way of feeling equates to that between sheer bodily pleasures (shared with the animals) and intellectual ones, which only humans are able to enjoy. Borrowing Figliucci’s vocabulary, we could say that in order for a sensation to “please” and not just “make itself felt”, a brain is required, which must be capable of understanding the soothing effect of that kind of sensation (for instance, enjoying listening to music). Like Segni, Figliucci uses the comparison between human and animal perception to reinforce the Aristotelian view that only humans can be happy.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, his work has a clear pedagogical intent: according to Figliucci, humans should follow Aristotle in learning how to implement philosophy in practical action, and ultimately attain happiness.<sup>36</sup>

In line with Aristotle, then, Segni and Figliucci exclude animals from

32 FIGLIUCCI, Felice: *Della filosofia morale libri dieci. Sopra i dieci libri dell’Etica di Aristotele*. Venice: Bonelli 1552. Figliucci was active as translator, too. The publication of this work on Aristotle’s Ethics is announced in Figliucci’s translation of Demosthenes, as part of a whole programme of engagement with Aristotle (“dichiarare tutta la scienza d’Aristotele in questa lingua”): *Undici filippiche di Demostene con una lettera di Filippo a gl’Atheniesi, dichiarate in lingua toscana per M. Figliucci* Rome: Valgrisi 1551, ‘Giordano Ziletti a Bernardino Vaneti’, unnumbered. On the use of the dialogical form see BIANCHI, Luca: *From Jacques Levéfre d’Étapes to Giulio Landi: Uses of the Dialogue in Renaissance Aristotelianism*, in: KRAYE, Jill/STONE, M.W.F. (eds.): *Humanism and Early Modern Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge 2000, 41–58, here 47–48. On Figliucci see VANHAELEN, Maude: ‘Cose di Platone fatte Toscane’: *Language and Ideology in Two Vernacular Translations of Plato Printed by Francesco Priscianese*, in: *Modern Language Review* 107 (2012), 1102–1120.

33 On Tolomei see FIGLIUCCI: *Della filosofia morale*, 10v–11r.

34 FIGLIUCCI: *Della filosofia morale*, 146r: “l’odore di tale animale al senso arrivando, solamente ha forza di farsi sentire, ma non di dilettere.” The view is expressed by the character of Claudio Tolomei. Commenting on *Nicomachean Ethics* X.5, Figliucci also uses the expression “istinto naturale” (487v).

35 FIGLIUCCI: *Della filosofia morale*, 2r. On the difference between humans and animals see 7r.

36 FIGLIUCCI: *Della filosofia morale*, 3r.

reaching happiness.<sup>37</sup> But they also exclude them from the proper enjoyment of pleasures, due to their physical as well as psychological limitations. In this view, animals do not stand simply for the enjoyment of brutish gratifications, as seen in the medieval commentary tradition: they are less well-endowed than humans to take pleasure from sensory experiences, and might even be entirely incapable of certain pleasures enjoyed by humans.

## II.

In 1574 a book in Italian by the Neapolitan Ciarletta Caracciolo († before 1574)<sup>38</sup> was published posthumously. The book, entitled *Dieci libri della felicità humana*, is entirely dedicated to the topic of human happiness. Now completely forgotten, the book was discussed with interest in Rome around its time of publication, at least if we are to believe the claim in the dedicatory letter: “it is incredible how the *Ten Books on Human Happiness* and the other compositions by Ciarletta Caracciolo [...] are sought after and desired here in Rome”.<sup>39</sup> The text discusses the role of the body in attaining happiness, again with reference to the boundary dividing humans from animals. Caracciolo’s approach is strongly eclectic, intertwining references to the Aristotelian interpretation with Platonic and Pythagorean ideas, among others. The result is a view of human happiness that, unlike Segni’s, stresses the permeability of the boundary dividing the realm of virtue, happiness and rationality from that of bodily impulses. The identification of the latter with animality is also challenged as a result, showing once more that defining

37 SEGNI: *Ethica*, 55r: “Quello che s’acquista dagli huomini per virtù, per dottrina o per esercizio, procede da cagione humana. La felicità s’acquista per le cose dette: adunque ella procede da cagione humana.”

