
Book Review - *Mourning Animals: Rituals and practices surrounding animal death*

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M*ourning Animals* is a collection that takes death as the starting point for inquiry and focuses on what happens after an animal dies. Twenty-one written essays and six photo-essays, divided among five sections, accomplishes this with much diversity.

Sections cover topics on the history of animal mourning, companion animals, memorials and ‘special’ treatment, animals not mourned for, and problems with coping. Part 2, dedicated to companion animals, is the largest section, while companion species such as dogs, cats, and horses feature in all five sections. The companion animal focus is complemented by several essays about animals often publically overlooked (e.g., roadkill, war animals, sanctuary animals, ‘average’ race horses). The book can also boast of a strong cross-cultural emphasis. Several essays venture outside of the Western tradition to consider such practices as the special treatment of cats in Egypt, horse burial in Siberia, and memorial statues in Japan.

Due to certain interpretations of the Bible, Christianity is often viewed as being rather indifferent towards nonhumans based on the premise of humans created in God’s image and subsequently granted dominion over other life forms. Various faith-related arguments for kindness toward nonhumans suggest that animals inherited suffering, death, and eternal salvation from human original sin. Experience, understanding, intelligence and a soul have been inferred to apply to nonhumans implying the duty of humans to care for them and be held morally accountable for cruelty. Alma Massaro chronicles the debate over animal souls and an afterlife through enlightenment-era Christian texts on animal ethics This overview

shows that non-canonical interpretations emphasizing compassion can be drawn that are based on animals' shared characteristic of being creatures of the same God and possessing similar traits, such as the ability to feel pain. Ultimately, Massaro's essay highlights the overlooked potential of religious faith to contribute to animal protection and lends precedence to contemporary Christian arguments such as Scully's (2002) *Dominion*.

Wild animals killed by cars, or roadkill, are animals almost never mourned. Little attention is given to them from the public, academia, or animal protection groups. Desensitization to this automotive violence can be a result of its complete visibility. To illustrate, Linda Monahan's essay draws a parallel with images of prepared animal flesh for consumption as their ubiquity contributes to normalization. An important point is how labeling roadkill as anonymous and "inevitable" reifies human supremacy while rendering the value of animal lives to zero in a striking example of how language reflects and engenders certain perceptions of nonhumans even after death (Dunayer, 2001).

In an underutilized perspective, Joshua Russell's essay investigates children's recollections of companion animal loss through a relational pedagogy. Children's points of view and relations with animals are often overlooked or not taken seriously. As the only child-centric article, Russell's essay offers a unique perspective. Human others contribute relationally to children's remembrance of nonhumans. This interplay of memories results in co-authorship of life stories, which has significance for building children's relationships with both humans and nonhumans by sharing similar feelings over the same situation, such as bonding over a companion animal's death.

Many westerners view Eastern countries as being especially hostile to nonhumans. Elmer Veldkamp contests this by examining how Korean attitudes toward animals may be becoming more considerate, with some Koreans modelling the Western companion animal relationship. In so doing, Veldkamp breaks from the norm of contrasting the East-West

divide by emphasizing a similarity. Evidence of this resemblance is the rising popularity of pet cremations and memorial services as ways to recognize and display grief. Collaboration between animal protection organizations and Buddhist temples have resulted in public memorial services as a way to acknowledge animal death from industrialization and development. It is not mentioned, however, if human behaviors are altered by this recognition, or if these deaths are considered incidental.

Simultaneously, humans are becoming progressively separated from nonhumans, yet also increasingly tied to their deaths to sustain certain lifeways (e.g., food, medicine, roadkill). The final written essay, by Taya Brooks Pribac, offers reasons to extend mourning to animals not personally known, via a sense of interspecies equality, empathy and entanglement. Indeed, no one benefits if we avoid exposing ourselves to nonhuman suffering and fail to allow ourselves to mourn for animals. If we allow ourselves to be swayed into closing off the possibility of mourning for nonhumans who die out of sight or without direct relation to us, we only deceive ourselves. We become “more fragile and more vulnerable, both as individuals and as a society” (p. 197). This grief “at a distance” is especially salient in the current age of mass extinctions and global human impact, and offers a way to reconnect with other living beings through the death of others. What stands out about Pribac’s analysis is that it investigates the negative space of not mourning, and the fallout of such manufactured callousness. This approach could also function as a suggestion of future directions into studying animal mourning.

As to the photo-essays, Mary Shannon Johnstone’s is a standout that opens the book with a glimpse into the horrific side of animal shelters. Her photos capture the final moments of “unloved” cats and dogs, some literally fighting for their lives, some awaiting death with what looks like abject depression, and others recently euthanized. We are informed that these animals are overwhelmingly not aggressive or sick, but are nearly indistinguishable from our

nonhuman companions at home. Johnstone's images are a compelling reminder of the anguish involved in the death of whom most people consider unmournable.

While *Mourning Animals* has a diverse approach, companion animals still feel slightly over-represented. Essays involving less represented animals are present but dispersed throughout the book, slightly weakening their potential to challenge conventional subject matter. Pribac's article and Jo-Anne McArthur's photo-essay only begin to really question and challenge which animals are appropriate for mourning. In future research it would be nice to see these ideas expanded upon much further and perhaps start to rival the page count of that of companion animals.

References

Dunayer, J. (2001). *Animal equality: Language and Liberation*. Derwood, MD: Ryce Publishing. Scully, M. (2002).

Dominion: The power of man, the suffering of animals, and the call to mercy. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.