VAMPYROTI
INFERNA

A Treatise, with a Report
Scientifique de Recherche

VILÉM FLUS
and
LOUIS BE

Translated by Valentine

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CONTENT

THE TREATIS

THE TREA

Nil

I

OCTOPOD

A GENUS OF MORE THAN 170 SPEC
is represented by a single extant specie
Some octopods, such as *Octopus vulga*
and even eaten. Others, such as *Octop*
a length of ten meters and are rightly
and sharp teeth, their muscular tenta
ers—and the voracity of their expres
cal appearance. Still others are all bu
inhabit the abysses of the sea. Their
meters and their skull capacity exceed
difficult to classify, was recently cau
Vampyroteuthis infernalis.

It is not easy for us to approach it tax
taxonomically. Humans and vampyrot
one another. We would be crushed by
and it would suffocate in the air that w
its relatives captive in aquaria—both t
fer certain things about *it*—they kill
their own arms. How we would condu
its depths, where eternal darkness is pu
minescence, remains to be seen.

And yet the vampyroteuthis is not
abyss that separates us is incomparabl
separates us from extraterrestrial life

fiction and sought by astrobiologists. The same basic structure informs both of our bodies. Its metabolism is the same as ours. We are pieces of the same game, both constructed of genetic information, and we belong to a branch of the same phylogenetic tree to which its branch belongs. Our common ancestors dominated the beaches of the earth for millions of years, and it was relatively late in the history of life that our paths began to diverge—that is, when life "decided" to advance away from the beach both toward the mainland and, in the opposite direction, toward the bottom of the sea. We and the vampyroteuthis harbor some of the same deeply ingrained memories, and we are therefore able to recognize in it something of ourselves.

If, from the perspective of the vampyroteuthis, we were to follow the *arbor vitae* back to its roots, the path would look approximately so: *Vampyroteuthis infernalis* is a species of the genus *Octopoda.* This classification, it should be said, is not fully agreed upon by zoologists (some regard it as the only living species of the genus *Vampyromorphida*). This confusion is presumably caused and exploited by the species itself.

The genus *Octopoda* belongs to an order that, curiously enough, is also called Octopoda. It would be as though the genus *Homo* were assigned to an order called simply Homo, not Primates. The order Octopoda consists of thirty-six genera of animals, each with eight tentacles. It belongs to the class Cephalopoda, specifically to the subclass Metacephalopoda. Cephalopods are animals whose head and foot combine in such a way that the head emerges from the middle of the foot ("head-footed"). This peculiar foot, which encircles the head, branches out into eight or ten arms (octopods and decapods). The class Cephalopoda belongs to the immense phylum Mollusca, "soft animals" that secrete a shell. Well-known examples include oysters and snails. This phylum, in turn, belongs to a category of animals, Eucoelomata, among which we humans can also be counted. Eucoelomata are our common ancestors, and it is with them that our paths diverge. We should therefore accord these animals a closer look.

Eucoelomata are, incidentally, re
consist of three types of cellular tissue:
and endoderm. The ectoderm encases
from the world, and the endoderm pr
low them to digest what they can of th
of all, however, is the mesoderm. It li
and digestive layers and allows these a
In the case of Eucoelomata, we are de
mes, worms—that distinguish themse
absorb the world into themselves, tha
world, and that influence it. Humans
Eucoelomata.

Beyond Eucoelomata, there are oth
with admittedly less success, to achiev
gether with Eucoelomata they form a
Eucoelomata differ from other bilateri
coelom," an abdominal cavity betwee
endoderm. Because of this cavity the
and a "true" anus. Whereas the other
and Pseudocoelomata, can only disti
right, Coelomata can also distinguish b

All of these worms, all bilateria,
For them the world has two sides, ri
ally symmetrical: "either-or" and *"ter*
what distinguishes bilateria from radi
center radiate various symmetrical axe
radiata form the subkingdom called
These are "true" animals with "true"
"true" organisms. Other life forms mig
cell tissues, the Parazoa and Mesazoa
animals. Sponges, for instance, canno
isms: They have no organs. We are su
that we deny these life forms their an
to mention our attitude toward Protoz
despite the fact that they constitute the
imal kingdom.