38 Cf. GIMMA, Giacinto: *Elogj accademici della Società degli Spensierati di Rossano*, vol. 2. Naples: Tremigliozzi 1703, 208. CERBO, Anna: *Trattatistica meridionale. Gli scritti politici dopo il Concilio di Trento*, in: *Annali – Sezione Romanza*, Istituto universitario orientale 33 (1991), 5–64, especially 24 on Caracciolo’s critical engagement with Aristotelianism.

39 CARACCILO, Ciarletta: *Dieci libri della felicità humana*. Naples: Cacchio dall’Aquila 1574, Dedicatory letter by Antonio Caracciolo to Ciarletta’s brother, Scipione, \*2r: “I *Dieci libri della Felicità Humana* del S. Ciarletta Caracciolo [...] e l’altre sue compositioni, è cosa incredibile quano siano desiderate e bramate qui in Roma”. On the Caracciolo family tree see DE’ PIETRI, Francesco: *Cronologia della famiglia Caracciolo*. Naples: Stamperia Simoniana 1803, 113. De’ Pietri mentions, too, that Ciarletta had written further unpublished works, but does not provide titles.

human happiness implies taking a stance on the issue of the human-animal difference.

At first sight, Caracciolo appears to comply with the standard view that the human being becomes a brute when giving in to the impulses of the senses. Yet, he stresses that this is a process of sliding towards the realm of sensation. Caracciolo views the transition between sensation and rationality as continuous, and the ‘transformation’ into a brute can thus also vary in intensity: “We see that [some humans] turn into cruel and ferocious lions, others into fraudulent and wicked foxes, others still into harmful and rapacious wolves.”<sup>40</sup> Yet, unlike animals, humans possess the potential to reach happiness: “But those of them that have a manly, virile spirit become happy and perfect by elevating themselves forcefully to the intellect and living according to it.”<sup>41</sup>

Caracciolo conveys the impression that reaching the level of intellection is a constant, on-going battle for every human being. This implies that not all humans will be able to experience happiness and perfection, or that some might do so intermittently, but not constantly. Caracciolo, like Aristotle, places children and animals on the same level. Children, for Aristotle, are incapable of acting according to virtue, so they are in fact on the level of animals, with the sole difference that they have the potential (but not the certainty) to develop and become humans capable of political action: “For the same reason no child is happy either, because its age debars it as yet from such activities; if children are so described, it is by way of congratulation on their future promise.”<sup>42</sup> As Caracciolo puts it, children experience a transition during which in them “reason begins to blossom” – or at least it might do.<sup>43</sup>

But Caracciolo does not simply connect sensuality and rationality in terms of a degeneration from the latter into the former: rather, he argues

40 CARACCILO: *Dieci libri*, 6v–7r: “sdruciolando ver la region sensoale, e in tal modo sensoali e brutali divengono, perché altri d’essi veggiamo fatti leoni crudeli e feroci, altri volpi fraudolenti e inique, altri lupi nocivi, e rapaci.”

41 CARACCILO: *Dieci libri*, 7r: “Però quei di loro c’han l’animo maschio, e virile, all’intelletto animosamente inalzandosi, e secondo quello vivendo, divengono e felici e perfetti.”

42 ARISTOTLE: *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2I (1100a1–4). Albertus Magnus distinguishes between the will (*voluntas*) that is regulated by reason (in adults) and the form of *voluntarium* present in children and animals: *Super ethica* (xiv.1), 155.

43 CARACCILO: *Dieci libri*, 24v: “comincia in loro [...] a fiorire la ragione”.

that it is impossible to draw a definite, distinct line. The human being can be transformed into an animal, but, at the same time, in all animals there is a glimmer of reason: “We see that in all animals there is a certain likeness or trace of reason, thanks to which they seek and obtain everything they need in life, and flee those evils that could damage them.”<sup>44</sup> Caracciolo maintains that several philosophers of Antiquity, including Plato and Aristotle, admitted that animals do partake in reason, and some, like Pythagoras, even drew from this the conclusion that animals should not be killed for food.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the work, Caracciolo insists that the powers of the soul form a unity: therefore everything that is sensed through the body must also be judged by the mind, or, as he puts it, is “introduced into the senate of the soul”.<sup>46</sup> This happens in the same way in humans and animals, and Caracciolo even allows for the possibility that plants, and all things that to us appear to lack sensation, could in fact choose what they need and avoid what could damage them, in exactly the same way. A plant, for instance, ‘decides’ next to which other plants it prefers to grow, in the sense that some plants grow better and faster next to some other specific plants.<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, for Caracciolo, what differentiates humans from all other life-forms is a mere potentiality to elevate oneself to happiness through the exercise of virtue, cultivating what is indeed a human prerogative but not predicated on a strict binary opposition of bodily pleasure versus reason, or animals versus humans. In this way, for Caracciolo, virtue is inborn in humans.<sup>48</sup>

