

# LOVING ANIMALS

*Toward a New Animal Advocacy*

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## INTRODUCTION

# A CHANGE OF HEART

THE WORLD OF “ANIMAL RIGHTS” IN THE FIRST PART of the twenty-first century is busy, perplexing, and extremely uneven. Sometimes, people who call themselves animal rights activists simply mean they don’t eat meat or wear leather; sometimes they eat fish, cheese, or eggs, and sometimes they don’t. Sometimes, these activists break into scientific research labs and steal animals used in experiments. Sometimes they kill animals in “shelters.” Sometimes, the term animal rights refers to people who rescue injured wildlife for rehabilitation and release them back into the wild. Sometimes it means people who run permanent sanctuaries for retired entertainment animals or exotic pets; at other times it refers to people who believe wild and exotic animals should not be kept at all and work to shut such sanctuaries down. Sometimes, people who say they’re into animal rights mean they really love animals and share a large portion of their lives with them, even trying various sound and unsound methods to communicate with them. At other times, being an animal rights activist means holding a strict abolitionist policy toward all animals, and condemning zoos, pet ownership, and all other venues in which humans come into intimate contact with nonhuman animals.

It's not easy to make sense of all these conflicting viewpoints and issues. Indeed, other than the fact that all these projects have something to do with animals, there aren't transparent ways to articulate what holds all these agendas together. It's even more confusing when the general public uses a kind of shorthand to classify all animal rights interests as extremist food police; when I try to convince my women's studies majors to take one of my animal classes, for example, their response is almost always, "I can't take that class because I'm not a vegetarian." It reminds me of the way people used to equate all feminism with lesbianism in the 1970s: "I can't be a feminist because I like men." The public discourse concerning feminism has certainly changed, and I think it's time for things to change with regard to animal rights as well.

This book argues that animal advocates should undertake and attend to significant emotional shifts concerning animals for animal rights to become a more mainstream movement. In other words, to hold all these competing agendas and ideas together, we must work toward building a shift in public thinking about nonhuman animals such that animal advocacy can become more accepted by wider sectors of society. "Women's rights" does not mean the same thing in every pocket of feminism, nor does "gay rights" or "civil rights." These terms point to orientations toward social change, not specific agreed-upon agendas. Indeed, inside each of these other movements, arguments and conflicts abound; what holds them together in the public eye, though, is a fairly general cultural acceptance. The same thing needs to happen for "animal rights." We need to explain animal advocacy agendas, and the variety of approaches they take up, in a different way such that animal issues become more accepted by a wider public.

*Loving Animals* asks us to step back from the rational principles employed by many animal advocacy philosophies to examine the emotional and spiritual connections that, for many, produced the desire for change in the first place. Stepping back allows us to ask a whole range of different questions about animals and our relationship with them: What mechanisms of language sorted all living things into only two categories called "humans" and "animals"? What practices in capitalism rendered the bodies of some animals as killable commodities? What religious practices gave only some of us souls? What scientific data render some animals

as wild and others as domesticated? What stories support the view that animals could and should be exploited for human benefit? And what, exactly, counts as exploitation? How do we interact with and connect with real animals, and how do those connections reflect (or not) current ethical thinking about animals? How well are our relationships with animals reflected in culture today? Do these stories adequately portray the way we feel with and about animals? When and under what circumstances do we get our relationships with animals “right,” and how can those examples serve as a model for treatment of other animals? Examining the ways that emotion, connection, and stories have constructed our current world, I believe, can lead to new strategies for change.

Although this book is informed by my training and work in theological ethics and women’s studies, it begins, really, with the passions that are closest to my heart. It would not be an overstatement to say that most of the important and successful relationships I’ve had in my life have been with nonhuman animals. The vast majority of them have been dogs, a half-dozen cats, a few birds, one horse, and most recently two pigs. Almost every picture of me as a kid is taken with a dog or a kitten or a horse; if there’s no animal in the picture, chances are pretty high I am not smiling. It’s very hard to explain, but I am most “myself” when I am with animals, they alone “speak my language” (and not all of them, just some); without them around, I feel just a little bit invisible. The connections that shape my own life, then, form the heart of this book. I start with a dog by my side and go from there.

