



# ENTER THE ANIMAL

CROSS-SPECIES PERSPECTIVES ON GRIEF AND SPIRITUALITY

TEYA BROOKS PRIBAC



# Enter the Animal

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# Enter the Animal: Cross-species Perspectives on Grief and Spirituality

Teya Brooks Pribac



SYDNEY UNIVERSITY PRESS

First published by Sydney University Press  
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A catalogue record for this book is available from  
the National Library of Australia.

ISBN 9781743327395 paperback  
ISBN 9781743327401 epub  
ISBN 9781743327425 mobi  
ISBN 9781743327432 pdf

Cover image: Teya Brooks Pribac

Cover design: Miguel Yamin

Painting of Charlie: Teya Brooks Pribac

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# Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	ix
Introduction	1
1 Animal subjectivity	15
2 Intersubjective attachment and loss	63
3 Cross-cultural grief matters	101
4 Spiritual animal	147
5 Grief at a distance: Humans grieving unknown animals	195
<i>Coda: The precarious way ahead</i>	233
<i>Works cited</i>	239
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	273
<i>Index</i>	275



# Foreword

As a Freudian analyst and director of the Freud Archives I was given access to a large treasure trove of unpublished Freud letters that seemed to show that the history of child sexual abuse we had been given (namely, that it was mainly a female fantasy) was false, and that child sexual abuse was real, serious, and everywhere. Freudians did not like that. I was fired from my position and lost my licence to practice psychoanalysis. I had also by that stage given up a full professorship of Sanskrit at the University of Toronto. So now what should I do with the rest of my life?

This was in 1980. I was living with the great law scholar, Catherine MacKinnon, and she said: ‘Start by reading about what you love.’ That was easy. Even though I was no longer an analyst, I was fascinated by emotions, but having grown disenchanted with the human animal, I decided I wanted to explore the inner world of other animals. I wanted to learn everything there was to know about animal emotions in general. Easier thought than accomplished.

I turned to the author of *The Question of Animal Awareness*, Donald R. Griffin, who had been a distinguished professor of biology at Harvard, and had discovered bat sonar. I called him, and he was absolutely lovely, but he could not tell me much: ‘Jeff, if you want to read about animal emotions, after you have read Darwin, you will have to write about it yourself. There is practically nothing written about it. I

## Enter the Animal

got into enough trouble with scientists by suggesting that animals were conscious and aware. I would have been run out of the university had I suggested they had emotions like our own, but I am sure they do.'

That was all the encouragement I needed. I began doing the research and the writing for a book that became *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals*. I have never had more fun doing research for a book than that one: everyone had a convincing story to tell me about animal emotions, and people bought the book because, I think, they wanted validation for their own feelings on this matter. The book simply stated what was obvious to anyone who had ever lived with a dog or cat or bird, or really, any other nonhuman animal. *Of course* they had feelings. Who could doubt that?

But some did doubt. I was accused of not being a scientist (true) and of committing a major sin: anthropomorphising nonhuman animals, that is, attributing to them characteristics they could not possibly possess (by fiat?). I was projecting my own feelings onto them. I did not believe that for one moment, but as it turned out, the story of animal emotion that we were given – that was forced onto us, that people had to accept if they wanted to save jobs and intellectual reputation – was equally false. Despite being passed as a fantasy of the weak-mind, like child abuse had, animal emotions were also real, serious and everywhere.

Thirty years is a long time. Attitudes have changed. Books on animal emotions are growing more numerous and interesting. Two of the more recent gems that have touched me are by scientists Frans de Waal and Carl Safina. Others too – non-scientists – are opening up to the idea that nonhuman animals not only have emotional lives comparable to our own but also that it is possible (I go further and say it is certain) that they experience some emotions more powerfully than we do. Who can equal the *joie de vivre* that a dog is capable of? Or the level of contentment that cats appear to reach?

What about more complex emotions? That is the territory Teya Brooks Pribac takes us to in this book, aptly titled *Enter the Animal*.

To begin with we learn that 'complex' is a loaded term. Just because we do not understand something, it does not mean that it is more complex compared to something that we understand or think we do. Recent scientific advances have both filled many gaps in our knowledge

as well as exposed errors that we considered as truths. The other problem with ‘complexity’ is that as soon as a phenomenon is labelled as ‘complex’, nonhuman animals are automatically excluded from the circle of consideration because we have been conditioned to think of them as anything but complex, as simple, basic, unsophisticated. And how wrong we were!

