"Introduction" in
Erica Fudge, Animal.
London: Reaktion Books. 2002.
pp. 7-23.

Introduction

Animals present a challenge to humans. They are both similar to and different from us. That is, they are like us – they form bonds, communicate with each other, some of them, like some of us, even manage monogamy – but they are simultaneously completely lost to us. In our fantasies a Dr Dolittle comes along and offers to translate for us, but in reality we know that, hard as we might try, we can never really learn to speak 'dog', let alone understand it when we hear it barked. It is this paradox of like and not like, same and different, that exists in our fascination with animals. But there is also something else; something, perhaps, just as compelling as this desire for communication. The German philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote:

> In an aversion to animals the predominant feeling is fear of being recognized by them through contact. The horror that stirs deep in man is an obscure awareness that in him something lives so akin to the animal that it might be recognized. All disgust is originally disgust at touching. Even when the feeling is mastered, it is only

by a drastic gesture that overleaps its mark: the nauseous is violently engulfed, eaten, while the zone of finest epidermal contact remains taboo. Only in this way is the paradox of the moral demand to be met, exacting simultaneously the overcoming and the subtlest elaboration of man's sense of disgust. He may not deny his bestial relationship with animals, the invocation of which revolts him: he must make himself its master.[1]

Alongside and sometimes working against the desire for communication persists, as Benjamin argues, a fear, and this fear manifests itself as disgust. The disgust is directed towards animals, but it might be fair to see the disgust as being *about* humans, about ourselves. We are horrified that there is a kinship between us and them (a kinship that we have, of course, in part produced through our own desires), and we wish to wipe it out; annihilate it. Mastery – control, domination – is the means by which we annihilate the fear. But if we place these two simultaneous drives – desire for communication and fear – together, as I think we must in our relationships with animals, what emerges is not so much the problem of the animal, as the problem of the human.

We live with animals, we recognize them, we even name some of them, but at the same time we use them as if they were inanimate, as if they were objects. The illogic of this relationship is one that, on a day-to-day basis, we choose to evade, even refuse to acknowledge as present. We, or so we argue, have access to a truth, knowledge, reason and order, into which we place animals. And yet at the heart of that truth, knowledge, reason and order persists this danger, this limitation on our power. Animals are present all of the time in our lives, but frequently we treat them as if they were not there as animals. They are the limit case, if you like, of all of our structures of understanding. They stand between us and our sense of ourselves, but they also allow us to think about ourselves.

This contradiction is the reason for this book. It won't attempt to

explain animals, rather, it will attempt to look at the ways in which we live with, think with and use them. Not only are animals both like and not like us, they are also friend and foe, individualized and dissected, loved and eaten; and it is these apparent oppositions that I am interested in here. Because of its size, this book cannot, and does not, attempt to cover everything about our relationships with animals at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Rather than, for example, attempting a detailed analysis of animals in literature, I have chosen a few texts to look at. It is hoped that you will be able to think of many others, and construct for yourself ways of making meaning out of them. Similarly, when discussing an important issue like meat-eating, a couple of examples – rabbit pie and the export of live veal calves – are used to offer some way of thinking about the issue. This is not the place to find a detailed analysis of the nature and history of vegetarianism, although references will point readers to where they might find such studies.

Having said, then, what the book is not, it is worth thinking about what it is. I will not make any direct attempt to proselytize, or present an 'evangelical' reading of animal rights. Rather, I will be asking you, through the organization of the book, to think about the ways in which Western society uses animals. The book is, though, polemical: that is, it presents an argument about the need to rethink our relationships with animals. This polemic arises from an analysis, not of philosophical positions about animals, but of the ways we currently live with them. That is, the book argues that if the variety of ways in which animals are present in Western culture are juxtaposed then the inherent contradictions will ask a number of questions.

