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ANIMALS

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This chapter addresses human animals' relationship to the countless nonhuman animals with whom we share the larger Earth community. Truly a principal global challenge facing our species, this inevitable human–nonhuman intersection is seen far better today than it was only a few decades ago. Through helpful lenses afforded by interdisciplinary and multicultural approaches, humans today can identify the relevance of religious practice and scholarship to humans' inevitable connections with other-than-human animals.

This intersection, which is an essential feature of "our common home" (cf. Pope Francis 2015), faces an array of challenges generated by modern humans' denial of their own animality. Our better understanding of other animals gives us improved prospects of (1) noticing nonhuman animals' actual realities as individuals and members of their own communities, and (2) providing adequate accounts of humans' long past, complex present, and future prospects of living in a more-than-human world populated by healthy human and nonhuman animal communities.

These aims are sharpened by two crucial developments. First, our discussion about nonhuman animals has evolved greatly in the last half-century, and now features great diversity, openness, and a commitment to seeing other animals in terms of their actual realities rather than the one-dimensional caricatures that characteristically have dominated inherited beliefs and generalizations. Second, current discussions about humans' relationship to our fellow animals have made important contributions to broader intellectual currents and cultural movements by enlarging many people's notions of morality and a virtuous life.

It is important to underscore the important role that religious analyses and scholarship add to perspectives on humans' multifaceted engagement with nonhuman animals. In many circles of today's industrialized societies, the idea of ethics-driven protection of nonhuman animals is associated primarily with secular figures who have intentionally distanced themselves from religion, such as the leading animal protection philosopher Peter Singer. That animal protection has deep roots in religious traditions is easily seen in an argument that the great sages of the Axial Age—the pivotal period of global religious and philosophical ferment between 900 BCE and 200 BCE—understood the core of religion to be "*respect for the sacred rights of all beings*" (Armstrong 2006, xiii-xiv).

Understanding the origins, breadth, and depth of anti-cruelty sentiments and other animal protections is but one way that the academic study of religion deepens perspectives on the

human–nonhuman intersection. Another is supplied by sociological studies of how commitments to such protection continue to prevail today in some religious communities. In contemporary versions of those religious traditions that stem from Axial Age insights, the story is mixed. In medieval or modern forms of Christianity, for example, dismissals of animals outside the human species exist alongside high points of concern expressed by seminal figures such as Francis of Assisi and Albert Schweitzer. In the Axial Age tradition of noticing and taking the world beyond the species line seriously, present forms of religion and ecology advocate habitat protection, "creation care," and "stewardship," which embody ethics and practices crucial for protection of nonhuman animals and their communities.

Such features of modern religious practice have been used to support two claims regarding religion's relevance to the question of the Earth community's nonhuman citizens. First, those who wish to understand attitudes across time and place toward nonhuman animals cannot understand such issues well without awareness of the religious roots of many current attitudes or the wide-ranging phenomenon of religious communities protecting certain nonhumans through their ethical values, education, and daily practices. Concerns for other animals are, for example, a vital part of the worldview and daily life of many indigenous and small-scale society religious traditions. They are also an important feature of modern scholarship about the two largest religious traditions (Christianity and Islam)—scholars *from within these traditions* have noted the key role that animal protection continues to play in their tradition (see, for example, Hobgood-Oster 2008 and 2010; Masri 1987 and 1989; Tlili 2012). Through such diverse historical and contemporary sources, a variety of religious traditions offer remarkable awareness of the ethically charged dimensions of the human–nonhuman intersection.

A second claim about religious traditions and animals is that those who seek to understand humans' religious dimensions will not succeed *unless* they engage the long history of religions posing profound questions about humans' relationship to Earth's other-than-human living beings. Evidence for this second claim overlaps with the evidence offered in support of the first claim (cf. Waldau 2013, 174–176), but also includes the arguments cited below about cognitive development benefits that are lost when a child or adult is prevented from noticing and taking other animals seriously.