This sort of self-revelation is important up front because—in addition to the general confusion around the theoretical stakes of animal advocacy—there is often a fairly large disconnect between much of the theory of the movement and the experiences of many people who call themselves animal advocates. Most of the people I encounter in my daily life who self-identify as animal advocates truly love animals. Like me, they have special connections to certain nonhuman animals. Some articulate it as a spiritual bond, others say that animals have purer hearts or are easier to live with than humans. Many of these folks would sell their last possessions to help an animal in need; and some have done just that. For them, no sacrifice is too great. Yet, very little of this love or emotion is reflected at the level of ethical theory around animals. Many writers

speak about the animal as a distant other, a creature that needs our consideration but not necessarily our love. Very few ethicists write about their pets; indeed, some, as we shall see, believe pet ownership is wrong. They implore us to take animals' interests seriously, but not necessarily to be involved with them at the most fundamental bodily and emotional levels. I believe that emotional connections with real animals, connections based on love and shared lives, need to be included in the discourse of animal advocacy in order to maintain and model a better world for them.<sup>1</sup>

This new approach to animal advocacy strives to develop a way of seeing the world where animals are subjects, agents, and actors in their own right. Through their relationships with us, they can gain more of a voice in public debate about the conditions of their existence. Inside the connections we share with all kinds of animals, a new sense of subjectivity emerges where humans and animals are not separate entities, but creatures inextricably attached to one another through emotional bonds. Put differently, this approach to advocacy is not only about humans loving animals but also about animals loving us back. It recognizes that animals have choices, and one of the choices many of them make is to become loving, to be loving animals. They transcend the boundaries of their bodies and their species by trusting, caring for, and communing with us. Thus, "loving" is both a verb and an adjective, something both humans and animals do, but something both of us also are. Inside these attachments, animals can fully be seen as subjects rather than objects.

When I think about other social movements, it is not only principles that made them viable but a whole host of other things as well. Many of those tools found their stage in the realms of emotion and connection, and specifically in the registers of language, stories, identification, and love. What I call for in this book is the inclusion of emotion—and in the way that connections can change culture—in the theory and practice of animal advocacy. Social movements all started somewhere, usually from a few voices crying out not only for better treatment but also for a different outlook on the world. The first time we heard Dr. Martin Luther King speak, or watched Cesar Chavez march on television, or knew someone who died of AIDS, our world shifted just a little to let in this new reality. A deep change in the way we act and think almost always starts with a change of heart, and our hearts are usually changed by

hearing, seeing, feeling, and sensing something different. Thus, although I think ethical principles are critical in defending any new vision, those of us who are border crossers, who have intense emotional bonds with specific animals, bear a particular burden right now to share our worldview. Only when we understand better how to change people's hearts will animal advocacy become a more viable social movement. The current animal advocacy movement can and will gain even more legitimacy in the next generation if those of us who love animals can think and talk and write about those connections; we all then need to extrapolate those relationships to the twenty billion or so animals that have no advocates, those creatures that never see sunlight or grass, that never know the touch of a kind hand. What I call for in this book is a more sophisticated understanding of the role of affect and emotion in the building of a contemporary animal advocacy movement.

Each of the chapters that follow addresses one realm in which humans use animals; in each chapter I try to think not only about animal suffering but also about venues in which good relationships between humans and animals exist. My goal in each of these settings is to explore the power structures that landed us in a world where abuse is accepted. It's not the case, I believe, that all humans are inherently destructive toward nonhuman animals; rather, social structures such as gender oppression, capitalism, Western religion, and scientific objectivity obscure the realities of animal suffering. My aim in this book is to dig out the problems involved with such institutions. In each chapter, I ask questions like the following: Why do we kill so many unwanted pets in shelters across the country? How did we move from the small family farm to animal agribusiness? Are there alternatives to keeping wild animals in zoos? What kinds of dualisms support our ability to cut nonhumans open to better develop human medicines? How did we come to live in a world that does such things? And can we intervene to construct our relationships with animals differently? The thinking in this book implicates larger institutions in animal oppression; it's rare, I believe, that individual humans torture animals. Most of the torture is done by larger structures, and I name those throughout.

