Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology

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Edited by
FORREST CLINGERMAN and MARK H. DIXON
Ohio Northern University, USA

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Chapter 12
Recreate, Relate, Decenter:
Environmental Ethics and Domestic Animals

Anna L. Peterson

Introduction

In this chapter, I address an issue that does not attract a lot of attention in environmental ethics these days: domestic non-human animals. Many people who write about environmental ethics or animal welfare assume either that the two fields have separate concerns or, more strongly, that their priorities are divergent, perhaps even opposed. Thus a real division has emerged between philosophical thinking about non-human animals, especially domestic ones, and about the natural world more broadly. This division probably cannot be bridged entirely, and in fact it may not need to be. However, we can learn a great deal from looking at the points of connection or at least of mutual illumination between the two fields.

This is not just an interesting task but an important one, because—and this is my argument—attention to domestic animals can help clarify and even recreate our ethical response to non-human nature in (at least) three interconnected ways. First, as we recreate or play with domestic animals, especially companion species, we recreate our attitudes and practices regarding the more-than-human world. I will spend most time on this aspect, which for me establishes the foundation for thinking about other issues. Second, when we relate to domestic animals as partners in play and in work, we are relating to them also as moral agents, and in so doing we recreate not only cross-species relationships but larger communities. Finally, when we decenter ourselves through mutually transformative interactions with animals and reflections on those encounters, we recreate human self-understanding along lines that are both more humble and more ecologically viable.

Before continuing, I should specify that I am not talking about all domestic animals. Non-human species have been domesticated for three main reasons: to supply food and clothing, to do specific kinds of work, and to provide companionship. By far the largest proportion of domesticated animals fall into

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I would like to thank Dan Spencer and Bill Jordan for their helpful comments and suggestions on this chapter, and Mark Dixon and Forrest Clingerman for organizing the conference at which it was presented. A few passages in this chapter are taken from Chapter 4 of my book *Everyday Ethics and Social Change: The Education of Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
the first category. However, I am primarily interested in the latter two: work and companionship. And then among all the different species that provide work and companionship, I focus on two: dogs and horses. These are a relatively small subset of all the domestic animals in the world, but they loom very large in terms of their importance to human culture, history, and evolution. Most important, we interact with these species in very special ways, which shed light on the issues I want to discuss here. I am bracketing for now the question of whether this discussion might have any relevance to other domestic animals, especially those that are kept by humans primarily for food. I suspect that our relationships to domestic animals, and their places both in human societies and in larger ecosystems, are too varied to be captured by a single argument or theory. I recognize, however, that any extended discussion of the place of domestic animals in environmental ethics will have to deal with a wider range of domestic animals than I address here.

Environmental Ethics and Animals

The relations and especially the conflicts between environmental ethics and animal ethics are important background for this topic. I will outline very briefly the two primary positions. Philosophers concerned with animal ethics (or welfare, or liberation, or rights) focus on the moral value (or interests, or needs, or rights) of individual animals, sometimes limited to a particular subset defined by characteristics such as sentence or capacity for suffering. Environmental ethicists, on the other hand, are concerned with the moral valuation of non-human nature as a whole, often described by collective nouns such as “ecosystems,” “biotic communities,” or “the land.” Thus while both animal and environmental ethics are concerned with the moral status of (and appropriate attitudes and behavior toward) non-human nature, the former is individualistic in orientation while the latter tends to be holistic. There are, of course, many exceptions to and variations on this general rule. However, overall it holds and, more important, this distinction between individual and holistic approaches is the key to the conflicts between animal and environmental ethics, as they have played out in the scholarly literature and often in practical, political arenas as well.

Environmental ethics does value non-human animals, but it does so not for individual qualities such as sentience but rather on the basis of collective characteristics such as scarcity, ecological significance, or contributions to larger goods such as biodiversity or land health. Thus members of an endangered species or one that is crucial to an ecosystem are more valuable than individuals of a more common or peripheral species. Individual characteristics such as intelligence, sentience, or complexity should not play major roles in moral, political, or scientific judgments. There is a general (though not universal) consensus among philosophers that the “rights and interests of individuals are not a helpful basis for an environmental ethic,” because, as Bryan Norton summarizes, the interests of individual organisms bear only a contingent relationship to the primary value of

“the healthy functioning and integrity of the ecosystem.” In other words, what is good for individuals is not necessarily good for the whole, and the most important criterion for an environmental ethic is the good of the whole. This approach is common to an otherwise diverse set of environmental philosophers, including moral pluralists like Norton, “monists” like Baird Callicott, and a host of other important thinkers including Holmes Rolston, Arne Naess, and many others.