Claims about the importance of modern religious and secular circles taking seriously humans' ability to act as responsible citizens of a more-than-human community have not only affected, but also been reciprocally nurtured by, perspectives now being developed in many subfields of our sciences and humanities. The result is that the field of Religion and Ecology, the emerging discipline of environmental humanities, and the many sub-disciplines of the umbrella field known as animal studies (cf. Waldau 2013) can draw upon abundant scholarly, practical, scientific, and religious sources about humans' connections to nonhuman animals. All three fields also have an ethical cast, for each foregrounds the importance of humans meeting a challenge described succinctly in the mid-twentieth century—humans must evolve "from conqueror of the land-community to a *plain member and citizen* of it" (Leopold 1991).

Beyond human exceptionalism

Although human life interacts constantly with countless microorganisms, our native, unaided human senses cannot detect the vast majority of these "neighbors"—thus, the practical reality is that, in our daily lives, we can attend only to much larger "macro" animals (those animals visible to us in our daily lives) (Waldau 2011, 22–23). In practice, however, humans frequently attempt to ignore all but their fellow humans, often to the detriment of both the Earth community and themselves. Chief Luther Standing Bear in 1933 observed, "[T]he old Lakota

… knew that man's heart, away from nature, becomes hard; he knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans too" (Standing Bear 1988). A twentieth-century naturalist added, "Whenever man forgets that man is an animal, the result is always to make him less humane" (Krutch 1949). Echoes of such wisdom undergird a medical doctor's evaluation of our present condition: "Much of the damage that we inflict on ourselves, on others, and certainly on the natural world stems from extreme adherence to the notion of human exceptionalism" (Ratey and Manning 2014, 8). Exceptionalist tendencies in humans' self-evaluation of our importance to the universe have crystalized in the last centuries into a virulent human exceptionalism, a form of human-centeredness that holds humans superior to and thus rightly entitled to privileges over all else in our more-than-human world (Waldau 2013, 144–149).

Human exceptionalism ignores two foundational facts: (1) humans are embedded in an unavoidably multispecies world, and (2) humans *need* a shared, multispecies community for a variety of scientific and humanistic reasons (Louv 2005 and 2011). Apart from the obvious benefits that responsible membership in our larger community brings to the nonhumans now under grave threat of harm from humans, benefits *inside the species line* range widely (cf. Waldau 2013, 9, 16 and 56), and include therapy for children and adults, increased ecological awareness and connectedness, and diverse opportunities for spiritual connection and integration with one's nonhuman surroundings. Of great relevance is the science-based claim that healthy cognitive development in children is retarded by removal of children from the natural world—"Yet, at the very moment that the bond is breaking between the young and the natural world, a growing body of research links our mental, physical, and spiritual health directly to our association with nature—in positive ways. … Nature inspires creativity in a child by demanding visualization and the full use of the senses" (Louv 2005, 3 and 7). A decade earlier, Paul Shepard observed, "Children respond spontaneously to the details of nature and the names and movements of animals because animals were (and are) the path into categorical thought and, eventually, the terms of a philosophy or a cosmology" (Shepard 1996, 10). Jacques Derrida mused, "The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there" (Derrida 2002, 397). Other animals, then, because they prompt our capacity for creative imagination and enhance key reflective capabilities, nurture both experience and learning. Benefits also flow from the opening of hearts and minds to types of compassion that produce joy even as they strengthen character-creating diverse opportunities for forms of self-actualization that can occur *only* through self-transcendence (see Frankl 1992).

Scientific and empirical challenges

The respect afforded to the natural sciences in the modern world has given science-based claims about nonhuman animals great interdisciplinary power. Scientific data about animal cognition and emotion have been available since the 1970s (Griffin 1998) and today provide an important perspective because the emotional capacities of nonhuman animals were something Western societies had to *re*discover. Many ancient peoples believed fervently that some nonhuman animals experienced emotions, and Charles Darwin also observed, "The fact that the lower animals are excited by the same emotions as ourselves is so well established, that it will not be necessary to weary the reader by many details" (Darwin 1874, 84). But gradually the Western cultural world and its scientific establishment slipped into persistent, Cartesian-inspired denials of emotional capabilities in *any* nonhuman animals. Today in many scientific research precincts, such denials have been surmounted (see, for example, Bekoff 2007; Marzluff and Angell 2012; de Waal 2013). Public perception of emotions in some nonhuman animals has

also been advanced by familiarity with emotion-intensive nonhumans, such as family dogs and cats (see Bradshaw 2011 and 2013).

