

# Animal Others—Editors' Introduction

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When Jeremy Bentham wrote his oft-cited words challenging the rationality of denying concern for an individual's suffering simply because "of the blackness of the skin" or "the number of legs" he also suggested that attitudes and legislation that allowed such irrationality amounted to "tyranny."<sup>1</sup> Peter Singer, who is the most prominent contemporary Benthamite, as it were, begins the preface to *Animal Liberation* with "This book is about the tyranny of human over non-human animals. This tyranny has caused and today is still causing an amount of pain and suffering that can only be compared with that which resulted from centuries of tyranny by white humans over black humans" (Singer 1975, vii). Working to end animal suffering and combating human tyranny, particularly as this occurs in intensive agriculture, the entertainment industries, and biomedical research, have served as the practical goals of the animal liberation movement. These goals and their philosophical underpinnings have been interrogated, alternatively interpreted, and challenged both inside and outside of the academy.

Some of the most penetrating criticisms of what might be called the mainstream philosophical position on animal ethics first came from feminist theorists who were equally concerned about the mistreatment of other animals and who often shared the practical goals of the animal liberation movement.<sup>2</sup> The pioneers of this critique were Marti Kheel, whose writing in the 1980s laid the groundwork for the development of ecofeminist ethics (Kheel 1985; 1988; 1993; 2004; 2008) (and to whose memory this special issue is dedicated); Carol Adams, whose early work drawing connections between intersecting oppressions initially appeared in radical feminist publications such as *WomanSpirit* and *Heresies* and then in her important 1990 book *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (Adams 1976; 1987; 1990); and Josephine Donovan, whose publication of "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory" in *Signs* in 1990 brought the issues into academic feminist discussions and helped generate what is now called the feminist care tradition in animal ethics (Donovan 1990). *Hypatia* also published some of the early criticism of mainstream approaches to thinking about the more than human world. A special issue in 1991 on "Ecological Feminisms" included a major essay by Deane Curtin that argued for a politicized ecological ethic of care and offered "contextual moral vegetarianism" as the defensible position on our relationship to animals who are eaten (Curtin 1991). In that same issue, Carol Adams and Deborah Slicer also offered alternative accounts to thinking about the ways that other animals are considered in mainstream philosophy (Adams 1991; Slicer 1991).

These early criticisms dealt with three related shortcomings inherent in the approach to animal ethics initially encouraged by Bentham and later developed into a full nonspeciesist, utilitarian theory by Singer. The criticisms also apply to the deontological theories developed around the same time that argued for animal rights. The first critique was of the abstract individualism common to these mainstream approaches; the second can be described as a failure of these theories to substantively explore the "tyranny" they condemned; and the third was the way in

which reason was regarded as disembodied and cut off from emotion and affect in theorizing about our duties to and responsibilities for other animals.<sup>3</sup>

Influenced by Enlightenment ideals, Bentham was committed to articulating rational principles through rigorous argumentation, principles that would shape legal and moral reforms.<sup>4</sup> One of the features of Bentham's utilitarian view was that individual interests were interchangeable and aggregative. Following in this tradition, Singer argues for equal consideration of equal interests for all who have interests, importantly including the interests that all sentient beings have to avoid unnecessary suffering. And although he understands that the nature of the suffering is unique to the individual who experiences it, from a moral point of view, suffering and interest setbacks are thought to be impersonal and thus comparable across experiencing bodies. Singer's version of utilitarianism attends to the suffering other animals endure, but in a way that allows for that suffering to be detached from the individual and counted, compared, combined, and even justified if such suffering could alleviate the greater suffering of another.

Animal rights philosophers find this methodology problematic. Critics have argued that utilitarians cannot account for "the separateness of persons," and in a similar vein, those who advocate for animal rights argue that all experiencing individuals, human and nonhuman, are more than just containers of pleasures and pains but are subjects-of-life (Regan 1985; 1990). Individual animals have worth independent of their contribution to some imagined calculation of greater goodness; this worth is best protected by recognizing their rights.

Feminists have been critical of both approaches insofar as they are based on abstract, universal principles deduced through detached reasoning. This sort of reasoning leaves too much out and flattens or erases the complexity of our interactions with others. These approaches don't adequately recognize the particular concerns, interests, worries, attitudes, sympathies, or sensitivities of actual people deciding what to do when confronting suffering nor the complex and conflicting experiences of those who suffer. The type of argumentation that mainstream animal ethics engages in tends to ignore the genesis, quality, context, and significance of particular concerns, interests, or sympathies. By focusing on the suffering that a specific individual experiences, we tend to overlook other aspects of her life that may involve pleasure in community with others. Even when one's life is extremely impoverished, it may not be a life of all and only suffering. Abstract, detached reasoning truncates the description of moral problems, actions, agents, and relations. It highlights what is common or the same in what may otherwise be very diverse situations—that is, suffering, pain, rights violations—and relegates to the background important situational and structural differences.