The holistic emphasis within environmental ethics makes the status of domestic animals problematic, at best. Wild animals are morally valuable if and when they contribute to “the healthy functioning and integrity of the ecosystem,” not as individuals. Domestic animals, who almost by definition cannot contribute to a healthy ecosystem, thus would appear to lack any moral value whatsoever. In fact, since domestic animals often harm wild ecosystems, an environmental ethic probably should aim to reduce or eliminate them, as when domestic or feral animals threaten rare native plants or degrade entire ecosystems.

There are, however, exceptions, cases in which domestic animals contribute to holistic ecological considerations. Here are a few examples, all involving dogs. The first case is the use by ranchers of livestock guardian dogs to avoid the use of lethal methods such as traps or poison to control wolves, coyotes, cougars, and other predators. This example is ambiguous, since the guardian dogs are protecting domestic animals who probably should not be grazing in the predators’ habitat anyway. The dogs’ job is less to make a positive ecological contribution than to minimize the damage done. The second example is the use of dogs specially trained to identify particular plant or animal species. Some of these dogs are used to search wild habitats, vehicles, boats, air cargo, and mail for invasive exotic species, including bees in Australia, quagga mussels in California, and Burmese pythons in South Florida. Sniffer dogs also work in airports to find endangered animals transported by smugglers, both live and as “bushmeat.” And still other dogs have been trained to identify the scat of particular wild animals, enabling rangers and scientists to locate, monitor, and protect endangered species in Brazil and elsewhere. These cases are fascinating in and of themselves and also as


3 I refer to non-human animals as “who,” rather than the more common “that” or “which,” since “who” emphasizes the agency of such animals—a theme that is central to this chapter.


www.conservation.org/PMG/Articles/Pages/sniffing_dog_saving_species.aspx.
evidence of the extraordinary working partnerships that dogs and humans form with each other for a huge range of purposes. I will return to this topic later.

Sniffers aside, domestic animals are not morally considerable in most environmental ethics. The individual qualities that animal ethicists value, such as sentience, reason, or emotional complexity, are rarely, if ever, important ecologically. Instead, many environmental philosophers argue, these qualities are valued because of human preferences and priorities. We appreciate in other creatures either traits we value in ourselves, such as intelligence; traits that enable them to bond with us, such as loyalty; or traits that inspire compassion, such as the capacity for suffering. (While wild animals also possess such traits, these are not the source of their ecological or moral value in most environmental philosophies.) Again, the differences between environmental ethics and animal ethics have played out as a conflict between a holistic perspective, on the one hand, and an individualistic perspective, on the other hand.

Searching for Common Ground

In the midst of this sometimes heated debate between animal welfare and environmental ethics, some thinkers have sought common ground. One of the best known, at least within environmental philosophy, is Paul Taylor’s ethic based on a “respect for life” that can encompass both individuals and species. Taylor’s ethic proposes that “it is the good (well-being, welfare) of individual organisms, considered as entities having inherent worth, that determines our moral relations with the Earth’s wild communities of life.” Taylor’s model is biocentric, because value is found not in ecological wholes but in life itself. Because life is a property only of individual organisms, “we have prima facie moral obligations that are owed to wild plants and animals themselves as members of the Earth’s biotic community. We are morally bound (other things being equal) to protect or promote their good for their sake.” This good is an individual good, inherent in every organism that has a good of its own, which is the case for all animals and plants, according to Taylor. Taylor’s primary goal is to undermine anthropocentric ethics that automatically privilege humanness. However, in arguing for an environmental ethic based on the moral value of individuals rather than ecological wholes, he points to an environmental ethic that can value both domestic and wild animals and plants.

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I find Taylor’s argument about inherent worth more plausible as a starting point than a finished ethic. Once we agree that all beings, human and not, have inherent value, we still have a great deal of work to do. What does it mean to respect nature in concrete situations? What kind of practices support and are supported by an ethic of respect for nature? Taylor’s overly abstract ethic leaves these questions unanswered, although he does offer one provocative suggestion. The way that we come to know the inherent value of individual organisms, he writes, is by striving to understand their “point of view” and ultimately to look at the world from their perspective. He makes this call to understand non-human “points of view” almost in passing, but in so doing he opens the possibility of a deeper, mutually transformative understanding and interaction. Such interactions are most likely to occur with domestic animals, for most of us. By paying attention to such interactions, environmental ethicists could learn more not only about the inherent value of non-human nature but also about the ways we can and should live with that nature. Taylor somewhat casually drops a ball that I will pick up and run with later.