In our juxtapositions we have, for example, on the one hand, the close bond that is formed between the owner and the pet, on the other the consumption of animal flesh at the dinner table. Similarly, we have the anthropomorphic representation of animals in classic children's books like *Charlotte's Web* and *The Wind in the Willows*, while at the same time

vivisection asserts the absolute difference of the moral positions of humans and animals. It is these contradictions – and others – that are constantly in play in our relations with animals, but are often forgotten: we rarely make the connection between the cat we live with and the cow we eat. But by bringing these contradictions to the fore I hope that this book might continue the debate about the ways in which we live with animals in the twenty-first century.

But it is not only contemporary culture that will be the focus here. The history of many of the ways in which we currently live with animals offers some sobering reminders that those ways have a source; that is, that they are not natural. It is also included to remind us that many of our apparently friendly gestures towards other species are grounded in a firm belief in human superiority rather than a concept of animal 'worth'. For example, the outlawing of dog-carts (carts pulled by dogs) in nineteenth-century London did not announce a new understanding of the rights of animals; rather it was a response to human displeasure at the very visible nature of animal abuse on the streets and to human disgust at the perceived pollution from animal dirt and disease. What might appear to be a movement to increase the welfare of animals is simultaneously a movement to shield humans from the use of animals that was – and is – so prevalent in our societies. When the dog-carts were banned, the dogs used to pull them did not retire to spend the rest of their days happily lying by the hearth. Most of them were killed; they were too expensive to maintain as pets.[2] What on the surface appears to be a gesture based upon kindness is also a gesture of human self-preservation. As Benjamin argued, our greatest fear of animals is through contact – and I would include contact through the eyes, ears, nose and mouth, as well as through touch – and the only way we have to overcome this fear and disgust is through mastery. He proposes eating as the most violent means by which animals are 'engulfed' by humans, but we might include other ways in which we consume animals: through experimenting upon, caging, hunting, representing,

wearing them (this list could go on). By invoking history alongside contemporary debates our current relations with animals become less and less straightforward, and many assumptions that have become wholly naturalized in our cultures are made strange.

So what is it that is naturalized? In her book *Reordering the Natural World* the anthropologist Annabelle Sabloff has proposed, following the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, that we live by metaphors. That is, that metaphor, the figure of speech whereby aspects of one thing are applied to another, is one of the key organizing structures whereby our lives are given meaning. An example of a metaphor might be 'Peter's a pig.' In this metaphor we know that Peter is not actually a pig, but that he has some of the qualities that we associate with pigs – greediness, dirtiness and so on. For the literary critic Norman Friedman the relationship between Peter and the pig is 'based on likeness in difference'.[3] This is where the metaphor works; it brings both of the ideas – Peter and pig – together and creates something that is more than just a mixture of the two. We do not have a crossbreed, if you like, but a new way of looking at an existing species.

Sabloff writes: 'Metaphor, that unstoppable faculty of the human mind to make associations, most often between an experienced and named domain of life and an apprehended but unnamed domain, is a fundamental mechanism for the patterning of cognitive and behavioural practice and emotional life.' We look at the unknown and name it through our experience of the known: we, to use Friedman's phrase, base our understanding on its likeness in difference to ourselves. What is incomprehensible becomes knowable through its translation from thing 'out there' to metaphor 'in here'. Sabloff proposes three key metaphors by which we live with animals, those distinct and different creatures. In the domestic domain the metaphor is one of kinship: animals are represented as members of our families; in what she terms the factory domain, animals are figured as artefacts, tools, objects for our use; and in the rhetoric of

animal rights, they are perceived as citizens.[4] In each of these cases animals as such disappear and are replaced by a metaphorical structure that attempts to represent what is, for humans, unobtainable.