Though Singer and others who have argued for greater concern for animals have noted the irrational prejudice that underlies our interactions with them—a prejudice that has come to be called "speciesism"—and have compared this type of prejudice to more familiar forms such as "racism" and "sexism," some ecofeminists have argued that their objection to "tyranny" is underdeveloped, at best. Mainstream animal ethics tends to view animals in isolation from larger political and social structures, and in particular from those structures of power that underlie current practices in which animals are used. According to some feminist critiques, there is a conceptual link between the "logic of domination" that operates to reinforce sexism, racism, and heterosexism and the logic that supports the oppression of nonhuman animals and the more than human world more generally, a link that translates into individual and institutional practices that are harmful to women, people of color, nonnormative humans, as well as other animals and the planet (see, for example, Warren 1990; Gaard and Gruen 1993; Gruen 1993).

One of the most common early feminist critiques was that the theories of human obligations and responsibilities to other animals explicitly rejected the role of emotion in both establishing the moral claims animals make on us and in motivating us to act on those claims. Singer and Regan promote an understanding of emotion as separate from reason and favor the latter as the grounds for animal ethics. Feminists have long challenged these patriarchal dualisms and took this rejection of emotion to task, arguing that the distinction between reason and emotion was itself suspect, as the two are mutually informing (Gruen 1991). They have urged the development of a praxis built on compassion, care, and empathy, one that includes cognition and affect in ways that cannot be disentangled, and that will lead to richer, more motivating approaches to understanding and improving our relationships with others. Rather than generating distance and the vilification that often accompanies efforts to distinguish us from them, feminists have been working to bridge gaps between reason/emotion, human/animal, man/woman, and self/other in part by challenging the legitimacy of the binaries.

Simone de Beauvoir's claim that women have been made into the "Other" of man, and consequently regarded as less human, has offered important insights into our thinking about the function of such dualisms. Going back as far as Aristotle, women and "inferior races" have been linked to animals and nature and "othered" in relation to "Man" and "culture." But over the last half-century the othering of women and of animals has lost some sway (at least in the academy) as the imagined essential lines of difference between sex and species have become difficult to maintain. Women in particular (such as Jane Goodall, Vicki Hearne, Joyce Poole, and Sue Savage-Rumbaugh) have been at the forefront of showing how various species participate in cultural forms once thought to be exclusively and essentially human. Yet even to point out that women have been at the forefront of making the case that chimpanzees, dogs, horses, elephants, and bonobos, for example, grieve for their dead, form interspecies bonds, communicate and even use language, is to risk being accused of essentializing women's ways of knowing or reinscribing an age-old image of woman as somehow more animal or "closer to nature" and therefore less human (Ortner 1972).

Efforts to dismantle human (and male) exceptionalism and to demonstrate similarities between humans and other species have carried risks as well. "Saming" is a term that Naomi Schor coined for what can be understood as othering's flip side (Schor 1988, 45; see also Gruen and Weil 2010) and what has allowed women, and more recently, some animals, access to public recognition and to rights, but only to the degree that they are regarded as like men, or the same as men. A variety of studies have been designed to establish that there are certain intrinsic psychological or cognitive capacities that nonhuman animals share with human animals, studies that have worked to prove that a variety of species are like us, whether in terms of their rational or emotional capacities, their capacities for language, as well as their capacities for suffering. Such "saming" has often been strategic—a political move designed to call attention to, and ultimately, protection for, those who have had no or only minimal recognition. But saming also exposes the anthropocentric prejudices that subtend the very notion of rights and the recognition of who or what deserves them.