The Aristotelian Simone Porzio (1496–1554), roughly a contemporary of Caracciolo, takes a similar approach in stressing that the position of the

44 CARACCILO: *Dieci libri*, 6r: “E perciò veggiamo in tutti gli animali esser un certo simulacro e orma di ragione, onde vengono a procacciarsi i vari bisogni della vita, e a fuggir que’ mali, che potrebbon noiargli”.

45 CARACCILO: *Dieci libri*, 6r–v: “Onde i Pitagorici havean per gran scelleraggine l’uccidergli o ’l violargli, stimando in tutti gli animali, che partecipano di senso e di memoria, esservi non sol la ragione, ma il parlare. [...] Et Empedocle, Democrito, Platone, Aristotele e altri che puoser studio su le nature de gli animali, furo tutti al fin forzati attribuir loro parte di ragione, però a quai più, a quai meno.”

46 CARACCILO: *Dieci libri*, 22r: “nel rappresentarsi le cose a’ sensi, sono immantenente introdotte nel senato dell’anima”. See also *ibid.*, 22v: “in una sola anima esser tre potenze, conoscenza, voglia e forza.”

47 CARACCILO: *Dieci libri*, 22r. See also 16r–v on self-preservation in plants. This view of the vegetable world will gain currency around fifty years later in the philosophy of Tommaso Campanella (especially as expressed in *Del senso delle cose e della magia*).

48 CARACCILO: *Dieci libri*, 37r: “la virtù adunque è in noi da natura.”

human being, torn between the prospect of happiness on the one hand, and similarity with the animals on the other, is a liminal, precarious one. In *An homo bonus vel malus volens fiat*, Porzio states that the human being has an “ambiguous nature” (*natura ambigua*), because

his soul has in part faculties in common with animals and plants, and partly of its own, through which it is superior to the other creatures, that is to say the intellect [...]. Indeed the human being is made of soul and body, since he is not pure intellect, nor simply sensitive: he holds a midway position between the two [...]. His parts will even affect one another, and sometimes rationality will assume the nature of sensation, and sensation that of rationality. This is what Aristotle means when he says that human sensation is rational.<sup>49</sup>

Just like Caracciolo, Porzio explains this permeability of sensation and rationality by referring to the transformation of humans into animals: “If sensation wins, so that rationality is entirely removed, the human being changes into some animal and lives according to the passions. [...] The Peripatetics, too, said that affections and desire are contrary to each other. [...] For this reason Aristotle says in the tenth book of the *Ethics* that human action is mixed.”<sup>50</sup> Yet, unlike Caracciolo, Porzio draws from this the conclusion that virtue must be grounded both in sensation and rationality, because

49 PORZIO, Simone: *An homo bonus vel malus volens fiat*. Florence: Torrentino, 1551, 12–13: “nam cum homo naturam nactus sit ambiguam [...] anima quoque eius facultates habet partim communes cum brutis ac plantis, partim sibi propriam, qua caeteris animantibus praestat, intellectum scilicet ipsum [...]. Homo itaque ex anima ac corpore conflatus, cum non sit purus intellectus, nec simplex sensitivum, medii rationem inter utrunque retinet. [...] Quinetiam partes eius altera ab altera vicissim afficientur, ratioque sensus naturam, sensus vero rationis interdum induet. Quod Aristoteles significavit, cum inquit, sensum humanum esse rationalem.” On this passage see DEL SOLDATO, Eva: *Simone Porzio. Un aristotelico tra natura e grazia*. Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura 2010, 158–159. See also her introduction to the facsimile reprint: PORZIO, Simone: *An homo bonus vel malus volens fiat*, ed. by Eva DEL SOLDATO. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura 2005.