We tend to get lost in our interpretative world and forget that our body continues to live in this other world, touches things and gets touched by them, communicates in ways that we often do not even notice or recognise as meaningful experienced communication. But when we start peeling off those meandering layers of anthropocentric quests and solutions we discover a dimension that is more immediate and grounded in relations, and these relations with significant others – be it other humans, other animals and the rest of the world – enable us to survive, to live, to be who we are and to feel the way we feel. Complex? For sure. Exclusively human? Absolutely not.

In this book Brooks Pribac takes us on a journey deep into the animal body/mind. She began her research, as I did, by wanting to understand something. Then there was reading, thinking, experiencing – in fact, all along she has also been involved hands-on with various animals, some of whom we meet in the book. As she begins to understand, she brings the reader along with her, because she has to be clear in her mind exactly what it is that she is seeing and seeking to understand. That is a quality you rarely find in a book as scientifically rigorous as this one. No matter the angle you are approaching this from, this book offers a unique, concise presentation of the material. It is clear, and easy to read, and easy, as well, to understand. You are treated to the writer thinking out loud as she writes. Whether you are a scholar in the broad area of animal studies, a student embarking upon animal-related research or simply a reader interested in all matters animal, this is an essential book, which will help you understand three fundamental points: where we are currently, how we got here, and where to go next.

— Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, PhD



*Charlie* by Teya Brooks Pribac

# Introduction

In the final stages of the editing of this manuscript Charlie died. He had irreversible cancer. He died moderately peacefully, at home, in the presence of his loved ones. Thirteen and a half years earlier, Charlie, a black and white fox terrier cross, had been rescued from death row, completely traumatised. It took time, patience and love: Charlie was on the mend. He was always considered an equal member of the family unit and had a good life overall; nevertheless following his death remorse set in. I regretted all the walks we had not taken but could have, all the beach trips we had not done (he loved water), and many other things, including the canine friends he lost when humans and their dogs moved towns and cities for human convenience. Charlie's story, with new ends and new beginnings. Could I have done better?

People sometimes wonder what the function of grief is in evolutionary terms. How does it increase fitness? Physical pain, for instance, is very helpful: it is a signal that something is harmful and the organism needs to attend to it. What about grief? I do not have an evolutionary, or revolutionary, answer but Charlie's passing made me even more aware of the importance of staying present, of being – body and mind – with the loved ones while they are still with me. When they leave, memories are all that is left. They had better be good ones.

Charlie's passing reminded me of another dog, also black and white with many shades of grey and a story with probably as many ends and

beginnings. He was my best friend in my early childhood. His name was Bobbie – the Bobbie mentioned later in this book was named after him. He ‘belonged’ to the neighbours and, allegedly, saved my life twice. He was very bright. ‘So human,’ everyone would say. ‘Speech is the only thing he lacks [to be fully human],’ they would add. Despite all this Bobbie had to live outside and had other restrictions imposed upon him because ultimately he was an animal – not a human animal, just animal. The story unfolding on an experiential, immediate and intimate level was subdued by the other story – the official, ‘intelligent’ one – and the world remained divided.

Historically, a substantial amount of philosophical discourse, particularly in the Western tradition, has centred on attempts to articulate a framework of defining features that would capture the presumably distinct nature of the human. ‘[S]uspended between a celestial and a terrestrial nature,’ Giorgio Agamben notes, the human’s being, as it constructs itself, is ‘always less and more than himself’<sup>1</sup>. During this quest for essences and meanings, the human ontological fabric has become significantly defined by the human/nonhuman animal binary. Taken for granted, Aaron S. Gross observes, the binary enables the otherwise rigorous contemporary scholar the freedom to uncritically invoke it for support.<sup>2</sup> In order to secure this extremely vulnerable mode of being, separatists have over time built a domino castle of ‘exclusively human’ attributes only to see it progressively collapse as knowledge and understanding of humans and other animals rapidly increases. Tool use, for instance, was believed absent in other animals’ worlds until a variety of nonhuman animals, including octopi from the invertebrate group, were observed operating various objects not only to acquire food, but also for other purposes, such as averting predators as in the case of the makeshift whistles orangutans assemble using leaves pulled off a twig.<sup>3</sup>

Reason was another attribute considered uniquely human, with the human as *rational* animal standing in juxtaposition to all other ‘instinct-driven’ animals. Increased understanding of cognition and

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1 Agamben 2004, 29.