But there's more to the story than what is done wrong and how we bought into systems that perform such atrocities. That's the reconstructive

part of this book. In each of these chapters and settings I ask: Is the human use of animals in this setting ever done right? Is deep connection with animals possible in environments where we use them? What does it look like, and how will I know it when I see it? Are there spaces where animals seem happy, where they aren't mutilating themselves, where they aren't engaged in obsessive behavior, where they seem (to my eyes) to be fulfilled? What kinds of cultural artifacts might help better represent these successful connections? How can we construct a different kind of society in which connection with and affection for animals becomes the norm?

This kind of assessment is difficult, for we can't actually ask the animals what they're thinking or feeling. I'll speak more fully about the problems the language barrier produces (and offer ways of seeing around it) in later chapters, but suffice it to say right now that the strategy I have chosen to mark connection is really based on my own experience of living with animals. While we may not be able to access the deep structures of their thinking or the precise contours of their emotions, I think most observers can tell when animals are miserable and unhappy. They act in a way that seems wrong. They bite themselves or pee where they're not supposed to or pick on animals bigger than they or spin or cry or just lie unnaturally still. At the same time, I believe most observers can tell when animals are filled with pleasure and joy, when they run and seem to dance and act as if the world were wholly designed especially for them. They cuddle and laugh and lick their young and turn their faces to the sun and smile. These are the markers I used in evaluating animal happiness. I could be wrong on many counts, but finally I believe that the communication problem between humans and animals is not different in kind from the communication issue between two humans. We don't all speak the same language, and, yes, people and animals can lie about what they experience. But in the final count, if (as evolution tells us) we're all made of the same "stuff," some impressions about happiness can be discerned across species lines.<sup>2</sup>

Many theorists of animal advocacy begin their thinking by valorizing the wild animal.<sup>3</sup> For them, animals in the wild function as a representation of the beauty of nature over the tameness of culture and domestication. This book flips that paradigm around and looks toward



domestication as a new location for a cultural shift concerning the human-animal relationship. Put simply, I begin my thinking with the animals that are closest to us, our pets, and move out from there to examine human relationships with farm animals, exotic animals in zoos and sanctuaries, and animals in science labs. I am not at all interested in making stark contrasts between nature and culture, but rather in seeing how the “natureculture” worlds we inhabit with other animals can become healthier and happier spaces for them—and for us.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, this is a very different kind of animal advocacy book. What the reader will find in the chapters that follow are analyses about human oppression of the animal as well as lots of narratives about animals that aren't suffering, animals that are thriving, animals that have reached across the species divide and chosen to connect with humans. These are the stories that I believe can provide guideposts to help us into a new form of animal advocacy.

Chapter 1 reviews current philosophical approaches to animal advocacy by examining the competing methodologies of rights, utilitarianism, welfare, and animal studies. The first three methods comprise the vast majority of the thinking behind animal advocacy today. All three are based, in one way or another, on Enlightenment philosophy; each deploys a different method for bringing animals into the circle of protection. Rights-based strategies move a limited catalog of rights out into the world of (some) animals; utilitarianism extends protection to animals based on their ability to suffer; and welfare orients advocacy toward animals as a function of human sympathy. Each of these methods is limited in its ability to truly serve animal advocacy. I argue instead for a different approach toward animal advocacy, one based not solely in rights or sympathy but in the revolutionary power of love many of us feel toward animals.