Nonetheless, there remain circles where doubts about other animals' emotional realities prevail, as is the case in the production-oriented academic field of animal science, which is dominated by money from industrialized agribusiness (see Waldau 2013, 68ff). In the profit-making businesses themselves, denials of food animals' individual emotional needs remain the *de facto* reality (see Scully 2002; Foer 2009).

Claims about the cognitive abilities of certain macro nonhuman animals follow a similar pattern—ancients held some other animals to be intelligent, early modern scientists and many citizens in the industrializing western world doubted such claims, and then modern science subsequently confirmed that ancient views were often far closer to the truth than were early modern doubts. Darwin himself suggested that while "[o]nly a few persons now dispute that animals possess some power of reasoning," nevertheless "many authors have insisted that man is divided by an insuperable barrier from all the lower animals in his mental faculties" (Darwin 1874, 90 and 95).

Today, despite much cutting-edge work in a wide range of sciences (cf. Griffin 1976 and 1998) dualistic schemes still dominate major modern institutions. Law and other public policy circles, all levels of education, mainline religious establishments, economics-focused scholarship, and the business establishment are bastions of unmitigated human exceptionalism. At the same time, there have been profoundly important changes in public values and social ethics in many countries, which in turn have led to great ferment in the last half-century about what future our species might choose regarding treatment of various nonhumans (see Waldau 2011 and 2013). Science-based discoveries continue to arrive regularly regarding the social and cognitive realities of many different species (e.g. de Waal 2013) and such findings consistently confirm ancient intuitions that our world is graced by multiple intelligences (Tucker 2006).

Contemporary analyses suggest, however, a number of reasons that our science traditions should be infused with humility. These include the long history of paradigm-shifting discoveries, the constant revision of one major theory after another, the problems of fraud and political correctness (Dreger 2015), the use and control of science by self-interested corporations (Oreskes and Conway 2010; Krimsky 2003), all-too-familiar patterns of resistance to change (Griffin 1998), and contemporary harms to farm animals (Pew Commission 2008). Such problems reveal that practices pursued by the scientific community have often promoted human exceptionalism and the privileges it enshrines.

To insist that humility is needed as science goes forward is in no way to deny that our sciences have made great advances in many fields. Many advocates of Religion and Ecology and the Environmental Humanities have from the beginning embraced science-based viewpoints (Tucker and Grim 2009). Other disciplines, such as Religion and Animals and the now decades-old legal education field of Animal Law, began their work more narrowly, confining themselves to the discourse of, respectively, theology and law. Today, however, these fields feature second-wave forms that are richly interdisciplinary and cross-cultural in scope (Waldau 2016).

About nonhuman animals, then, there is much that has been learned and, of course, much more to learn. The fact that any full understanding of the human–nonhuman intersection must be informed by some adequate level of science-based realism by no means implies that science alone will suffice—it will not, for informed empirical approaches to nonhuman animals are a necessary, not a sufficient, condition for making informed judgments about animals, whether human or nonhuman. As noted by a Nobel Laureate in physics,

> The image of the world around us that science provides is highly deficient. It supplies a lot of factual information, and puts all our experience in magnificently coherent order, but keeps terribly silent about everything close to our hearts, everything that really counts.
>
> *(Erwin Schrödinger, quoted in Revel and Ricard 1999, 214)*

We need to acknowledge humbly that our human languages, though truly marvelous, can bewitch our minds and thereby create false illusions. Unexamined uses of common but anti-scientific phrases such as "humans and animals," which remains the standard even in science-based education, favor the kinds of ignorance that harden into exclusions. Fortunately, it is possible today to speak in ways that do not support misleading dualisms or commit the fallacy of misplaced community by pulling humans out of the animal community (Waldau 2013, 16). To realize our full human nature and to actualize our bountiful human caring abilities, we also need ethically sensitive, religiously perceptive, and cross-culturally aware understandings to grasp the profound ways in which each human is a citizen of a variety of nested communities that, taken together, reveal how our shared Earth is a *much* more-than-human community.