Several other philosophers have tried more systematically to find common ground between animal and environmental ethics. John Fisher argues that we can value different things, including both individual animals and natural ecosystems, for the same underlying reason. Natural sympathy, according to Fisher, people feel for both animals and natural places, undergirds both environmentalist and animal welfare concerns. “Sympathy for animals, wild as well as domesticated,” in fact, plays an important role in many people’s concern for the environment broadly conceived, and thus can provide “a partial basis for environmental ethics.” Fisher acknowledges that sympathy can be unreliable and biased, far from an infallible guide to correct ethical attitudes or action. It is, however, a powerful enough basis that we should not dismiss sympathy as irrelevant to ethics.

Taylor and Fisher both try to find an overarching moral framework that can value both individuals and groups. Another way to bring animal and environmental ethics together is to acknowledge that perhaps we cannot value very different entities for the same reasons—and that might be okay. Some ecofeminists have made this point, challenging the unproductive dualism of both holists and individualists, neither of which, as Marti Kheel notes, “can see that moral worth can exist both in the individual parts of nature and in the whole of which they are a part.” Similarly, Mary Anne Warren proposes that we combine the animal liberationist concern for sentient individual creatures and the environmentalist concern for ecological wholes. “It is not necessary to choose between regarding

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biological communities as unified systems, analogous to organisms, and regarding them as containing many individual sentient creatures, each with its own separate needs and interests." Warren explains, "for it is clearly both of these things at once."

Warren's expansive view of value echoes the work of Mary Midgley, who has argued persuasively that we can value different entities—individual creatures, species, or entire ecosystems—on different bases, without necessarily falling into serious moral or intellectual contradiction. We should think of moral claims of different types as an overlapping web, Midgley proposes, rather than as concentric circles with an inner core, of which other values are mere extensions. Midgley is mostly concerned with sorting out how we value non-human animals in relation to human beings, but her arguments also elucidate efforts to value non-human animals as individuals in relation to ecological wholes. She acknowledges that differences exist between concern for individual beings and ecological concerns. The real problem here, she notes, may not be how to achieve philosophical consistency but rather the more practical question of how widely we should direct our concern. Should we minimize it by applying it to the smallest number of beings possible? Such an approach is implicit in the arguments of both individualists and holists. In contrast, Midgley contends that moral concern and compassion do not need "to be treated hydraulically . . . as a rare and irreplaceable fluid, usable only for exceptionally impressive cases." Rather, they grow with use. Thus, "effective users do not economize on them."'

Midgley's work provides a crucial resource for Baird Callicott in his efforts to resolve the conflict he helped ignite. In an essay titled "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again," Callicott regrets the "acrimonious estrangement" between advocates of animal welfare and environmental ethicists that his earlier work helped encourage. The two camps have overlapping concerns, he notes, and "it would be far wiser to make common cause against a common enemy—the destructive forces at work ravaging the nonhuman world—than to continue squabbling among ourselves." While this is a practical concern, Callicott shies away from a purely pragmatist solution, because only a theoretically coherent ethic provides ground for deciding among competing moral claims. He seeks "a moral theory that embraces both programs and that provides a framework for the adjudication of the very real conflicts between human welfare, animal welfare, and ecological integrity." He finds the grounds for such a theory in Midgley's work, especially her concept of the mixed community, which he finds compatible with the holistic land ethic of Aldo Leopold. Drawing on Midgley, Callicott argues that "we are members of nested communities each of which has a different structure and therefore different moral requirements." This "biosocial" theory allows for clear ethical thinking about wild and domestic animals, as well as about holistic ecosystems. We are subject to the claims of close relationships, with people and with domestic animals such as pets, and also to "holistic environmental obligations" such as those articulated in Leopold's mandate to preserve the beauty, integrity, and stability of entire ecosystems, understood as the land.

I am not sure whether Callicott is right that we need a coherent theory that can justify all the different ways we care about what we care about. I would like to bracket that issue as well and turn instead to a different question. Rather than thinking about our different ways of caring about animals and other aspects of nature alongside each other, as parallel philosophical streams, I will consider them in more direct relation to each other. I begin this task by noticing that the most persuasive attempts to find common ground between animal rights and environmental ethics, including those of Midgley, Callicott, and Fisher, focus on relationships. Their shared starting point is the recognition that we are in relationships, and communities, with animals, with other aspects of nature, and these relationships create moral sympathies, commitments, even duties. I ask what happens if we think about relationships even more deeply, and especially if we not only acknowledge but actively work on the relationships and sympathy that ground our moral commitments to the non-human world.