Chapters 2 (pets), 3 (food), 4 (entertainment), and 5 (science) display what emotional connections do or could look like in each of the areas where humans live with and use animals. In each of these chapters, I display what real connection brings to the table. While I recognize that animal rights, and to a lesser degree welfare and utilitarianism, are operating in political settings that seek legal change, my aim in each of these chapters is to show how a strategy based on transformative love

differs from these established approaches. I want to show how connection with animals can bring us to different conclusions. Over and over in my research, I found some humans living in harmony with some animals in ways that established ethical methodologies simply cannot account for or endorse. This is not to say that my observations and experiences with real animals in connection render philosophical theories wrong; it's more like they are just incomplete, especially at the task of capturing what goodness can come from sound human-animal connections. Many readers will call this approach particularistic, a soft method for reform at best. After all, we can always find exceptions that prove a rule, but those exceptions can't form the basis of public policy, right? My argument rests on the hope that with a little prompting, human culture could do much more work to make connection with animals the norm. Emotional connection has transformed our lives in relation to every other social movement, and it needs to be engaged more fully in animal activism. What I found in my research are many models of humans connecting with animals that—if we could extrapolate them into wider social norms—would produce a much better world for animals. This is not, then, a book that calls immediately for policy change (although we certainly need that as well). Rather, I want to think about the possibility that change happens in many ways at many different levels, and altering the hearts and minds of many people through affective shifts will lead to an easier job for philosophy and policy, and mostly to a better world for animals.

Chapter 6 of this book uses the metaphor of “clothing”—the final way humans use animals in daily life—to introduce the concept of affect. I use the word affect because it differs slightly from emotion; where emotions can be too easily manipulated, affect includes a sense of reason, but not a freestanding or objective reason. Rather affect recognizes that reason and emotion are inextricably intertwined; like two sides of the same coin, you can't have one without the other. They affect each other, and we are made through and in that interaction. Through processes of development and identification, we form various habits that help give expression to our emotional bonds; these bonds are not without reason, but they often do not entirely depend on reason either. The creation of the self emerges through attachments and disattachments, identifications,

disidentifications, and misidentifications. We are part what we love, part what we think, part what we feel, and part what we believe. The term affect captures the almost liquid nature of subject formation and allows for a different sense of self to emerge. It helps us understand how we proceed in the world by affecting both hearts and minds.

While focusing entirely on emotion can quickly lead us to an impoverished sentimentality, the concept of affect tempers that by intermingling emotion with reason. Affect symbolizes the fluid and interconnected nature of life itself. In other words, we change things as we bump up against them, and are similarly changed through these interactions. It is through affect that all lives become animated; we learn to cope with and live in the world by performing different feelings and sensibilities. Through those performances we become visible to ourselves. Affect signals our entire orientation to the world around us; while it may at times include the sentimental, it is not bound by it. Thus, my use of the term affect marks the fact that our realities are made for us in part through the worlds and meanings available to us, as well as by who and what we are attracted to and love (or don't love).

The concept of affect focuses on emotions like love, inclination, tendency, and desire, coupled with their interaction with reason, to argue for a new mode of subjectivity production, a new model of how we become "selves." Put simply, we become who we are by being involved with—affected by—the people, places, things, and ideas that draw us in. Our world is made by the constant interplay of our environments with our bodies, our reason, and our emotions. What drives us forward is the desire to connect with the world in an endless stream of different ways. The engine of that change is affect.

The concept of affect is also deeply rooted in material, corporeal bodies; it is about the way bodies live near each other, inside each other, with each other. Whether a tree, or a vegetable, or an animal, or a human, affect attends to the ways bodies move through life relying on other material beings, using living things to make houses and food and clothing and meaning. Affect is not only about the ways reason and emotions are linked together but also about the specific ways they are embedded in real bodies. Who gets to exploit what or whom, who gets to eat what or whom, who gets to love what or whom are central concerns in the agenda

of affect. Thus, the concept of affect forces us to focus on competing claims for scarce resources; it pushes us to think inside the limitations of the material world. On the shrinking planet we all currently inhabit, this corporeal aspect of affect is perhaps most salient, especially when it comes to animals.