The "Anthropocene" question—A segue from science to ethics

The question of nonhuman animals in our changing ecological context helps us make sense of today's debates over humanity's past actions and future choices, and influences our discussion of whether we should name a new geological epoch after ourselves. Anthropocene relies on Greek etymology—*anthropos*, "humans," + *kainos*, "new." It has been proposed in geological circles to signal that we are no longer in the Cenozoic era (*kainos,* "new" + *zōion,* "animal"), which, by scientific consensus, began about 65 million years ago when various factors, including a large comet striking the Earth, led to the extinction of dinosaurs and thereby opened the way for our kind of animal, namely, mammals. One implication of choosing this new term would be that, of all the animal species, we are the first one whose world-altering powers can be compared to the asteroid or comet from the sky responsible for the most recent epoch-ending global catastrophe.

The behaviors that have produced the changes memorialized by the proposal of the Anthropocene as a new geological era are not, of course, new behaviors. Instead, they are the latest version of a long-standing pattern of rank human-centerednesses that have licensed disregard in certain societies for the more-than-human world. Anthropocene is, in effect, a corollary of human exceptionalism, which now functions as the dominant narrative of our time. The result is that many humans have lost awareness of their own animality and of our species' membership in the larger community. But as explained below, our radically human-centered narrative promotes only *some* humans' privileges, for the harms created by modern societies, including consumption patterns, undeniably have disadvantaged many humans as well.

The Anthropocene and other animals

In part because geological uses of Anthropocene have been attracting attention, the term has already been appropriated in nongeological circles. That nongeologists have come to speak of "the Anthropocene" tells us two additional things about ourselves. First, this word has been used by some concerned citizens who want us to curtail humans' broad harming of the Earth and its communities. Speaking of the Anthropocene, then, can be seen to reflect our capacious ethical abilities.

In addition, however, the arrival of the Anthropocene has an undeniably ugly implication. Elizabeth Kolbert has shown how the apathy and self-inflicted ignorance that human exceptionalism promotes regarding lives outside our own species has led to a state of affairs she calls "the sixth extinction" (Kolbert 2014). In fact, many of the harms committed by human societies fall short of extinction but nonetheless result in "a massive diminution of the entire body corporate of animate creation … species that still survive as distinct life forms but have suffered horrendous diminishment" (Mowat 1996, 14). We should not be too eager to celebrate a pattern of extinction and other harms for our larger community that compares in any way to five previous global catastrophes.

Kolbert's concerns reveal an ethically charged backstory involved with any use of "Anthropocene," namely, the pervasive problem of humans having exceptionalized *only our own kind*. Some may assume that, on its face, this notion must be a boon for humans. But upon closer examination, there are many reasons to halt before the precipice we create by our deeply troubling tendency to name things after ourselves alone. A parallel exists in the limits of our educational field called "the humanities"—there are few places in this megafield of our "higher education" where a student can study nonhumans in robust ways unimpeded by a Protagoras-like axiom that "man is the measure of all things" (cf. Waldau 2013, 289–306). The *anthropos* undergirding Anthropocene is eerily close to the extinction-promoting assumptions of human exceptionalism. But so much contemporary science, common sense, and traditional wisdom make it *obvious* that the Earth is neither designed primarily for humans nor fully in our control. There are even hints in various narrative traditions, as in the recurring claim among North American indigenous groups that "every animal knows way more than you do" (Ratey and Manning 2014), that it might be *nonhuman* animals who fit better into this world than do humans.

Less-than-careful uses of "Anthropocene," which risk *celebrating* the series of failures that have now produced measurable global destruction of living beings, beg questions about facile, nongeological uses of the term. Consider an example that illuminates how welcoming the Anthropocene may amount to nothing less than contemporary elites justifying their own lifestyles and fascination with modern technologies and power. Diane Ackerman's (2014) *The Human Age*, Part I of which is entitled "Welcome to the Anthropocene," features an optimistic tone throughout. One reviewer challenged the book's focus on only surviving humans and not the marginalized poor who will be unable to wall off their low-lying communities from rising sea levels or deal with other destructive effects of climate disruption (Nixon 2014). De-emphasizing or, worse, ignoring altogether the problem of marginalized humans *not* surviving in the Anthropocene is deeply troubling. *From the vantage point of nonhuman animals*, however, such optimism about the benefits that privileged segments of humanity could gain in a "good" or "great" Anthropocene would likely seem mere "business as usual" in the all-too-familiar key of human exceptionalism.