What is absent, Sabloff argues, in our current mode of thinking about animals is another metaphor that would allow for a biocentric, as opposed to anthropocentric, relationship, a metaphor that would allow for 'the radical otherness of other life forms, that is, their inherent value outside the human ethical domain' to be acknowledged, as opposed to a relation that sees only humans as centrally significant, and represents the world accordingly. This new metaphor, she argues, would provide the foundation for a new lived relation. Sabloff is certainly right to argue that we lack a language at present in which we can think about and represent animals to ourselves *as animals*, in ways that are not metaphorical. But I am not sure that the way forward is through the creation of another metaphor – what she calls a 'practical poetry' – by which we can live with meaning in 'a more benign, respectful relationship with our habitats', and with animals.[5] Creating a new way of representing and thinking about the natural world might allow the old relations to persist. Rather than attempting to find a new metaphor, then, what I think is necessary is a relocation of the ways in which we live with animals on a day-to-day basis. The argument of this book is that if we acknowledge some of the – frequently cruel – contradictions in the ways in which we live with and think about animals we might be on the road to creating a new language. The language will not precede the lived relation, a renewed acquaintance with the lived relation will, I hope, help us to create another language.

But, if the lived relation is so contradictory it is probably worth pausing to consider how it came to be lived as true, as natural in the first place. How is it that we haven't really – as societies rather than as individuals – sat back and thought about the problems inherent in our relationships with animals? How come, to return to Walter Benjamin, wearing

metaphorical gloves is all that we have needed to protect ourselves from the terror of contact?

One starting point is what, in Western culture, has been, and for many still is, regarded as the beginning, Genesis. It might be argued that, in multicultural societies such as our own, where different religious beliefs exist alongside each other, and alongside atheism, beginning with the Christian myth is a rather limited and limiting way into a more general discussion of animals. My defence is that within European and North American cultures (and this is what is under discussion here) our legislation and institutions are, whether we like it or not, often premised upon Christian ideas. Much of the naturalized morality of our cultures comes from this source, and this is, I think, particularly the case with our relations to animals.

According to Genesis 1, the creation took six days, and those days represented the six stages of the universe. Beginning with the heaven and the earth, day and night on the first day, God ended his work with Adam and Eve on the sixth. God began with the basis, the foundation of his creation, and ended with a creature formed in his own image. Humanity was the final and greatest of God's creations, and so humans, created after the animals, were given dominion over them. That is, as one seventeenth-century commentator noted, man (and it was *man*) was 'a petty God . . . all things being put in subjection under his feet'.[6] As God had absolute power over Adam, so Adam had absolute power over the animals. This power was made manifest in Genesis 1:19, when Adam named the animals: 'and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof'. It is as if the animals had no identity, no presence without Adam, and their inherent powerlessness, perhaps most easily described as their inability to name themselves, has persisted in human relations with animals. An animal cannot think, we argue, and therefore it is down to us to think for it. If we firmly believed that a cow could think like us it would become very difficult to justify eating it. Instead, we decide that a cow

can't think as we understand the term, and that it is therefore morally acceptable to eat the cow. In these terms, dominion is a claim for the human right – even duty – to treat animals as objects of use rather than as fellow subjects of the planet.

From this notion of man's absolute dominion over the natural world comes the faith – also naturalized in much contemporary culture – in anthropocentrism; the belief that the human (*anthropos* is the Greek term for human) is the centre of all things, that the world revolves around him (feminists have spent many years attempting to turn that him into him/her). The Christian narrative has had a massive impact on the ways humans relate to the world around them. Anthropocentrism is naturalized: the eating of meat – often undertaken without thought for what it is that is really being eaten – is just one example of how normal anthropocentrism is in our cultures. Cannibalism, on the other hand, has always been the source of horror and comment, and not because of the flavour of human flesh.

I am not, of course, the first person to see the Christian narrative as lying at the heart of our relations with animals. This belief has persisted throughout Western history, and was brought to the fore in 1967 when Lynn White Jr wrote a now famous article in the journal *Science* entitled 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis'. In this article White laid the blame for many environmental catastrophes firmly at the door of Christianity. He wrote, 'Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.' The original impetus for developments in science and technology, which to his mind had produced environmental catastrophes of numerous kinds, should, he argued, be traced to the Christian belief that a knowledge of God would be increased by a knowledge of his creation. White argued that 'Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt' for the ways in which we relate to – and use – the natural world. It has given us a reason, or perhaps an excuse, for many of our most destructive actions. For White, the Christian narrative was not merely a myth of origin, it had much more import than that.[7]

Eight years later F. B. Welbourn wrote a response to White's article in which he argued that far from reinforcing notions of human dominion, the Christian relation to the natural world, symbolized in Adam's naming of the animals, did something rather different. He wrote: 'By the act of naming the animals man recognized his responsibility towards them.'[8] This interpretation of the Bible presented humans as stewards rather than as masters or rulers of the natural world. With power, Welbourn argued, comes responsibility. It is our duty to shepherd rather than dominate nature.