Sympathy for non-human nature is indeed natural, but it does not exist in a vacuum. There may be, and I think there is, an innate attraction between humans and other animals, plants, and places, whether we call it Wilsonian biophilia or Human natural sympathy. It may, further, be strongest in children, as Midgley argues. However, it can be and in fact needs to be nurtured and cultivated—to be educated, like any natural desire, so that we desire "more and better." If our natural sympathy for animals and nature is not encouraged and educated, it will not last. It may wither into indifference or be twisted into cruelty and destructiveness.

This gets us to perhaps the most important reason that environmental ethicists should take domestic animals seriously. In relationships with domestic animals, we come to recognize and then educate our natural desire for a mixed community.

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14 Ibid., p. 31 and p. 144.
15 Callicott's most direct contribution to this conflict was his article "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," first published in the journal Environmental Ethics in 1980 and later reprinted in Hargrove's edited volume.
17 Ibid., p. 251.
18 Ibid., p. 256.
19 Ibid., p. 259.
and cross-species bonds. In these interactions and relationships, we learn (morally and scientifically) appropriate ways to relate to non-human others. Ethics in this sense is a sort of “etiquette,” as Jim Cheney and Anthony Weston have called it. Ethical action is not an application of ideas we already figured out in the abstract but rather an effort to open up possibilities. In ethical action, we might learn to understand the dog or horse (and perhaps also the apple tree and tomato plant) as beings with their own ways of seeing and experiencing the world, with needs and interests that we can help fulfill or stymie, even as potential conversation and work partners. Working and playing with domestic animals is not just a process in which we enact already existing sympathies and values. Even more important, it is a process that itself generates and cultivates sympathies and values.

In this chapter I am thinking through this possibility in a very rough and preliminary way. My working hypothesis is that serious consideration of domestic animals can contribute to environmental ethics by focusing our attention on practices, relationships, community, and our own self-understanding as a species. Specifically, taking domestic animals seriously can help us recreate our relationships with nature, it can help recreate the meaning of community in and through our practices, and ultimately it can help recreate our self-understanding as ecologically and socially embedded creatures. Non-human animals, especially domestic species, serve as links between people and wildness and as facilitators of care for the non-human world. Pets and domestic animals, like children, help connect adult social worlds and wild worlds. The key is to respect the otherness of other animals while also finding doors between our different worlds that make positive relationships possible.

Recreate

God and the devil are both said to reside “in the details.” Nature is also to be found in the details. We do not know nature in the abstract, but in and through specific experiences and interactions. Environmental philosophers and activists often talk about the importance of direct experiences in nature for the development of positive environmental attitudes and behaviors. Wilderness activities such as backpacking, hiking, cross-country skiing, and kayaking take us into open spaces far from centers of human activity. Even the most dedicated outdoors-people among us, however, spend a relatively small fraction of our time in wild places. Overall, surveys show that today fewer Americans than in the past visit national parks, hike, backpack, cross-country ski, or otherwise get out in nature to have the kind of sublime experiences that motivated Muir, Leopold, and other founding fathers of American environmentalism. If practical experiences are necessary for people to appreciate and try to protect nature, then we are probably in trouble. (We are in trouble anyway, but here is another possible reason for it.)

Fortunately, more mundane experiences with non-human nature can also be transcendent and life-changing. This is true because what is important is less the setting than the different way we act and interact when we spend time in places that are not structured primarily by human priorities. As people spend less time in wilderness, more and more of our experiences with nature are in back yards, empty lots, city parks, and other marginal places. These places, which blur the line between domestic and wild, provide opportunities for close interactions between humans and non-human nature. It may even be that connections to nature and to non-human animals can be discovered and nurtured in partly domesticated places even better than in truly wild areas. Wendell Berry describes plowing a field while watched by a hawk who let him get close because he was with a team of horses rather than a noisy, smelly tractor. Amish farmer David Kline recounts a similar experience, one warm late summer day, when he struck up a fat woodchuck sleeping in the sun. “Taking my walking stick,” Kline remembers, “I reached out and lightly scratched its back. Instead of waking, as I expected it to, the woodchuck arched its back in appreciation.” Kline’s friendly encounter with a woodchuck, no less than a backcountry trek in Alaska, is an experience with and of non-human nature, of the sort that both reflects and changes our way of being in the world.

Like the edges of plowed fields, domestic animals are “boundary creatures,” occupying a middle ground between wild nature and human society. Still, for all their in-betweeness, domestic animals are part of non-human nature, never entirely beyond the influence of their wild origins. Encounters with domestic animals are the most frequent form of direct engagement with non-human nature for most people today, urban or rural. (Even more frequently, of course, people eat domestic animals, but that represents a form of indirect engagement.) Much of what we know and feel about nature comes from what we know and feel about domestic animals, to whom most people seem drawn from childhood on. Our sympathy for and attraction to nature may be innate, as the biophilia hypothesis suggests, but this sympathy needs to be cultivated in direct engagement and relationships. We can do that most fully with domestic animals, who are evolved to relate to us, and us to them.