2 Gross 2015, 91.

3 Hardus et al. 2009.

## Introduction

emotion, however, has forced the rational animal into humbleness again. The highly praised reason turned out to be far more influenced by emotions (traditionally held in lower regard) than previously believed, but not just that: emotions were found to play an essential, positive role in normative functioning, including in the reasoning process. This proposition was met with scepticism when neuroscientist Antonio Damasio<sup>4</sup> first proposed it but has since been largely embraced. Convergent scientific evidence also shows that the processing of raw data and concept formation (whereby ‘concept’ is defined as ‘grouping of “object” attributes’) in the brains of human and nonhuman animals follow the same principles.<sup>5</sup> The contents of the minds and relative associative combinations of course vary across species and individuals within species. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that the differences between humans and other animals are less significant than the similarities, that other animals are far from being instinctual automatons, and that just like human lives, other animals’ lives are replete with thinking, evaluations and decision-making, informed by various species and individual specificities as well as their developmental and living contexts.

Entering into the debate opened by these and similar investigations, the present volume examines the underlying commonalities that enable the experience of grief and spirituality as an embodied practice in both human and nonhuman animals. Considerations of both phenomena in nonhuman animals continue to be tainted by anthropocentric philosophical questions, failing to recognise the significance of the more fundamental psychobiological processes at the root of these experiences. A vast and growing body of knowledge concerning intersubjective attachment and loss, and the shaping of animals’ (human inclusive) experiential realities more broadly, elucidates the role of the implicit forces at work for the emergence of grief and spirituality. Simultaneously it evidences that a human-comparable interpretative dimension is not necessary to experience both phenomena deeply.

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4 Damasio 2006 [1994].

5 Snyder, Bossomaier and Mitchell 2004; Vallortigara et al. 2008.

I did not know any of this when I was standing in Jay's office several years ago hoping she would agree to supervise my dissertation. The dissertation, undertaken part-time, was going to be about *animals*, not grief just yet – grief happened later. The initial plan was rather vague; it was centred on attitudes towards and (mis)representations of nonhuman animals in monotheistic traditions. In the process of gathering research material over the following months, I discovered that someone had already dealt with the question and they did it well. My zeal for attempting a new approach to the same question was minimal so I decided to drop the topic. Then the idea of grief emerged, and both Jay and I were satisfied with the new choice. From the very beginning, however, the point was not the degree itself. The intention to complete the degree was there – it is good practice to finish what is started if possible – but it was not an imperative, at least not for me. In fact, the reason I returned to studies, close to ten years after having moved countries for marital purposes and relinquished my plans to pursue an academic career in historic linguistics and onomastics, was to help me acquire more systematised knowledge of nonhuman animals and the entire cross-species rights and liberation issue. Working on a specific project would give me both the necessary focus, so I did not derail too much, and the opportunity to expand in various directions as we moved along the path into (and hopefully out of) the abyss of cross-species being.

By that stage, I had been calling myself vegan for several years. I read an article in which the author was telling the reader – in that case, me – that I was personally responsible for the suffering nonhuman animals endure and that it was in my power to change that. The whole issue of animal suffering at the hands of humans – an issue that I had considered before, and as a consequence of which I was, at various times, flexitarian, pescatarian and vegetarian, but it had always felt too vast and overwhelming – suddenly appeared ‘easy’, manageable, something I could do something about right then and there. I turned vegan – quite literally overnight. I considered it a necessary first step, and the easiest thing I have ever done – an ‘unexpected pleasure – relief – in the thought that just by *not* doing something we were saving lives,’ as my partner phrased it later.<sup>6</sup> Naturally, I wanted to reach out to

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6 Brooks 2019, 10.

