
Book Review

Teya Brooks Pribac, *Enter the Animal: Cross-Species Perspectives on Grief and Spirituality* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2021), 281 pp., \$28, (pbk), ISBN: 9781743327395.

This is a sophisticated, lucid, well-reasoned, and intellectually complex book. It is one that offers various insights and interdisciplinary understandings of non-human animals that challenge existing understandings of animal others, especially those understandings contained in religions; and it updates how scholars can, and more so, should understand animal kind, broadly. Overall, it can be argued that this book should be required reading for scholars of religion and nature interactions, regardless of their approach; but it is especially required if those scholars are doing any type of research, theorising and/or teaching that involves animal others. In the author's words:

The present volume is offered as a step towards a more comprehensive appreciation of the building blocks of animal (human inclusive) subjectivity in relation to loss, and to some extent spirituality...Contrary to most other views, explicit or implied, the premise of this book is that grief—the internal reaction to loss—and its intensity may differ on individual level not on species level. (p. 58)

Given this goal, and the author's transparent normative claims and bearings towards animal abolitionism, the book works towards its end with a helpful introduction: a complex and wide-ranging chapter that incorporates ample psychology and evolutionary theory on animal subjectivities; ethological, psychological, and neurobiological insights on how various species react to (affectively, emotionally, psychologically, culturally, physically, and key: spiritually) attachment and loss, and thus how animals (human inclusive) grieve; and what these data points may mean for theorising and understanding non-human grief, attachment and spiritualities across the animal kingdom. Pribac consistently articulates the importance of the book's trajectory, and of the sources used to make the argument that animals do experience loss and thus grief, and that given these emotional and mental capacities it is entirely valid to understand and expect that many types of animals also may have spirituality.

The project's focus on attachment, loss, grief, and spirituality is intended to continue deconstructing the false 'human-nonhuman divide' (p. 7) and deeply

rooted ‘anthropodenial’ (p. 16) of nonhuman others that reinforces ‘species segregation’ (p. 18) that allows for the rights and liberation of other species to continue to be ignored, denied, and exploited (p. 4). This liberatory and emancipatory part of the book runs throughout. In large part it is fuelled by Pribac’s own lived experiences with animal others and the sanctuary movement so that when it comes to loss, grief, and possibly spirituality, ‘other species’ interpretive solutions’ (p. 16) to these universal-to-animals domains are under theorised and under studied, if they are recognised at all. But because all animals, at both individual and species levels, dwell in ‘their interpretive world’ (p. 114), scholars (and all humans) need to grant them such autonomy of interpretation, and in so doing recognise that ‘any such visit to “nature” is in effect an invasion’ (p. 184) of how animal others engage with, interpret, and live out autonomous lives on a planet that is equally theirs (p. 185) as it is ours.

Pribac identifies with new animist scholarship and, in doing so, adopts a naturalistic approach to the phenomena of religion, building on understandings of religion as agency detection and that is done intra-zoomorphically (p. 118). They also articulate that all animals have various communication strategies and that ‘the nonhuman animal world is replete with vibrant information exchange’ (p. 48), including issues related to attachment to place, death, and thus grief and spirituality. Yet, despite evidence that supports all of this (and which Pribac copiously and fastidiously references), the author explains that:

Groundless human projections continue to be evoked to dismiss proposed nonhuman animals’ characteristics capable of disturbing the biblical foundations promoting human supremacy, upon which the Western mind was built and within the framework of which it continues to operate, even in secular circles. (p. 26)

According to Pribac, this inherited supremacy and human chauvinism, however, makes it hard to recognise that animal others are capable of feeling and experiencing what the author calls a:

...sense of oneness, of merging, of connection that researchers and religious practitioners often cite in considerations of spirituality, [and how this] materialises (in the sense of becoming experientially graspable) through a process of reaching into the realm of the implicit, experiential self. (pp. 149–50)

Rather, Pribac is theoretically and normatively adamant about animal others having the same capacities for many emotional and affective and psychological states and experiences that most assume only human animals can have, including spiritual ones. This is because:

It is not the reflective self but the experiential self that is fundamental for spiritual experience, for it is the experiential self that communicates with intangible agencies during a spiritual

exchange, and this communication, this experience, is felt by the organism without the reflective self's interference and post-processing. Critically, both human and non-human animals have equal access to the experiential self. (p. 150)

Given that animal others experience realities and actions in living ecosystems, in ways that are unique to them and their species, they have 'intangible agencies' (p. 148) that potentially can generate a 'religious imagination' (p. 148) just like human animals have and do, and where such imagination may even occur functionally in ritual-like settings unique to a species; in understanding loss (grief); and in experiencing reciprocal exchange with living, agential others in ecosystems that are also vibrantly alive. Thus, because the 'BrainMind' is found across many animal species:

...the capacity—indeed the imperative—of direct, experientially conscious communication with phenomena in the environment determines the affective dance with animacy as a felt interactive presence on a self-nonself continuum, which I see as the foundation of spiritual experience for animals (including humans). (pp. 177–78)

While it is possible to quibble on aspects of the book that could have been written differently, or have woven in a bit more religious studies theorising, this belies the point that this is an important, theoretically fresh and normatively important book. It should be of interest to anyone working in the animal humanities, ecopsychology, vegan studies, posthumanism, environmental ethics, ethology, cognitive science of religion, place attachment/community studies, and, of course, religion and nature theory. As someone who has been vegan since 1998 and who has taught numerous courses on religion and animals, and in animal studies/humanities, broadly, I was inspired, challenged, and edified by the argumentation of this book. I also reflected on how far the world has to go (including academic worlds) in granting agency to animal others, and to move away from our thoroughly exploitative relations to them. At many times throughout the book, it struck me as how anaemic, outdated, and exploitative religious practitioners from most all religions (excluding place based, 'animist' ones) are (as are most academic practitioners) when it comes to understanding animal others and how those others have rich, complex emotional needs and lives, and their own desire for agency (including spiritual agency) in navigating our shared world. Pribac's book is a necessary corrective, backed by psychology, ethology, neurobiology, and ethical theorising to such a dismal and unconscionable state of affairs.

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