The difference between dominion and stewardship, between human rights to use, and human duty to act responsibly, will be traced throughout this book. In many places it is clear that it is a matter of interpretation which of the relations is being exercised. Many of us, myself included, find it difficult to see all human relations with animals as being based upon dominion, but it is often worth thinking about whether those relations that we see as based on the more generous model of stewardship really are. The zoo is a good way of thinking about this. Many zoos now claim their status as conservation organizations, the protectors of endangered species. This would place them as stewards of animals. But there remains an alternative reading, based, perhaps, on the links that have been made between zoos and the contexts in which they first emerged: animals displayed as evidence of the West's 'conquest' of the 'barbaric' world.[9] There is a possibility of reading zoos as places where animals are imprisoned for the benefit only of human entertainment, and this would make the relation between humans and other species witnessed in the zoo one of dominion. It might sound like merely a matter of opinion, something upon which we can agree to differ, but I hope that by presenting the possibility of alternative ways of thinking about how we live with animals this book will unsettle some of the commonsense assumptions that prevail in our cultures.

What is certain in both of the interpretations of the zoo – and in both of the interpretations of the Bible – is that the human remains central: as

either preserver or conqueror and observer. Animals are merely the means by which we exercise our power, and this is where, I think, Christian ideas are so central to the ways in which we co-exist with animals. These ideas have made natural – to the extent that we no longer need the knowledge of Christianity itself to support such naturalization – our current relations with them. But there is a possibility of breaking out of this: if, as we put on leather shoes, we begin to think about the animal from which the leather came, and to recognize the kind of stories we tell ourselves to make it acceptable to wear them, then we are, perhaps, beginning to take those stories as just that: stories. From this basis it is possible to begin to seek another way of thinking.[10]

But, of course, Christianity is not the only faith practised in the West. Other religions exist side by side with Christianity in our cultures, and some of them offer alternative relations to animals that are worth pausing briefly to think about. In the *Qur'an*, for example, is written, 'there is not an animal . . . in the earth, nor a creature flying on two wings, but they are peoples [or communities] like you'. As James L. Westcoat Jr has argued, 'communities of animals praise Allah through their existence and their actions. They have souls (*nafs*) of various types and qualities that constitute essential parts of the world soul. Some Muslim scholars infer from this passage that animals will be resurrected on the day of judgement along with humans.' However, as Westcoat also notes, 'at the same time, the *Qur'an* states that animals are subordinate to human beings and that they are created to serve human beings'.[11] They are simultaneously the same and other – us and them.

This is a paradox that we can also trace in what is apparently one of the most obvious challenges to the kind of human rule espoused in the Bible and the *Qur'an*: that which comes from Buddhism. This Eastern religion, now practised throughout the world, offers a radically different relationship with animals. At the heart of Buddhism is the belief in rebirth, in the understanding that death is not an ending, but a new beginning, with the

soul reborn in another form. The nature of that form – whether human or animal, male or female – depends to a large extent of the nature of the life lived by the deceased. A pure life will lead to a higher form in the next life, and the most pure life, one that included enlightenment and understanding, can lead to rebirth in 'a Pure Land'. For all believers, however, there is a recognition that the relationship with all other living beings is crucial. The first precept of Buddhism is the 'most important', and it is, as Peter Harvey terms it, 'the resolution not to kill or injure any human, animal, bird, fish or insect'. Kindness and compassion to all other living beings are at the heart of Buddhism in a way that cannot necessarily be claimed of the Christian faith (although an individual such as St Francis of Assisi might have disputed this).