Vampyroteuthes and humans are "true" animals. They are Eumetazoa. Both are Bilateria, living "dialectically," and both are Eucoelomata, distinguishing between front and back. Despite these similarities, life has chosen for them two wildly divergent paths, and that of the vampyroteuthis has been far more convoluted. Let us first, then, consider the human path.

Eucoelomata were disposed to one of two evolutionary possibilities: to refine either the endoderm (the digestive system) or the ectoderm (the nervous system). To accomplish both at once was, for reasons irrelevant to this discussion, infeasible. As ignoble as this may be, we have followed the first path, that of digestion, and vampyroteuthes the second. Our path, admittedly, was forged with some reluctance. Some Eucoelomata that had "chosen" the path of digestion, for instance, even attempted to reacquire their long lost radiality at the expense of their well-established bilateriality. Known as Echinodermata, they managed to "recapitulate" radiality; the starfish is a good example of this. Other Eucoelomata on the course of digestion branched into two vastly different groups. One of these consists of Chordata, from which vertebrates originated. This group, in turn, developed directly into fish, amphibians, and reptiles, from which birds and mammals derive. It was all, as we can see, a relatively easy process.

Far more dramatic is the path of the vampyroteuthis. Those Eucoelomata that had "chosen" in favor of their nervous systems began to segment their bodies into catenated rings. Examples of this include earthworms (annelids). From here there were two paths of development, a straight one and a vampyroteuthically winding one. The straight road led to exoskeletal animals with multiple legs and antennae: arthropods. These exoskeletons and antennae are absolute triumphs of life: Although entirely immured from the world, the animal can nevertheless feel it directly with its nerves. Arthropods developed into crustaceans such as lobsters, into centipedes, spiders, and insects. Viewed "objectively," the latter—especially ants and bees—represent the highest stage of life's development. Humans and vampyroteuthes, in

comparison, have advanced down bli
noptera, life has managed to supersed
and cultivate a highly cerebralized sup
hives). It can thus be expected that H
come to dominate all life on earth.

The vampyroteuthis did not parti
rade. Annelids happened to develop
they also forged another path that has
by zoologists. Along this path they p
nelidic segmentation, but as adults th
that of the long surpassed Eucoeloma
apparent regression from segmente
tivity—this winding turn away from
lusks—is typical of the vampyroteuthi
of all mollusks, and nothing about its b
and exoskeletal structure of annelids.
bees even less than ours does. And ye
mentation and of the inclination towa
grained in its mind. We can take no pa

The path from mollusk to vampy
structure our own path from chordate
of the vampyroteuthis are mussels, its
other octopods are its "Neanderthals.
with the aim of the present text, whic
the basic structure of vampyroteuthic

Certain aspects of human *Dasein*
ture, and certain others appear in it
then a game can be built out of disto
enable us to recognize the basic stru
afar, of our own *Dasein.* By playing
sort, we should hope to gain a new per
though distanced, is not "transcendent
dent, that is, because its standpoint w
ence, which would adopt an "object
above the world and looking down up
trary, our analysis of humans will be n

of the vampyroteuthis, which coexists with us in the world. It is our co-being *(Mit-Sein)*.

What will be presented here is, accordingly, not a scientific treatise but a fable. The human and its vertebrate *Dasein* are to be criticized from the perspective of a mollusk. Like most fables, this one is ostensibly concerned with animals. *De te fabula narratur.*

GENEALO

The Phylum Mol

THE VAMPYROTEUTHIS IS A MO
chordates. An endoskeleton buttresses
tude toward life. Even without any p
ology, we feel a sense of belonging to
step on a mollusk, on the one hand, or w
hand, a cracking bone under our shoe.
life-forms supported by bones, while
us. Though existential philosophy has
idea of disgust, it has never attempted
"biological existentialism," to advance
ing hypothesis: "Disgust recapitulates
pothesis is advanced here.

The more disgusting something is,
from humans on the phylogenetic tree.
mollusks, "soft worms." Somewhat les
primitive chordates (Acrania), worm
ported by a cuticular fin. Fish are more
ians because they are more slippery. R
than frogs and more disgusting than
sis becomes interesting, however, in th
a branch that split away from reptiles
that of humans. The pulsing life of bi
fingertips, disgusts us because it is so