Interactions with animals are not the same as ecological restoration or a hike in the woods, but they are still important and even necessary. Non-human animals,

even highly domesticated ones like dogs, experience the world in distinctive ways, without the same goals, priorities, or assumptions of humans. When we try to meet these animals on their own terms, with appreciation for their agency and also their mystery, we experience non-human nature just as profoundly as when we gaze at charismatic landscape features such as towering mountains or crashing waterfalls—even more profoundly, perhaps, because our relationships with domestic animals can have a depth of communication that is not possible in many other encounters. One of the best ways to foster and deepen this communication is through recreation.26

Play with other species, as with other humans, takes many forms and enacts many meanings and values. I am interested in play that entails communication, greeting, and response; it has rules and standards, and ultimately it is about mutual respect and understanding. As I discuss below, in and through this type of play, we create relationships through play with another animal, whether in informal games of fetch or sustained, disciplined practices such as agility training with dogs or dressage with horses. This relationship is transformative, as is any real partnership.

When we play with other species, we create value, not unlike the process of ecological restoration that Bill Jordan and many other authors elsewhere in this volume describe. Sometimes we even create entirely new worlds. Certain kinds of relationships between humans and non-humans embody a different way of living and relating. In them we speak a second, often non-verbal, language, which can open a door to a different way of being. For Carolyn Knapp, this door was opened by her relationship with her dog Lucille, who led her “into a world that is qualitatively different from the world of people, a place that can transform us. Fall in love with a dog, and in many ways you enter a new orbit, a universe that features not just new colors but new rituals, new rules, a new way of experiencing attachment.”27 Knapp recalls that she “once heard a woman who’d lost her dog say she felt as though a color were suddenly missing from her world: The dog had introduced to her field of vision some previously unavailable hue, and without the dog, that color was gone. That seemed to capture the experience of losing a dog with eminent simplicity. I’d amend it only slightly and say that if we are open to what they have to give us, dogs can introduce us to several colors, with names like wildness and nurturance and trust and joy.”28 Wildness, nurturance, trust, and joy can be experienced with people as well, but many aspects of human society can make them harder to find, or at least to recognize.

Joy, trust, and other positive aspects of mutual relationships between people and animals both make possible and emerge from play. In other words, we can play with animals because we acknowledge their agency but, equally, we can acknowledge their agency because we play with them. In and through concrete practices, we come to understand the animals and ourselves differently. Mary Midgley observes that people who do well training animals do so by interacting socially with them, “by coming to understand things from their point of view.” It is correct to speak of an animal’s point of view, she adds, “because it means something to be a bat or a horse, in a way that is not true of machines.”29 If we cannot enter into another creature’s point of view, if we continue only to “think like people,” we cannot enter fully into the joy and partnership of interspecies play, and we will certainly never become “more than one but less than two.”

Fortunately, playing with other species is not as hard as it sounds. As Midgley notes, “Play-signals penetrate species-barriers with perfect ease.” Especially for young creatures of all species, including humans, the walls between species are full of holes.30 In passing through some of these holes, we re-create ourselves and our understanding of other animals. Spending time with animals in loving relationships, notes Temple Grandin, teaches people “that there’s more to animals than meets the eye.”31 There is more, in other words, than the passive, objectified, machine-like images that dominate both scholarly and popular views of non-human animals. Interacting closely with animals in play makes it impossible to deny their agency, sentence, and moral status.

This brings us to the recreation of meaning made possible by recreation with non-human animals. Play can take us beyond compassion or pity, beyond Jeremy Bentham’s famous question “Can they suffer?” to more promising questions, as Haraway suggests, such as “Can animals play? Or work? And even, can I learn to play with this cat. Can I, the philosopher, respond to an invitation or recognize one when it is offered? What if work and play, and not just pity, open up when the possibility of mutual response ... is taken seriously as an everyday practice available to philosophy and to science?”32 Everything changes when this possibility is taken seriously. Play does the most serious work in the world: it opens us to ways of being, to entire worlds, that we did not know existed—even ones that we strenuously denied could exist.

In the next section, I move from play to work, which turns out to be not such a clear line, and to the question of relationships more specifically.