Saming and othering are related to each other as practices derived from the anthropocentric and often patriarchal frames through which we see the world. Insofar as nonhuman animals have been locked within our faulty representations of them, we can see the recent turn to animals as responding to a desire to find something outside of representation itself or to locate those who might resist our flawed linguistic systems. On this account, it is we humans who are encaged by our representations and the world they enforce. Paraphrasing Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida

writes, “Man is an animal, but a speaking one, and he is less a beast of prey than a beast that is prey to language” (Derrida 2008, 120-21). With echoes of Beauvoir’s interrogative “woman?” (Beauvoir 1989, 3) the term *animal*—“what a word!” writes Derrida (23), is evidence not only of the inadequacy of language, but of its violence, assimilating an infinite variety of beings into a category in order that we humans may distinguish ourselves from them, and, in particular in the case of animals, kill them with impunity. It is thus in response to this linguistic predicament and in response to this violence that *the animal* has become a focus of theory.

Rather than show that some animals have language and can communicate (like us, if not with us), an alternative effort to understand the absence of language not as a lack or “privation,” but rather as a different, but not lesser means of relating situates animals within a counter-linguistic and affective turn (Weil 2006; 2010). Here, references to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of a “becoming animal,” and its replacement of representable identities or forms with intensities and flows of affect, constitute attempts to retrieve a relational experience of being that is outside the bounds of language and the meanings it imposes and enables. Feminist work inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, especially the work of Elizabeth Grosz, Rosi Braidotti, and Lynda Birke, has gone far to undo the line of demarcation between humans and other animals (Birke and Parisi 1999; Braidotti 2002; Grosz 2008). But as singular identities dissolve into the fluid and changing interdependencies they effect in others, and as animal otherness is increasingly situated within and between all species, the specific plight and needs of particular nonhuman animals, indeed their difference(s), risk being lost again.

It is at this space of “différance” between othering and saming where Derrida’s late works on the question of the animal can be situated, especially as animals in their real and not merely symbolic capacities remind us of our responsibility, although to who or what is not always clear. Some feminists, most notably Donna Haraway, have been critical of Derrida for his lack of curiosity about his cat, for getting hung up on his own shame, or for his disregard for earlier feminist writings about violence done to animals. Attending to his shame might also be seen as a move inspired by feminism’s attention to the affective (even if some affects, like shame as well as disgust or fear, may distance us from, rather than draw us closer to, other animals) as well as the acknowledgment that the intensely personal is integral to the philosophical. That his shame is brought on by his own cat (a particular, female cat, he stresses, not a concept) is a notable first within a patriarchal tradition of recognition scenes that stretches back through Sartre to Hegel.<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, Derrida’s intervention, like the early feminist critiques, constitutes an important response to what we have been calling mainstream animal ethics, as practiced by Singer, following Bentham. For Derrida, the unknowability (beyond other and same) of this cat, as of any other subject, renders it impossible to quantify happiness or suffering. There can be no “calculation” of the subject. Derrida also highlights the insufficiency and anthropocentrism of rights and the subject of rights it is founded on. For Derrida, Bentham’s statement that “it is not whether they can reason but whether they suffer” must give rise to a subject defined not by his abilities (rational thought, use of language, free agency) but by his vulnerabilities, his incapacities.<sup>6</sup>

Despite some feminist criticism of his work, Derrida is closely aligned with recent work in feminist animal studies. His rejection of abstract rules and, in particular, his attention to the pathos that we humans share with animals and that, he acknowledges, is being violated daily by what he calls an “animal genocide” led Donovan and Adams to describe him as “having adopted (without labeling it as such) a feminist ethic-of-care approach to the treatment of animals” (Donovan and Adams 2007, 14). Derrida’s critique of the word *animal* as a term that legitimates

violence by drawing a single, untenable line of difference between us and them and thereby denying the differences that exist between as well as within species, is one that has also been useful for feminist and queer theory's disruptions of normative categories and normative relations between species, sexes, and genders. But whether there is an ethics in Derrida should be a question for feminist animal studies scholars to ask. His attention to his own shame over any curiosity or compassion is a warning that the initial response (or reaction) to animals may not be a helpful or constructive one "for them," and merits examination precisely for this reason. Indeed, if there is an ethical pronouncement in Derrida, it is that we must always be vigilant about our capacities for being unethical: "*On the one hand*, casting doubt on responsibility, on decision, on one's own being ethical, seems to me to be—and is perhaps what should forever remain—the unrescindable essence of ethics, decision and responsibility" (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004, 126).

How can we turn shame into compassion, response into responsible action? To tend to an animal, to respond to her is to change her as it is to be changed by her in return. The "difficulty of ethical responsibility" is that we must accept it in the face of uncertain changes. Feminists, we think, are not afraid of such complexities nor shamed by our entanglements with others we cannot fully know. As the papers in this volume attest, we will acknowledge the limitations of our perspectives, our language, and the resources of our own minds, but then take the risk of making judgments and taking action for the sake of all animals, ourselves included.