In many ways, I will suggest, affect is also about a certain notion of spirituality or sacredness. I use these terms not to signal organized religion but rather to attend to the fact that as bodies crash up against and change each other, something sacred happens, something that cannot be contained by the concepts of reason or emotion or even corporeality. Affect, for me, points to the mystery that accompanies us through our daily lives, namely, how our attachments and enmeshments transform us in ways that sometimes seem magical or otherworldly. Other terms could be substituted here: animism, pantheism, vitalism, enchantment, and process thought, for example. But I use the terms spirituality and sacredness because they open up the possibility that the sharing of scarce resources, the crashing together of all kinds of bodies in this material world, requires a sustained attention to larger meanings. It demands that all of us (and really every living thing) make sacrifices in order to cohabit this planet together. Who and what are forced to make those sacrifices and under what conditions is the work of advocacy, ethics, and politics. But without a sense of spirituality and sacredness, sacrifice has little value.

In his famous 1967 essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crises," Lynn White wrote, "More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecological crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one."<sup>5</sup> White was not really interested in finding a new religion in his writing, and I am certainly not interested in that here. Indeed, I'll display the differences between religion and a spiritualized concept of affect in chapter 6. Rather, I think both of us are pointing to the kinds of excessive meaning that often accompany deep interconnections with animals and the natural world. What White and I are both calling for is a shift that reorients our attention to the more-than-human world. Reason, emotions, and bodies produce things that are greater than the sum of their parts—ecstasy, peace, tragedy, fulfillment, wholeness, brokenness, hope, grace, to name a few. These are the kinds of things I want the concept of affect to capture, things beyond

simple emotions, things that open our hearts, minds, and bodies to new realities and new possibilities of worldmaking.

The language of sacrifice, sacredness, and spiritual embodiment haunts the margins of many thinkers in animal studies; for me, the concept of affect helps bring these (almost) otherworldly realities into sharper relief. It is because we are embodied, emotional, rational creatures that attention to these matters is required. Donna Haraway's work, for example, is often peppered with spiritual metaphors, especially when she discusses both human and animal suffering: "My story ends where it began . . . when the logic of sacrifice makes no sense and the hope for forgiveness depends on learning a love that escapes calculation but requires the invention of speculative thought and the practice of remembering, of rearticulating bodies to bodies."<sup>6</sup> I understand Haraway to mean that human and nonhuman animals are enmeshed in a world that requires sacrifice on both parts, and that the nature of that sacrifice depends upon the idea that such interconnection, even when it causes suffering, is sacred. Susan McElroy locates and identifies a transcendent power associated with human-animal interconnection:

Indigenous people look upon wild animals as living incarnations of special powers, traits, or virtues that humans might learn from if we watched closely and with reverence. Early priestesses and magicians donned animal skins and masks to call in specific virtues and abilities inherent in particular animals. Rituals and ceremonies in which people acted out or danced the essence of animals have been practiced since human time began. For centuries, animals have served as our bridge to the natural and supernatural.<sup>7</sup>

In keeping with Haraway and McElroy, I want to suggest that sacredness and spirituality are central themes that need to be taken more seriously in animal advocacy. I propose in this book that a broad definition of the concept of affect can help us attend to these realms more substantially. Spiritual and sacred experiences of and with animals are not limited to indigenous peoples, or to priestesses and magicians, or rituals and ceremonies. They surround all of us who live with and are connected in any way to the world of animals. We only need better eyes to see them rightly. Such a sacred dimension resides in pet owners who keep the ashes

of their beloved departed friends on their mantels, in the world of good hunters who keep a few bones of their prey around the house to remind them of sacrifices made on their behalf. This kind of spiritual, affective connection rests in stories of animal love from John Grogan's *Marley and Me* to films like *Babe* and *Black Beauty*. It lives inside human-animal relationships that are based on kindness, kinship, and reciprocity. What if we could, for just a moment, imagine that animals possessed different kinds of powers from the ones we can now measure? What if we assume that animals serve as our bridge to the natural and to the supernatural? What if their different biologies hold the key to healing the wounds we humans have inflicted on this earth and the animals that inhabit it? Thinking about animals like this, in the realm of spirituality and affect, can offer us new forms of relationship with them, new methods of creating reality together.