26 We also do this through the domestication process, which itself “recreates” a species into something different than its wild counterpart. This is, of course a double-edged sword, with many far from benign consequences for non-human others.
28 Ibid., p. 4.
30 Ibid., p. 117.
32 Haraway, When Species Meet, p. 22.
Relate

In play we build relationships, and depending on the kind of interactions we have with non-human animals, we can build more or less positive relationships, with more or less positive implications for our ways of being with non-human nature more generally. By learning how to relate to domestic animals in more mutual and respectful ways, we enact models for environmentally and socially responsible practices on a larger scale, recreating the meaning of community in specific practices and relationships. One way to do this is through a specific kind of play between humans and domestic animals, especially dogs and horses: the mutually transformative process of training for a particular discipline.

I am thinking of the kind of work, or play, that entails true partnerships across species. I do not mean to romanticize human relationships with domestic working animals, which have often been far from respectful or pleasant for the non-human partner. Still, in many cases, shared work is empowering, meaningful, and joyful for both humans and non-humans, who come to respect and rely on each other’s distinctive capacities and agency. Dogs and horses are most often involved in this kind of work. It includes “professional” work such as that done by therapy, service, search and rescue, sniffer, and guide dogs and by working cow, farm, and therapy horses; it also includes play work like agility training for dogs and equestrian disciplines such as dressage, among many others.

Donna Haraway has written extensively, in her most recent books, about agility work with dogs. This kind of work, she argues, is about communication, greeting, and response; it has rules and standards, and ultimately it is about mutual respect and understanding. While power differentials are always involved between different species, what is most important in the play Haraway describes is the dialogue of proposal and response, the ways that different bodies come together, “which makes each partner more than one but less than two.” The transformative mutuality of play between different species might, Haraway contends, “underlie the possibility of morality and responsibility for and to one another in all of our undertakings at whatever webbed scales of time and space.” This kind of recreation makes play joyful, not just “fun.” The joy comes in the reality of meeting another creature in mutual understanding, respect, and enjoyment. We create relationships through play with another animal, whether in informal games of fetch or sustained, disciplined practices such as agility training with dogs or dressage with horses. This relationship is transformative, as is any real partnership.

Play is not only a result of this mutuality but also, perhaps, its precondition. In other words, we can play with animals because we acknowledge their agency but, equally, we can acknowledge their agency because we play with them. In and through concrete practices, we come to understand the animals and ourselves differently. We may even stop thinking in species-bounded ways, as horse trainer Pat Parelli argues: “Most people are inadequate when it comes to horses because they think like people. My goal is to get people to think like horses. The best way I know to do that is to play with horses on the ground,” underlying the need to ground theory in practice. Knowledge about horses’ evolutionary history is necessary but not adequate; information and theory cannot replace direct encounters and shared experiences that build and maintain any relationship. Haraway makes a similar point in writing about dog training. Good trainers, she contends, share a “focused attention to what the dogs are telling them, and so demanding of them . . . These thinkers attend to the dogs, in all these canines’ situated complexity and particularity, as the unconditional demand of their relational practice.” For the right sort of training, according to Haraway, “method” is not what matters most among companion species; communication across irreducible difference is what matters.

Both Haraway and Parelli emphasize the agency of non-human animals. As Parelli explains, “Communication is two or more individuals sharing and understanding an idea. If I pat my leg and the dog comes, we’ve communicated. But I can talk to a post until I’m blue in the face, and I’m just talking. Communication is a mutual affair between two or more individuals.” This exemplifies Midgley’s argument, discussed above, that people who do well in training animals do so by interacting socially with them and coming to understand things from their point of view. Midgley reinforces a point central to the approach of Parelli and other trainers: to work successfully with non-human animals requires respect for the distinctive characteristics of each species and each individual, on the one hand, and willingness to find common ground, on the other.

In this disciplined play, we recreate the meaning of community in our practices and relationships. We move closer to what Midgley calls a “mixed community” that integrates human and non-human members. The mixed community begins with the fact of domestication, which occurs because animals form bonds with persons, as Midgley puts it, by coming to understand social signals addressed to them. This is possible “not only because the people taming them were social beings, but because [the animals] themselves were so as well.” The mixed community requires mutual communication, agency, and accountability. This kind of community differs greatly not only from the usual relations across species but also from the usual relationships between people.