50 PORZIO: *An homo bonus*, 16: “Quod si victoria sit penes sensus, ut ratio prorsus de medio tollatur, migrat in brutum aliquod animal, et vivit secundum affectus. [...] Peripatetici quoque adversari inter se affectiones et appetitum dixerunt [...]. Quare Aristoteles inquit decimo Ethicorum, actionem humanam mixtam esse.” Porzio is likely thinking of *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b27–31 (p. 272 of the English translation) where Aristotle states that in humans there is a “divine element” that is “superior to the composite being”. On the clash of passions and reason see *Nicomachean Ethics* 1180a4–5. See also DEL SOLDATO: *Simone Porzio*, 116.

it is “an operation of the human being”, and as such, “it will not be anything other than a moderation (*mediocritas*) of affections”.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Porzio points out that animals are superior to humans with regard to the senses, especially hearing and seeing.

All in all, humans occupy a fragile middle position, facing the prospect of becoming fully like animals, if they fail to follow the intellect as their guide. The conclusion is that virtue is not in humans by nature, as Caracciolo instead claims. Rather “it is evident that not the virtues are implanted in us, but a predisposition to acquire them. Indeed, our nature is rationality, and it renders us capable of grasping them.”<sup>52</sup> Porzio states that in human beings there is also “a certain faculty that prompts [us] to evil, that is to say matter and sensation”, together with a “form, which invites us to the good and to virtue”.<sup>53</sup> What this means with regard to the aim of attaining happiness is that humans can participate in it, but that happiness cannot be reached once and for all, because material embodiment means that reason will always fight against the power of the senses. This is described by Porzio as a tiring process, because the battle of passions upsets human life. Only God can be said to be ‘happy’ (*felix*), and Porzio sides with Aristotle in claiming that animals cannot partake in happiness to any degree. It is the human being, in this case, who is uncomfortably close to the (unhappy) realm of animals.

### III.

In Gelli’s *Circe*, humans fully turn into animals, assuming animal features and not only animal behaviours, as in Caracciolo and Porzio. Unlike Plutarch’s *Gryllos*, Gelli’s *Circe* is essentially a reflection on the achievement

51 PORZIO: *An homo bonus*, 18: “Si igitur actio virtutis est hominis, qua homo est, in sensu ac ratione est, nihilque aliud quam affectuum mediocritas.”

52 PORZIO: *An homo bonus*, 38: “Hinc patet virtutes non esse nobis insitas, sed aptitudinem quandam ad eas suscipiendas. Ratio enim est nostra natura, quae nos ad eas capessendas efficit idoneos.”

53 PORZIO: *An homo bonus*, 38: “Porro ad id quod dicitur, quod unicuique insita est malitia, respondendum est, quod in visceribus nostris, atque in substantia nostra inest facultas quaedam quae impellit ad malum, materia scilicet et sensus; inest et forma, quae ad bonum et virtutem nos invitat.”

of happiness.<sup>54</sup> To Ulysses' question whether they wish to regain their human shape, the animals demur, citing the lack of happiness of the human condition. The dialogue with the last animal Ulysses meets, the elephant, reveals the Aristotelian background of this discourse, linking happiness to the powers of the soul that distinguish humans from animals. The whole exchange between Ulysses and the elephant follows an Aristotelian framework, even though Aristotle is never mentioned by name.<sup>55</sup> The conversation with the elephant develops differently than those with the other animals: while in the other cases it was mostly the animal explaining to Ulysses the advantages of the animal condition, in the dialogue with the elephant, Ulysses explains the powers with which the human soul is endowed; the animal in question has a more limited role. Paradoxically, the reason for this is that the elephant had been a philosopher in Athens when he was still a human, and thus Ulysses decides to proceed 'philosophically' in his exposition of the greatness of humanity, in an attempt to convince the elephant to regain his shape as human, or rather as philosopher.

The main point that Ulysses addresses is the difference between the animals' sensory capabilities, and the humans' endowment with two powers that – Ulysses claims – are absent in the animal world, namely intellection and free will. The elephant's suggestion that the difference might be one between 'intellectual cognition' in humans, and 'sensory cognition' in animals, is dismissed by Ulysses: they are substantially different, because human cognition can function even without sensation. At the same time, humans are capable of using sensory information in ways animals cannot, for instance by abstracting universals. Ulysses thus defines the human intellect as a "spiritual and divine power",<sup>56</sup> which is capable of self-reflection and of appreciating its own perfection: because of this power, humans are superior to animals.