## Introduction

others, share my ‘discovery’. However, with time I started to feel that my approach, my advocacy, was inefficient, inadequate, somehow lacking, and that I needed a deeper understanding of questions and processes involved, hence the idea of a research project. Simply telling humans that nonhuman animals suffer and that an important contribution to reduce (if not necessarily eliminate) the suffering was the shift to plant-eating was not a successful strategy. Many sympathised but very few changed their practices. ‘That’s because we are herd animals,’ someone told me recently, citing a blogger they were reading:<sup>7</sup> you cannot take people out of a herd without giving them a new herd – one they can trust and that makes them feel safe and cosy; being alone is scary.

Fortunately, the pro-animal herd is growing rapidly, both in the wider world and in scholarly circles. What only ten years ago was still considered an oddity is now a new normal. For instance, back then the term ‘vegan’ often had to be explained in restaurants, and when I announced my new research topic at an informal dinner gathering a philosopher inquired, genuinely concerned, how I was planning to deal with anthropomorphism. I did not have an answer at the time; I was hardly aware of the ‘problem’. Importantly perhaps, as I realised halfway through my research, at the time I was also only half-aware of the biological, psychological and social comparability of humans and other animals. The aspect of physical pain was clear, the rest less so. Undoubtedly, this contributed to my feelings of inadequacy in advocating for cross-species *equality*.

The beginning of my research project roughly coincided with us moving to a small property on the edge of town. Rescued sheep soon joined our family nucleus of two humans and a dog, and slowly we began to discover that the area was populated with other residents who had been – cautious and hidden – observing and trying to establish the nature and degree of danger the new human-cum-dog settlers may represent. Living with some nonhuman animals and getting to know others, particularly those belonging to substantially unprivileged species, through fostering or assisting in rescue/sanctuary settings, help to imagine a world in which the human is not only removed as the centrepiece of this world but oftentimes becomes redundant. Charlie

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<sup>7</sup> <https://jamesclear.com/>.

the dog and Henry the sheep kept reminding me of this. Watching them play together was an evocative experience that can hardly be adequately translated into human verbal parlance. To be able to play in the first place they had to negotiate species differences that are not an issue when playing with a member of the same species. They managed that well; they learnt to read intentions and expectations. This involved understanding the significance of various moves within the play context as these same moves change meaning with the change of context. Henry, for instance, had to learn that Charlie's growling was not a threat but an invitation to play; similarly Charlie had to interpret Henry's head-butting move as a friendly gesture rather than a warning signal. Body language aside, they may also have relied on chemical language, which is inaccessible to me as a human with an underdeveloped sense of smell.

It is easy to get carried away by the richness of nonhuman existence. Many other humans must feel the same. It reflects in their writing and other projects. Over time I discovered a vast repertoire of inspiring voices that have, singularly and cumulatively, been helping challenge established perceptions of nonhuman animals and human exclusivism. The new field of animal studies is growing and spreading to various areas of inquiry and creativity. When recently, a senior-year high-school student unexpectedly contacted me wanting advice concerning what studies to pursue to be able to best help animals, I hesitated at first, feeling out of my depth at the prospect of influencing the direction of the life of a complete stranger. After some thoughtful consideration, however, I realised, with a substantial amount of pleasure, that nowadays it does not really matter whether one chooses biology or architecture. Whatever area we work in there will always be opportunity to support the multispecies justice project, and choosing an area we are genuinely passionate about may increase our capacity to help and the quality of the help we can offer.

Far from ideal, the current situation nevertheless feels promising, and of course there are those who came before, who wrote and thought about these questions, paving the way. Mary Midgley was one of them. She published her first book the year I was born, but I discovered her quite late in my research process. How different would my life have been, I wonder, had I grown up reading those books as opposed

## Introduction

to others that were perhaps subtly but nevertheless consistently reinforcing the human–nonhuman divide. What would the world be like now had we all been prevalently exposed to works that were more inclusive, less preoccupied with what makes us *special* and more with what makes us open and kind? Even in that case, I suspect, there would be plenty of room left for improvement.