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We begin this Special Issue with an Invited Symposium in which we see just how unafraid some scholars working in feminist animal studies are to interrogate commonly held views about the personal and political. Exploring a range of complex questions—How might we balance conflicts between different sorts of oppression? Should feminist animal studies scholars be vegan? Does one need to identify as feminist or be directly involved with animals to contribute to feminist animal studies?—these scholars are not shy about naming names. This Symposium highlights some of the exciting debates occurring in feminist animal studies.

The first two essays that follow treat the question of the animal from a postcolonial perspective and stress the importance of intersectionality as a feminist practice. Maneesha Deckha argues in "Toward a Postcolonial, Posthumanist Feminist Theory: Centralizing Race and Culture in Feminist Work on Nonhuman Animals" that for work to be truly posthumanist, it must be careful not to stabilize categories of gender or race and, consequently, the effects of their interlocking power relations. Deckha argues that the early work of some ecofeminists and those who espouse a feminist care ethic privilege gender in such a way as to lock themselves into the very humanism they seek to escape. The posthumanist and postcolonial work Deckha endorses demands recognition of the varied ways that social identities are constituted within multiple and changing hierarchies of race, class, and culture (to name a few) such that gender cannot be presumed as a point of departure for analysis. This is the very kind of analysis that Ruth Lipschitz offers in her deeply intersectional and destabilizing reading of the work of South African artist Nandipha Mntambo. To read Mntambo's art as a simple reinscription of the black African woman as the animalized other of the West (as was done by a national official) or one that, in its use of bared women's bodies and cattle skins makes an equivalence between the consumption of black women and the consumption of animals, Lipschitz argues, cannot account for the ambiguity of the artist's visual language and medium. Reading these artworks in terms of Derrida's "carnophallogocentrism" and Kristeva's abject, she argues that Mntambo's is rather

a “risky” art that “resignifies” the associations of sex, race, and species in order to interrupt their consumption by exposing the political construction and slipperiness of borders between edible (animal) and inedible (human).

What bodies are edible and consumable and what lives are grievable are questions that James Stanescu takes up at the meat counter of the grocery store at the beginning of his essay “Species Trouble: Judith Butler, Mourning, and the Precarious Lives of Animals.” From the insight that both social and personal pressures are operating in the disavowal of mourning for animals, Stanescu expands Butler’s notion of precariousness as “a way of thinking connections, of claiming kinship and relations. . . . Precariousness is a place for thinking the ethical because it begins with the Other, rather than with the self.” Recognition of vulnerability and of finitude, Stanescu argues, is recognition of our precarious *animal* lives, lives we honor through mourning. In disavowing mourning, we are not just making such lives unintelligible but are also denying our animality and foreclosing our connections to other animals. By allowing ourselves to mourn, however, even at the grocery store, we can start making a difference for animals, humans and others.

As we noted above, making a difference through affective engagement with other animals has been a central theme in feminist theorizing about animals. Mourning and grief, care and love, empathy and compassion have increasingly been explored as ways of deepening our understanding of and connections to other animals. The next three papers develop these themes by analyzing the meanings of particular relationships with significant other animals, relationships characterized by dependency, needs for companionship and affection, and even erotic intimacy.

In “The Role of Love in Animal Ethics” Anca Gheaus draws attention to a fundamental feature of our caring relations with each other and other animals: that such relationships meet emotional needs for affection. She argues that while mutual love, understood as a shared valuing of companionship, cannot provide a full account of our obligations to other animals, a focus on love and emotional attachments can reveal what is valuable about their lives as well as help us identify the proper recipients of moral concern. Kathy Rudy’s auto-ethnographic reflections on her love for the dogs she shares her life with and the lessons she learned from Eve Sedgwick led her to explore the social and political roots of our aversion to bestiality with all its various connotations. Using insights from queer theory, Rudy in “LGBTQ . . . Z?” (the Z for zoophilic) explores the ways that our intimate relationships with animals can undo normative categories and cross identity boundaries. She provokes us to question what sex with animals could mean and then to examine how our answers inform our relationships with animals. In “Bitch, Bitch, Bitch: Personal Criticism, Feminist Theory, and Dog-Writing,” Susan McHugh, a well-known lover of dogs herself, reads dog memoirs as a form of feminist critique. They expose the alignment of human–canine sexual frustrations over heteronormative (and sometimes racialized) reproductive imperatives, and they assert a hybridized notion of feminist community that generates personal criticism while “switching the ground rules away from combative and toward respectful engagements with difference.”