54 Plutarch's *Gryllos* was published in the first edition of the *Moralia* in Greek in 1509. On Plutarch in the Renaissance see PADE, Marianne: *The Reception of Plutarch from Antiquity to the Italian Renaissance*, in: BECK, Mark (ed.): *A Companion to Plutarch*. Oxford: Blackwell 2013, 529–543. On the myth of Circe in the Renaissance see KUHN, Barbara: *Mythos und Metapher: Metamorphosen des Kirke-Mythos in der Literatur der italienischen Renaissance*. München: Fink 2003, 13.

55 PERRONE COMPAGNI, Vittoria: *Cose di filosofia si possono dire in volgare. Il programma culturale di Giambattista Gelli*, in: CALZONA, Arturo (ed.): *Il volgare come lingua di cultura dal Trecento al Cinquecento*. Florence: Olschki 2003, 301–337, here 305: the main source of *Circe* is the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

56 GELLI: *Circe*, 441: "potenza spirituale e divina".



Ultimately, the elephant decides to trust Ulysses and be transformed back into a human. Despite the long philosophical conversation, however, this decision hangs more on ‘trust’ than on persuasion, because the elephant admits that it cannot fully imagine what remains disclosed to it because of its animal condition. The paradox of the situation is thus that Ulysses and the animal can talk to each other, and that the elephant even recalls being a philosopher in his previous, human life – yet, Ulysses uses ‘yours’ and ‘ours’ to distinguish animal from human faculties. Hearing Ulysses’ explanation of human intellection, the elephant exclaims: “O most happy condition of human nature!”<sup>57</sup> But the motivation here is more the expectation of what it will be able to grasp upon regaining human form, than a full understanding of the happiness of the human condition.<sup>58</sup>

The dialogue ends with the elephant (now philosopher) reciting a hymn to humanity, in which he calls “miserable and unhappy those who want to live like brutes for the sake of the small pleasure derived from the senses and from our irrational part”.<sup>59</sup> Humanity, at first sight, triumphs over animality, since rationality gives humans access to a higher form of happiness than the one derived from sensation. Yet, in two respects this text acknowledges the unease with which the topic of happiness as a human prerogative is debated in the Renaissance. First, Ulysses’ successful convincing of the elephant is enabled by the animal’s former profession as a human, which must have persisted as a kind of distant memory. Only those who are able to follow philosophical reasoning can grasp that humans have a special potential for happiness. The implication is that happiness is a state only accessible to a few, trained in philosophical thinking. Second, in all other cases but the elephant, the metamorphosis stages an incommunicability between animals and humans. From the animal perspective, the animal condition is satisfactory, and in fact is less exposed to the hurdles and pain of embodied life than the human one. In the words of the mole, another Greek turned into an animal, it is experience that teaches how much more pleasant animal

57 GELLI: *Circe*, 441: “O condizione felicissima della natura umana!”

58 See PERRONE COMPAGNI: ‘Cose di filosofia’, 308. Despite the eclectic influences, I agree with Perrone Compagni that Aristotle remains the main source, and not just for *Circe*, but also for *I capricci*, as they are both part of the same project (see p. 318). See also PULIAFITO, Anna Laura: *Ostriche e talpe. A proposito della Circe di Giovan Battista Gelli*, in: *Versants* 55, 2 (2008), 35–46.

59 GELLI: *Circe*, 445: “O miseri e infelici coloro che, per un poco di diletto che arrecono i sensi e la parte nostra senza ragione, voglion vivere come fiere!”

life is, compared to human life. The mole and the oyster had been workers in their human lives (a farmer and a fishmonger respectively): for them, life is better as an animal than as a human. This point can be seen as an amplification of Aristotle's admission that, even if the body is not the source of happiness, still it can interfere with reaching it.