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36 Parelli, Natural Horse*Man*Ship, p. 15. Parelli echoes a point made by Mary Midgley, who writes that the thrill of hunting comes from the relationship between the hunter and the prey animal who is their “opponent – a being like themselves in having its own emotions and interest.” This is why, she concludes, shooting a rock is not a substitute (Midgley, Animals and Why They Matter, p. 16).
37 Midgley, Animals and Why They Matter, p. 112.
This kind of relationship, and this sort of community, is built not only in and through play but also as a result of considerable hard work. We can learn a great deal about the relationship between work and community, I contend, by thinking about play with non-human animals, especially the sort of structured play that takes place in agility or dressage (or a host of other partnerships between humans and domestic animals). First, we learn that the line between work and play is a fine one. Through a lot of hard work, we might be lucky enough become “more than one but less than two” in relation to another creature. That is when work becomes play, or a dance between partners who fully understand and enjoy each other, and their mutual undertaking. Work becomes play also because it moves toward, and takes meaning from, common goals and values. This sort of work, and the play to which it is closely related, contributes to a larger community in multiple ways: it exemplifies proper relationships between people and among species, it values practices that are both useful and pleasurable, it seeks improvement through disciplined and creative practice, and it invites rather than excludes others.

This sort of work-play practice, and this sort of community, are of course far from common. It is very different from the commonplace ways we work, which divide us from other people, set us against non-human animals, and pit our private interests against the good of the whole. It does not entail participation in collective projects and goals, nor contributions to common goals, nor even realization of our own dreams. Work may seem to be an instrument to these goals, but work itself does not fulfill them. “Life itself appears only as a means to life.”

This kind of work is rarely confused with play, for one of the characteristics of play is that it is an end in itself, and not only a means to another objective. Work that is also play, such as the inter-species praxis I describe here, is an end in itself at the same time it is a means to other valuable goals—tangible accomplishments such as rounding up the sheep (or completing the agility course) as well as less tangible, equally desirable goals such as the strengthening of relationships, the cultivation of excellence, and the extension of understanding. Disciplined play-work between humans and companion animals can help “restore the wholeness of work,” as Wendell Berry argues we must do. Berry proposes that “good work” should not be simply a means to an end, a way to maintain connections, but rather “the enactment of connections . . . one of the forms and acts of love.”

Good work, or what I am calling work-play, has its own intrinsic value in addition to, and regardless of, the instrumental role it plays in reaching practical ends. Just as in relationships among humans, the fact that practical goals are met need not make work alienating or relationships alienated. Even Kant did not require that we never treat others as means to our own ends—just that we do not treat them merely as means. Thinking about work and play together can help clarify the connections between ends and means, values and use, in more integrative and nuanced ways.

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39 Berry, The Unsettling of America, pp. 138–9.

Decenter

Throughout environmental philosophy runs a critique of anthropocentrism—the placement of humans as a species at the center of everything important—as a major obstacle to ecological sustainability. This critique seeks to replace human-centeredness with a view of humans as part of a larger whole. This claim is evident in a wide range of environmental philosophies, beginning with Aldo Leopold’s land ethic, which changes the role of humans “from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it.” A rejection of anthropocentrism is also foundational to Deep Ecology, which Arne Naess characterized as a more holistic view of humans’ place in the world in contrast to the fragmentary and individualized view of “shallow” ecology, which instrumentalizes nature because it separates humans from it. In an important early article, Naess argued that ecology suggests “a relational total field image [in which] organisms [are] knots in the biospherical net of intrinsic relations.” Other environmental philosophies similarly look to ecological science as a holistic model in which humans are but one among many mutually interacting organisms.

Many religiously-grounded environmental ethics also decenter humans, often by framing them as participants in an interdependent “web of creation.” This more egalitarian or ecocentric ethic contrasts with the stewardship model, very common in monotheistic traditions, which separates humans from the rest of nature by assigning to them both special privileges and special responsibilities. Perhaps even more radically than the “web of creation” model is the theocentric approach of theologian James Gustafson, which shifts the center of value away from both humans and nature to God. Divinity, according to Gustafson, “has to include not only dependence upon nature for beauty and for sustenance, but also forces beyond human control which destroy each other and us. If God saw that the diversity God created was good, it was not necessarily good for humans and for all aspects of nature.” Gustafson’s theocentric ethic decents humans just as surely as do holistic ecocentric ethics—philosophical or religious. It may decenter them even more profoundly, further, than many ecocentric ethics, which often still allow room for human special privileges based on psychological, social, or evolutionary considerations. Gustafson’s radical theocentrism offers transcendent grounds for relativizing and subordinating human interests and welfare, grounds which are not available to secular environmental ethics and which allow for little negotiation or...

43 Gustafson, A Sense of the Divine, p. 44.
compromise. Not all religious ethics offer such grounds, but Gustafson's model hints at the radical possibilities of a truly non-anthropocentric theological ethic.