Midgley warned about the futility of the widespread search for human excellences and exclusive properties already in her 1978 book, *Beast and Man*. Her commonsense proposal instead was that what makes humans unique as a species is a conglomerate of attributes and ‘the shape of the whole cluster’.<sup>8</sup> The same is valid for any other species, and sharing characteristics with other species does not make one species less unique. Yet the quest continues, and when a phenomenon that was previously thought to be exclusively human is found in other species, humans tend to dig further in an attempt to find differences and human uniqueness in the manifestation of that phenomenon. This is not *per se* problematic since manifestations can be species-specific, but it becomes untenable when manifestations in other species are not put under equal scrutiny. This may consolidate the prejudice against other animals, which is based on the assumption that humans are indeed a very special animal while all others are not. In the worst but not unusual scenario, differences are simply taken for granted without properly defining the parameters of comparison. The latter often applies in discussions of grief and spirituality.

Much could be said about how human assumptions on grief and spirituality as well as on the connection between the two have led to denying that nonhuman animals possess the capacity to experience either. The idea, in monotheistic traditions, of nonhuman animals not having a soul and a spiritual dimension sets them further apart from humans. This theological proposition continues to influence thought even in contemporary secular circles, in which many humans wish to distance themselves from more traditional forms of religion but do not want to (or perhaps cannot) relinquish spirituality. In this context spirituality becomes defined as a cluster of meanings and understandings of the world and life in it, which may then inform

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8 Midgley 2002 [1978], 198.

conduct. The contents – cosmologies, ethics, behaviour, etc. – may differ from theistic religiosity, but principles and functions remain comparable. Most humans do not consider nonhuman animals' cognitive capacities sophisticated enough to frame the complexity of the external cosmos and their own internal reality into more or less integrated conceptual systems recognised for human societies, and to appreciate the value, the *sacredness* of it. As a consequence nonhuman animals are rarely considered for their spiritual capacities. There are two principal problems with this position.

First, as Midgley aptly remarked in relation to elephants, 'we can do justice to the miracle of the trunk without pretending that nobody else has a nose.<sup>9</sup> The fact that nonhuman animals (and, until recently, also humans) have not produced abundant records reflecting intense preoccupation with the construction of such conceptual systems does not mean that their minds are not engaged in meaning-making. Successful navigation through their worlds is to a great extent dependent on their capacity to make some sense of those worlds: to understand phenomena, find connections, predict behaviour, embrace pleasure and cope with adversity, and similar skills (some learnt, some inherited) that absorb the minds of human and nonhuman animals alike.

Second, human conceptual systems or worldviews should not be equated with spirituality. Some of these systems may confer a central role to the experience of a spiritual dimension, and active spirituality may thus be encouraged. However, the system itself remains a product of cognitive appraisal and various extents of cognitive closure (the resolution of a state of uncertainty), whereas spirituality manifests as a propensity of the intrinsically relational non-reflective, experiential consciousness. While capacities for conceptual thinking and consequently cognitive elaboration may differ in degree among animal species – this conceptual muscle being particularly well developed in humans – both human and nonhuman animals have equal access to experiential consciousness, which is fundamental for spirituality. This level of consciousness, as convergent scientific evidence uncovers, is already felt – experientially meaningful – without having to be converted into meaning by some interpretative cognitive functions.

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9 Midgley 2002 [1978], 198.

However, in discussions of spirituality, human commentators tend to obfuscate these two processes, suggesting (sometimes implicitly, other times explicitly) that the body-based spiritual experience can only acquire meaning through cognitive post-processing and contextualisation within a broader picture of an individual's life. As a consequence, and given that the conceptual world of other animals remains largely inaccessible to humans, nonhuman animals' capacity for spirituality is usually dismissed.

In a similar vein, when considering grief in nonhuman animals, the subjective immediacy of the experience of loss, which is central to the emergence of grief, is often underestimated. The theory and observation of attachment and loss in humans and other animals leave little reason to doubt that what is experienced is similar. However, the potency of bereavement when discussing nonhuman animals' experiences becomes obliterated by commentators asking potentially unanswerable philosophical questions concerning, for instance, awareness of one's own mortality. Asking these questions is not per se contestable,<sup>10</sup> but in these discussions scholarly rigour often becomes lost by presupposing a non-existent universally human understanding of death, mortality and related issues.