In *I capricci*, Gelli devotes a substantial section to this topic in staging a different thought-experiment: the barrel-maker Giusto experiences a separation of his soul from his body, and the two engage in a debate as to what constitutes human life. This leads them to discuss a main issue in Aristotelian psychology: where exactly does the border lie between psychological faculties that both humans and animals possess, and those that pertain to humans only? Giusto's soul at first declares:

I will hive myself off, taking with me only my intellect and the imagination, without which I would not be able to understand, leaving in you [i. e. in the body] all my other powers, that is to say the vegetative, so that you can live, and the sensitive, so that you can feel, and the power of discursive knowledge and memory, so that you can discuss on the basis of what you know, ask questions and reason with me.<sup>60</sup>

Later in the dialogue, Soul reveals that it has not actually left the body, since such a separation would only be possible at death. The kind of separation taking place within Giusto enables an internal dialogue between the human part of him (intellection), and his animal powers (sensation, memory, and discursive knowledge): without his intellection, Giusto is in fact an animal, and therefore the dialogue takes place between the animal part (the living body) and the human one (the intellectual soul). In this way, *I capricci*, like *Circe*, puts animals and humans in direct conversation, considering their respective capacity for happiness.<sup>61</sup>

In line with Aristotle, Giusto and Soul agree that the body can be an impediment to reaching happiness.<sup>62</sup> The theory from book 3 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is repeated, according to which animals do not properly

60 GELLI: *I capricci*, 142: "Separerommi con la mia parte intellettiva e con la fantasia solamente, senza la quale non potrei intendere, lasciando in te tutte l'altre mie potenze, cioè la vegetativa perché tu viva, e la sensitiva perché tu senta; e il discorso e la memoria, acciò che tu possa, discorrendo mediante le cose che tu sai, dimandarmi e ragionare con esso meco." On Aristotelian psychology see 213.

61 GELLI: *I capricci*, 170: Giusto fears that he will "remain like a beast" if his soul leaves him.

62 GELLI: *I capricci*, 162. See also 228 (the soul can be burdened by the body's digestion).

enjoy smells other than those that stimulate in them other sensations (especially taste).<sup>63</sup> Animals are also said not to be able to assess each other's happiness, because they lack reason.<sup>64</sup> Yet, in this text, too, Gelli uses the dialogical form in order to problematize a simple division into animals as incapable of happiness, and humans as the only creatures that can aspire to it. He does so by giving the body a voice to talk about what happiness means to it (and therefore to animals, too, since they are conceived, in Aristotelian terms, as creatures without intellection), as opposed to what it means for the soul.<sup>65</sup> If bodily pleasures were the main source of happiness – claims Soul – then animals would be happier than humans, and, for humans, being asleep would be a happier condition than being awake, because in this state sheer bodily pain is avoided.<sup>66</sup> This implies that humans feel more intensely, and suffer more, than animals and that therefore the human body can impede the attainment of happiness more than the bodies of animals. Indeed Soul admits that animals are happier in this life, “if they can be called ‘happy’”.<sup>67</sup> Human happiness is instead postponed to life after death. The promise of reaching a fuller happiness *post mortem* re-establishes the hierarchy among creatures, as humans are superior to animals, and yet they are the most unhappy animals in this life. As the mole argues in *Circe*, from the point of view of animals, animal life is happier – at least before the death of the body.

In one of his *Lettoni*, designed to expound a passage from Dante's *Purgatory* (Canto XXVII) for the Florentine Academy, Gelli returns to the topic of happiness and provides a possible way of combining the approaches that he presents in *Circe* and *I capricci*.<sup>68</sup> In this text, Gelli underlines that

63 GELLI: *I capricci*, 234.

64 GELLI: *I capricci*, 246: “non avendo il discorso della ragione, non possono far giudizio della felicità l'un dell'altro”.

65 Gelli repeatedly states that it is particularly important that this conversation should take place in the vernacular: GELLI: *I capricci*, 201 (where Segni's translation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is mentioned), and 177–188.

66 GELLI: *I capricci*, 262.

67 GELLI: *I capricci*, 147: “Perché chi discorrerà queste cose ragionevolmente e senza passione alcuna, si risolverà che la felicità sua non abbia a essere in questa vita, dove l'hanno gli altri animali bruti inferiori a lui (se possono essere però chiamati felici)”.