Despite their important differences, these environmental ethics, both religious and secular, share a sense that humans must be decentered, their value relativized, if we are to appreciate the value of non-human nature. This decentering is very hard, perhaps impossible, to accomplish in theory alone. As environmental philosopher Anthony Weston puts it, "We should not suppose that we could construct a systematic non-anthropocentrism in the privacy of our studies or seminar rooms at all. Instead we must take up more systematically the entire question of the constitution of relationship in the first place." We take up this question in and through a practical decentering: "We need to deanthropocentrize the world rather than, first and foremost, to develop and systematize non-anthropocentrism — for world and thought co-evolve. We can only create an appropriate non-anthropocentrism as we begin to build a progressively less anthropocentric world." We must experience our own relativity, and the corresponding weight of other centers of value, in order to reduce our own importance in theory as well.

Weston proposes creating combustion-engine-free zones as an example of practical de-anthropocentrizing. Another, perhaps more immediately feasible experience, comes in and through concrete interactions with non-human nature— including domestic animals. Such experiences can help generate a sense of self that is more humble, more respectful of non-human others, more patient— all ecological virtues that are desperately needed in these trying times. Further, interactions with companion animals accomplish these goals in practice and not simply in theory. This is an important supplement or correction to much environmental philosophy, which focuses more on "getting the ideas right" than on praxis. Instead we need a more integrative understanding of ideas and practices, which continually constitute and transform each other.

Balancing the recognition of difference and otherness, equality and interdependence, is difficult and rarely achieved. It might become less daunting, suggests Mary Midgley, if we "get rid of the language of means and ends, and use instead that of part and whole. Man needs to form part of a whole much greater than himself, one in which other members excel him in innumerable ways. He is adapted to live in one. Without it, he feels imprisoned; the lid of the ego presses down on him." This echoes a point made by E. O. Wilson and others: we cannot decide whether or not to be connected to other animals and ecosystems. Our relations to non-human nature are internal, part of our identities as individuals and as a species. Our choice is not about whether to be connected but about what to do with those connections, how to acknowledge and interpret them.

Nonetheless, many people deny that they are part of a larger whole and that the other members of our whole, other creatures, are also agents, with their own ways of seeing and being in the world that are not, can never be, wholly determined by humans—no matter how hard we try, as in the case of many domestic animals. The objectification and instrumentalization of many non-human animals in the service of human food, labor, and entertainment is a moral, ecological, and political problem about which thousands of pages have been written. Deep moral and psychological, as well as ecological, contradictions reside in the huge divide we have perpetuated between the care for non-human animals and nature that most people profess, on the one hand, and the way these same people mostly treat the nature they encounter everyday, often without even recognizing it as such. In order to reduce this gap, and move toward valuing the intrinsic qualities of others—human and non-human—we have to engage in concrete practices with them. These practices are the foundation of better communities and better relationships, with people, with animals, and with non-human nature itself.

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Chapter 13
Replacing Animal Rights and Liberation Theories
Jonathan Parker

The word "replacing," as found in the title of this chapter, functions in a č manner. One form of "replacing" entails substitution; that is, if I lose or br my phone, I replace it with a new one. As far as ethical theory goes, if we rea one theory is insufficient given the circumstances, we may seek a new theory better address the situation. A second way to interpret "replacing" is in the sens taking an object or concept and literally or figuratively putting it in another pla argue in this chapter for the replacement of animal rights and liberation theories dual manner. That is, I do not wish to argue that these theories are in need complete replacement in the former sense. The reason for this is that I do not m the claim that they are theoretically inadequate. Rather, I argue that theories which grew out of an initial concern for domesticated animals, are inappropri and ultimately environmentally destructive if extended to cover our interacti with wild animals (and the interactions of wild animals amongst themselves). There has been a tendency for theorists to make this extension to encompass w animals and nature, which I argue creates serious problems. If we restrict s of these theories however, and re-place them to only concern domesticat animals, they offer us sound frameworks for addressing our interactions with the animals in this context.

This chapter offers a connection and challenge to Anna Peterson’s chapter this volume (Chapter 12). Peterson suggests that domesticated animals are linis beings, and that as our interactions with nature decreasingly constitute “wilderness experiences,” our most frequent way of interacting with non-human nature through domesticated animals. This is perhaps true for our conscious interactio (we do interact with wild nature all the time, though we may not perceive su interactions as wild since they often are not “wilderness experiences”), h even conceding Peterson’s point, I contest that this fact is not very instruci in terms of how we ought to interact with wild non-human nature, as I do n think domesticated animals are as linis as Peterson suggests. Domesticat i is a violent process which produces products of human culture; as such, hum ethics (and as an extension, animal rights and liberation theories) adequately cov these cultured creatures. Suggesting domesticated animals are linis creatures potentially dangerous because it may suggest that our interactions with them teach us all we need to know about how we ought to interact with wild animals—whic