Considerations of animal (human inclusive) grief and grief expressions become a problematic exercise if at least two criteria are not met. First, we need to have an adequate appreciation of the psycho-biology modulating attachment and loss. Colin M. Parkes, a long-time student of human grief, pointed out that one of the problems with discussing and analysing grief was the lack of an accepted definition, and suggested to focus on separation anxiety as the core component of grief.<sup>11</sup> Separation distress, which can manifest in innumerable declaratively conscious or unconscious ways, appears to

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10 To various extents it is also understandable since it appears that many humans fail to embrace their condition of impermanence, opting instead for denialism of their own 'creatureliness' and mortality, with consequences for their attitude towards other animal species. See, for example, Marino and Mountain 2015 and Grušovnik 2018.

11 Parkes 2009 [2006].

represent valid common ground for discussing grief in both human cross-cultural and cross-species contexts.

Second, as commentators we need to step out of our own cultural box if we wish to compare human and nonhuman animal grief and expressions thereof, and/or discuss broader death-related philosophical questions. In the global human context, past and present, in fact, expressions of grief and mourning that may not be considered acceptable in the sterile environment of Western mortuaries are not uncommon. A quick glance across human cultures also uncovers the picturesque fabric of meanings and understandings of life and death.

This research began with a focus on grief. While grief remains the central topic, I have incorporated spirituality into this discussion due to the similarities between the two discovered during the research process, and, perhaps more importantly, due to the possibility of their shared origins in our relation with the vitality of (the rest of) space. I discuss this aspect and the liminality of individual/place in more detail in Chapter 4. With regard to the similarities, they manifest on a procedural and discursive level. Procedurally, both grief and spirituality are intrinsically relational and defined by implicit processes that are primarily felt rather than thought. Spirituality, for instance, is often referred to in terms of self-transcendence, whereby the self is intended to describe the human-grade cognitive, reflective self. However, a closer examination in consideration of scientific evidence uncovers that what in fact enables a spiritual experience is access to the implicit, non-reflective experiential self and the individual's propensity for *self-extension*, or *self-expansion*, as it has also been called.<sup>12</sup> This extending of the self – merging with other selves – is enacted on the self-nonself continuum. According to Shihui Han and Georg Northoff,<sup>13</sup> who researched the phenomenon, this is a more veracious way of viewing self/other-relatedness than the alternative, namely a self-nonself dichotomy. Such self-extension materialises also in intersubjective attachment: when we lose a beloved individual we are effectively losing part of ourselves.

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12 Nelson 2009, 58.

13 Han and Northoff 2009.

In terms of discourse, as already indicated, both grief and spirituality have either been dismissed as propensities of nonhuman animals or considered weaker in their experiential potency compared to humans' experiences. In both cases, evaluations fail to attend to the subject matter in question, opting instead for considerations of satellite reactions based on the human interpretative domain. The latter is potentially incomparable with other species' interpretative solutions and does not appear critical for the two topics under examination. It is important to notice, however, that many of these 'evaluations' of other species' grief and spiritual experiences and their comparability to humans' experiences tend to be made in passing and to be based on assumptions, rather than being a result of detailed analysis.

An integrated consideration of the above issues, which the present work intends to achieve, is of ethical significance because of the treatment of nonhuman animals whose suffering due to anthropogenic violence (direct or in terms of habitat destruction) is increasing. It also significantly extends the radical interdisciplinary examination of the parameters of the 'human' and the 'nonhuman' that emerging understandings of human/nonhuman animal relations demand.

In my first chapter I outline the path that research into nonhuman animals' lives and subjectivity has taken from the establishment of ethology early in the previous century to current perspectives and approaches, which have changed significantly, particularly in the past twenty years. I review selected material that evidences how ideology on the one hand and proximity on the other have influenced views of other animal species and informed research approaches and focus. This background information is provided to help the reader understand past and current attitudes to nonhuman animal subjectivity in Western discourse, including grief and spirituality, and to contextualise the research of the present volume.

My second chapter looks at intersubjective attachment as the basis for feelings of loss and grief. Physical pain aside, the disruption and/or prevention of intersubjective attachment relations and societal quality more broadly is arguably the major welfare concern with regard to humans' intervention in and manipulation of other animals' lives and relations. This chapter examines more closely attachment theory and the neuro-bio-psychological bases for attachment relations in animals.

The importance and inevitability of attachment relations in animals predicates the experience of grief. Separation anxiety/distress is well documented for human and nonhuman animals alike.