68 See ELLERO, Maria Pia: *Aristotele tra Dante e Petrarca: La ricezione della Poetica nelle Lezioni di Giambattista Gelli all'Accademia Fiorentina*, in: Bruniana & Campanelliana 13,2 (2007), 463–476, here 467: Gelli reads Dante's *Commedia* as “un Aristotele visualizzato”.

the path to happiness is a steep one, and that it involves two stages: the human intellect can guide only to the attainment of that happiness that the human being “can reach as human”. This is the kind of happiness that Ulysses presents to the elephant, when he underlines the role of human intellection. But to grasp true happiness, “that is to say eternal beatitude”, one needs another light, namely a supernatural, divine power.<sup>69</sup> This view is more in line with the kind of happiness that Soul presents to Giusto in *I capricci*. Animals are certainly considered unable to attain the second type of happiness; the first type, on the other hand, is an earthly happiness that emerges from the negotiations of reason with the senses (and it is not by chance that Gelli refers here to his translation of Porzio’s *An homo*, since for Porzio, as we saw, humans have an “ambiguous nature”).<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

In Plutarch’s version, the dialogue between Ulysses and Gryllos ended with the latter’s claim that animals are capable of reason.<sup>71</sup> In Gelli’s *Circe*, instead, most human beings are considered to be closer to animals than to the few humans who can attain happiness through philosophy. For those (the majority) who cannot attain human happiness, animal life does appear to be a better alternative, and the oyster’s claim that man is the unhappiest animal stands. The boundary has shifted: with Plutarch, the animal condition is considered happier than most human lives; yet with Aristotle, human beings do have the potential to reach true happiness, which is connected with rationality and virtue. The real boundary here is between philosophers and all others, rather than between humans and animals, as potentiality (in

69 GELLI, Giovan Battista: *Tutte le lettioni [...] fatte da lui nella Accademia Fiorentina*. Florence: Torrentino 1551, 467–468 (“quella felicità [...] che può haver come huomo”; “la somma e vera felicità, cioè [...] l’eterna beatitudine”). Gelli refers here to Pico’s *Conclusiones*; in the dedicatory letter of *Circe*, Gelli also alludes to Pico’s conception of the human being. On Gelli and the Accademia Fiorentina see GILSON, Simon A.: *Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy: Florence, Venice, and the ‘Divine Poet’*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2018, 144–171.

70 PORZIO, Simone: *Se l’uomo diventa buono o cattivo volontariamente*. Trans. by Giovan Battista GELLI. Florence: Torrentino 1551. On the convergence between Gelli and Porzio on this topic see ELLERO: *Aristotele tra Dante e Petrarca*, 470 and 476.

71 PLUTARCH: *Beasts are Rational*, in: ID.: *Moralia*, vol. XII, trans. by William C. HELMBOLD. Cambridge, Mass./London: Harvard University Press/Heinemann 1957, 531.

all humans) and realization of the potential (in a few) is a key discriminator. At the end of Gelli's *Circe*, Ulysses runs away from Circe's island together with the philosopher-elephant, an escape that symbolizes their embracing of the rarity of human happiness, turning away from the world of animals as well as of the majority of humans. In *I capricci*, happiness is even more firmly out of the reach of humans, as the truly happy state will be attained only after death. Together, Gelli's dialogues can be read as a thought experiment on an Aristotelian dogma, and not just as playful re-elaborations of Plutarch (*Circe*) or a light-hearted variation in the traditional fiction of the separation of the soul from the body (*I capricci*). Gelli employs metamorphosis and psychological division to pinpoint how happiness expectations vary when the body changes shape and is given a voice. This is a strategy to reopen what for Aristotle was a settled issue: in so doing, Gelli not only discusses whether animals can be happy, but even compares human and animal ways of reaching the state of happiness.

The three scenarios discussed above demonstrate a general tendency in the Renaissance to reconsider the grounds for Aristotle's position on the issue of happiness. Renaissance debates on human happiness link the definition of human superiority not just to the possession of specific mental capabilities, with rationality foremost, but also to the analysis of key bodily functions. Aristotle had maintained that the body can play a key role in attaining happiness, and Renaissance authors extend this view to the comparison between humans and animals in view of their respective happiness expectations. The higher human potential to reach happiness remains intact only by arguing that the human body is actually better endowed to support the attaining of happiness (as we saw in Segni and Figliucci, and partly in Caracciolo and Porzio). At the same time, the definition of happiness is divided between a prosaic kind (which animals are better at reaching) and a fuller, philosophical and also religious kind, which will only be experienced by few, and possibly only after death – a point emphasized in Gelli. In both cases, this leads the authors to define human happiness against the backdrop of animality. This is an anti-Aristotelian move that results in exploring how animals can be said to be happy (and in some cases even happier than humans), as human happiness slides progressively out of reach, at least in the earthly life that humans share with animals.