Given these problems, does Anthropocene offer any solace for those who take seriously today's worldwide animal protection movement that promotes a better understanding of humans' possible roles in relation to our fellow animals? If individuals choose to deeply affirm humans' animality and our larger community by actively seeking the role of responsible, plain citizen, our species can add impetus to environmental and animal protection efforts to create a *modus vivendi* in which *whole societies*, through their public policies, laws, and social ethics, choose not their own privilege but, instead, the connections that plain citizens can enjoy in a larger, more-than-human community. This achievement would, of course, afford humans a form of life congenial to a full acknowledgement that humans are a very special kind of animal. To do so would also be consonant with the lines of evidence confirming that a multispecies

world is needed for human flourishing, and would thereby promote the *full* actualization of human potential. More than two decades ago it was argued,

> Meditation on animals and our relations with them must be very nearly the oldest and most persistent form of human pensiveness; it is doubtful that we could ever really adequately know our identity as humans if we did not have other animals as a frame for our own activity and reflectivity.
>
> *(Fernandez 1995, 8)*

Making choices in favor of a multispecies community does more than recognize the ancient roots of our connection and community with other animals. Taking responsibility for an inclusive rather than an exceptionalist future not only enhances our *present* capacities to care about both human and nonhuman others. It also gives us the chance to search out the full extent of our own animal abilities and create a tradition of realistic narratives about other macro animals' realities as individuals and as members of their own communities. If we affirm ourselves in this way, we thereby attest that being an "animal" can be extraordinary. Further, we set the stage for exploring other extraordinary animals, and we create forms of education that do something other than equip our children to be ever more effective vandals of the Earth (Orr 1994, 5). As challenging as it may be to forge a future in which nonhuman neighbors are respected as fellow citizens, this projected future contrasts favorably with the bleak prospects under today's human exceptionalism where extinctions loom and disfavored nonhumans are referred to as "trash animals" (cf. Nagy et al. 2013).

Religious and educational challenges

While only some segments of contemporary religious communities today emphasize animal protection, the budding field of Religion and Animals has shown that the number of religion-affiliated people concerned for nonhumans and their communities is now rapidly increasing (see Forum on Religion and Ecology 2015; Humane Society of the United States 2015). Any suggestion, then, as to who in our wide human world now commands the long view of humans' right relation with other animals surely must mention not only the better known "world religions" along with scientific and secular animal protection circles, but also indigenous traditions as well despite the fact that our modern world continues to harm these human groups (Goldhagen 2009, 54).

The problems presented by the human exceptionalism rooted in today's educational establishment brings to mind Helvetius' suggestion that humans are not born stupid, but only ignorant—they are made stupid by education (cf. Waldau 2013, 310). Care for others within and beyond the species line will be a *sine qua non* of developing robust education capable of nurturing responsible, plain citizens of biologically diverse local communities.

Conclusion

Exploring tensions and opportunities that exist in the complex relationships between human animals and nonhuman animals helps make sense of possible human roles in today's changing ecological context. To grasp the range of these roles, *at least* the following basics should be attempted.

(1) Develop awareness of the importance of *local place*, for such consciousness enhances awareness that humans, like other animals, are healthiest when they are place-knowing

creatures. As one scholar observed, "there never was an 'is' without a 'where'" (Buell 2011). This observation has affinities with the wisdom traditions developed in many small-scale human societies (see, for example, Basso 1996; Deloria 1969).

(2) Avow that in any place we find ourselves, nearby living beings are our neighbors, including the nonhuman animals visible to us in our daily lives.

(3) Recognize that humans' *unavoidable* membership in a more-than-human world has important ramifications for who we truly are—"we cannot be truly ourselves in any adequate manner without all our companion beings throughout the earth" *precisely because* that "larger community constitutes our greater self" (Berry 2006, 5).

(4) Acknowledge that *all* of humans' different forms of social awareness, including our communal, ethical, religious, and political capabilities, are required if humans are to recognize well our ecological embeddedness.

The unassailable fact that compassionate concern for other animals can be a vibrant part of our moral universe makes it evident why today there are many different cultural and political debates over whether and how humans as a collective might, *if we choose*, again extend our sense of community to the more-than-human world. This choice is both personal and momentous, for whatever choices we make regarding our larger community will thereby make morals and shape the future of life on Earth.

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