It may be that, reading through Chapter 2, the philosophically savvy readers will find themselves with a vision of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty putting down his pipe and looking out through the window at the trees of the boulevard. ‘Don’t you find it a little too mechanistic? Bordering on realism?’ he may say, turning towards American lover of wisdom Cynthia Willett, who got momentarily distracted wondering whether the current anti-smoking climate pervading the superorganism is going to reach the old philosopher’s perception. ‘Yes,’ she would probably agree, ‘there is the risk that the reader may miss the relationality between individuals implicit in the discussion of psychobiological regulation whereas the concept of affect attunement within attachment dyads bears a stronger suggestion of meaningfulness, emphasising in itself the proto-conversation between animals.’ Willett has herself written on grief and spirituality through theories of affect attunement – the sharing but also challenging and altering of moods, affects and desires<sup>14</sup> – which amplifies and complements dimensions of regulation. The absolutely fascinating nature of the material aside, my choice to prioritise the biological imperative of attachment relations is based on my feeling that it leaves little space for questioning the importance of the presence and quality of these relations across relevant animal species. I also trust that the reader will not fail to sense the richness of social exchanges behind the organismic processes discussed.

The psychologically informed reader, on the other hand, may wonder whether the length of Chapter 2 and detailed presentation are justified given that attachment research has received substantial public recognition, leading to growing awareness of the various aspects and processes. Over and over again, however, I have found people – non-psychologists – marvel at the available information, especially in relation to nonhuman animals, which helps them towards a new understanding and acceptance that the experience of grief truly is

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14 Willett 2014, 88–9.

comparable between human and nonhuman animals, just as it helped me when I first delved into this research.

Most considerations of animal grief presuppose a non-existing panhuman homogeneity in key grief- and death-related philosophical questions and in the expression of grief. A closer examination of both issues in the human realm challenges these assumptions. In its first part, my third chapter examines the question of understanding death from a biological (physical non-returnability) and – to a limited extent – cultural perspective (different conceptualisations of death), and what this may signify for nonhuman animals and grief. The second part of Chapter 3 explores a variety of grief expressions as well as repressions in human societies (from delayed personhood to cannibalism), challenging the widespread misconception that if nonhuman animals do not exhibit mourning that is comparable and recognisable to the (Western) human, they do not experience grief.

Turning from a focus on grief to that of spirituality, my fourth chapter explores spirituality as a manifestation of the implicit, experiential, non-reflective self. From this perspective, I suggest that spirituality is ontologically distinct from religion and religiosity; the latter tend to be characterised by a strong cognitive closure component, and may to various extents help individuals cope with grief. Nonhuman animals also engage in cognitive categorising and closure; nevertheless, they likely do not have an elaborated cosmology like many humans do, which may mean that in the absence of this coping strategy grief may be harder for them. Spirituality, on the other hand, is experienced by human and nonhuman animals alike, and its developmental origins could be traced in place attachment, which has been suggested to have been the evolutionary precedent of intersubjective attachment.

Returning to the topic of grief, the final chapter discusses vicarious and disenfranchised grief that some humans feel in relation to nonhuman animals, and the various forms of bearing witness to their suffering, including the emergence, in recent years, of organised public vigils. As they stand in silence, commemorating the lives and deaths of animals whom the human society perceives as mere commodities, the mourners bear witness to a different reality: one of profound suffering of the nonhuman victims themselves, the humans who refuse to look the other way and those who are not given the choice (for example, slaughterhouse

## Enter the Animal

workers) – a reality of sights, sounds and smells that have over time disappeared from public perception and hence awareness, and that we now have the opportunity to revisit and re-organise.

There is something freeing about perceiving oneself as a fragment of the whole. You are not insignificant even though you are very small and nothing special, embedded in living like the rest of life, equal to other animals and the rest of existence. You are here now, like they are, no-one's fault, no-one's merit. We just are – individuals of all kinds – freckles in the continuation of existence, specific (and mostly accidental) manifestations of being.

In the following pages I recount what I have learnt over the years, through theory and practice, about ourselves and other animals. This new knowledge and understanding have had an immense impact upon my life as I went from being a human who needs to protect 'animals' (as less privileged forms of sentient existence), to being an animal among many who needs to learn new ways of living and relating, within myself and towards the outer world.