Whereas much feminist work in animal studies focuses on navigating difference and deepening our understanding of affective and emotional connections, in “*Thou Shall Not Harm All Living Beings: Feminism, Jainism, and Animals*,” Irina Aristarkhova focuses on an important similarity: we are all alive. Arguing against an ethic of care in favor of an ethic of carefulness and *ahimsa*, nonharm and nonviolence, she challenges the affective approaches that tend to encourage building connections and relationships in order to understand the needs, interests, and desires of another animal and to satisfy our own. Aristarkhova argues instead that we would do

better just letting animals be. “Humans, even when they are careful in not seeking contact with animals, cannot help but take over animal space and get in their way.”

In the final essay, Sandra Koelle makes vivid just how we humans get in the way of other animals and how we might navigate intersections in order to do less harm simply by adding up the numbers. In “Intimate Bureaucracies: Roadkill, Policy, and Fieldwork on the Shoulder,” she suggests that attending to mundane and often abject details such as what shapes, sizes, and placement of passes or tunnels certain species prefer, and which species get caught within rather than behind certain barriers, generates the situated knowledges that can be translated into policies that will protect animals on the roadways and highways they also use and that are part of the nature-cultures they inhabit.

In the past few years a large number of books have been published that make connections among sex, gender, and the more than human world, and we are pleased to publish six reviews of such books here. We offer our thanks to the book reviewers, as well as to all of the anonymous reviewers of manuscripts for this issue. Their advice was invaluable, and we deeply appreciate their willingness to share their time and expertise. We would also like to thank our brave symposiasts for crafting their contributions so quickly and to Alison Wylie for comments that generated the idea for the symposium. Karen Emmerman and Asia Ferrin were terrifically helpful managing editors and Mary Jane Rubenstein, as usual, provided much local support, encouragement, and great wisdom. In February 2011, we held our “Sex/Gender/Species” conference. Some of the papers published here were first presented at that conference, and we thank all of the scholars who attended

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> “Under the Gentoo and Mahometan religions, the interests of the rest of the animal creation seem to have met with some attention. Why have they not, universally, with as much as those of human creatures, allowance made for the difference in point of sensibility? Because the laws that are have been the work of mutual fear; a sentiment which the less rational animals have not had the same means as man has of turning to account. Why ought they not? No reason can be given. If the being eaten were all, there is very good reason why we should be suffered to eat such of them as we like to eat: we are the better for it, and they are never the worse. They have none of those long-protracted anticipations of future misery which we have. The death they suffer in our hands commonly is, and always may be, a speedier, and by that means a less painful one, than that which would await them in the inevitable course of nature. If the being killed were all, there is very good reason why we should be suffered to kill such as molest us: we should be the worse for their living, and they are never the worse for being dead. But is there any reason why we should be suffered to torment them? Not any that I can see. Are there any why we should not be suffered to torment them? Yes, several. See B. I. tit. [Cruelty to animals]. The day has been, I grieve to say in many places it is not yet past, in which the greater part of the species, under the denomination of slaves, have been treated by the law exactly upon the same footing as, in England for example, the inferior races of animals are still. The day may come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may come one day to be recognized, that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the os sacrum, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or, perhaps, the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or

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even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? the question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?" (Bentham 1823).

<sup>2</sup> Efforts toward theoretical and political recognition generally warrant reconsideration of the terms that designate or deny subjectivity. Within animal studies, using gendered pronouns for nonhuman animals is a way of breaking through the human/animal binary. But asserting the subjectivity of nonhuman animals in this way precludes transgender subjectivity. How we refer and what is gained and lost in such references will be the topic of ongoing debates and requisite footnotes. Throughout this special issue, we have decided to alternate gendered pronouns in order to indicate that nonhuman animals are whos and not whats.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of these criticisms with a slightly different emphasis, see the "Introduction" in Donovan and Adams 2007.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that Bentham, though committed to rational argument, also loved animals, particularly "pussies" (Bowring 1838, vol. 11, p. 80).

<sup>5</sup> For two contemporary accounts of the politics of recognition as a reciprocal exchange between humans, see Pippin 2008, chap. 8, and Butler 2009, 5–12.

<sup>6</sup> See Weber 1995, 255–86 and Derrida 2008, 27–28. For a discussion of vulnerability and passivity in Derrida, see Wolfe 2010, chaps. 3 and 5.

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