I have purposely placed my fuller explication of the concept of affect at the end of this book for several reasons. While it might make sense to tell you up front exactly what affect is and how it replaces or revises theories of rights, utilitarianism, or welfare, I want to signal instead that the concept of affect is operating in a completely different realm from that of principled reason. An affective approach is not about finding the right rule and applying it; it's about examining the greater meanings and attachments that construct our lives. More important, placing my theory at the end of the book signals the fact that affect can only be displayed through narrative. In chapters 2 through 5, you will find emotional animal stories—lots of them—that collectively show us how to become better humans through our love for animals. It's only through reading those stories, stories filled with joy, grace, sorrow, despair, loneliness, happiness, fulfillment, and many other emotions, that we can fully comprehend the work of affect. Through these stories, I will show that change comes from the heart as much as from the head, and that the powers that trivialize emotions and dismiss them as mere sentimentality always function to reinforce the sole superiority of reason. This book begins in the conviction that human reason is not big enough to bring about the changes animals need. Thus, in using narrative and affect to change the conditions that oppress animals, theory follows the practices that can only be displayed in narrative, or put more correctly, theory and practice

emerge together as a new approach to advocacy. Placing my theory chapter at the end signals the fact that I am not offering a new principle for animal advocacy but a new way of living based on the revolutionary power of love.

The conclusion to this book offers one final personal story that highlights the role of affect, narrative, sacrifice, spirituality, and sacredness in our relationship with animals. Loving animals, and being loved by them, is not always an easy or blissful proposition. While a sentimentalized view of animals makes loving them seem easy, the reality of their corporeal existences means that attaching to and with them is often sad, painful, and heartbreaking. They do things we don't like, they hurt each other, and us, and they don't always know how to get along. The conclusion displays the fact that animals are not always or often cuddly playthings that acquiesce to our desires; they are beings with their own worldviews, ideas, and affects. And sometimes their realities crash harshly into our own. But, just as with humans, the work of love knits us together and forces us to endure and move forward, even during the harshest of times. Receiving their love, I will suggest, changes what it means to be human. These are difficult lessons, and in the conclusion, I will pull together all the reasons why I think love, as hard as it sometimes is, may be the only way to break through to a new reality.

I firmly believe that given the right opportunity, most humans can connect with animals, can look in their faces and see the spirit of a fellow being, and can make the changes necessary to improve their lot in life. It's the structures of our world that impede this process, structures that could be organized differently. Few people really want to see another being suffer. The problem is always either that they don't see the suffering (in factory farms or labs, for example) or they don't understand that an animal's life is made of the same "stuff" as yours or mine. Sustained attention to love, and the stories that produce that love, can help us address both of these issues. Good stories about animals can entertain us and educate us and help change the nature of humanity. I believe such transformation is possible. This book calls us to dismantle the arrangements that allow the unnecessary mistreatment and torture of animals to continue. By speaking about our deep connections across the species divide, we can call forth the goodness in even the most hardened human heart.

We must embark on this project of advocacy by first noting that the world is messy: it's filled with bad attitudes toward animals but also with grand and positive relationships. An orientation toward animal advocacy that chooses only to see only a world full of agony pushes us to the premature conclusion that all human intervention with animals is deeply flawed, that nothing can be saved. Such a strategy misses the goodness that happens when things are done well. When the abandoned puppy finds a new loving home, when the single guy looks forward all day to coming home to his cats, when the cow plays chase with the butterfly in a field of sunshine, when the orphaned chimp puts her arms around Jane Goodall's neck, when my dogs sense I am just about to finish writing and start to get excited about their walks, when the lonely teenage girl finds delight in galloping on her horse, and when that horse anticipates that girl's daily return from school with joy: These are things we simply can't give up. In a funny twist on the *Velveteen Rabbit's* story, these are the things that make us (humans) real.<sup>8</sup>