One of the key reasons for this different relation with animals is the sense in Buddhism that 'no permanent self or I exists within a person'. Harvey proposes that Buddhist teaching does not 'support a positive regard for persons as unique entities, as do Christian teachings'. The belief in past (and future) lives means that the clear dividing line between humans and animals present in Christian faith cannot exist: in Buddhism '"your" suffering and "my" suffering are not inherently different'.[12] This link between humans and animals is absent in Christianity: Adam is active: he gives names; the animals passive: they were named. Adam, if you like, is a subject, the animals objects.

However, underlying Buddhism's sense of a link between human and animal lives is a key difference between them. Animals are regarded as lower beings by degree. It is into the form of an animal that a person who has led an impure life will be reborn: animals exist as a kind of punishment. So while there is a link between humans and animals – an animal may have been human in a past life, a human may become an animal in a future life – there remains a sense of superiority and inferiority. Humans are at the top while animals, as Florin Deleanu has written, 'cannot develop liberating insight and progress along the Buddhist Path'.[13] Once

again, at the point where similarity appears to emerge, gloves are put on, a division is installed.

However, the sense of the link between human and animal that lies at the core of Buddhism can also be found in another very different challenge to human superiority. This time the text is not religious but, for some, anti-religious. In 1859 Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* was first published. In this work he argued that the new discoveries being made by geologists about the age of the earth meant that new ways of understanding the living creatures on the planet were needed. The creation narrative of the Bible was no longer credible, as the earth was much older than any arithmetical analysis of the Scriptures could propose, and what Darwin put forward instead of the Christian creation myth was the theory of evolution. The outcome of this theory was a world in which nature was never static, in which creatures (and he included human beings in this) were not created in their final state, but had evolved to become what they now were, and would, by implication, continue to evolve.

Evolution is a response to environment. The struggle for survival meant that the fittest survived, as the fittest were often in possession of faculties that made their survival more likely. For Darwin, adaptation to environment was vital, and did not happen in a generation: it took place over millions of years. One of his proposals was that originally there was perhaps only one species, but to survive that one species had to divide and specialize: some creatures adapting to living in the water, others in the air and so on. After millions and millions of years the natural world had evolved to become the diverse and astonishing one that Darwin saw before him. As he wrote at the end of *The Origin of Species*: 'There is a grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.'[14] Far from ending the mystery of nature Darwin's theory placed

that mystery in a different context. Here was not the inscrutable nature of God, rather it was the extraordinary wonder of nature itself.

What Darwin's theory proposed, then, was an end to human distinction: an end to the separation of man from beast. It was impossible, following his scheme, that humans should have ever existed as a breed apart. Instead, humans were animals, just the most evolved species. The Christian narrative of superiority and dominion was seemingly destroyed in one movement, a destruction that was most infamously recognized at a meeting of the British Association on 30 June 1860. Here Thomas Henry Huxley, speaking in support of the Darwinist position, was confronted by 'Soapy Sam', Samuel Wilberforce, the Bishop of Oxford, himself an acclaimed amateur naturalist. The meeting was regarded as a landmark victory for Darwinism, and the following exchange (or a version of it) has become a legend in the history of science:

> Wilberforce: Is it on your grandfather's or your grandmother's side that you claim descent from the apes?
> Huxley: I would rather be descended from an ape than a bishop.

Wilberforce's attack on Darwin's work was voiced as a response to what he regarded as the latter's attack on human status. Huxley's response was to attack what he regarded as the Bishop's wilful defence of an arrogant and unscientific position. As one contemporary report of the meeting recorded it: Huxley rose in response to the Bishop's question and said that 'He was not ashamed to have a monkey for his ancestor; but he would be ashamed to be connected with a man who used great gifts to obscure the truth.'[15] Truth here is no longer the scriptural truth of Genesis, but a scientific, empirical truth, made clear by the expanding geological record.

Darwin's work, so fundamental to the ways in which many of us understand the natural world now, was shocking in its challenge to the

established Christian world view when it appeared. This is a challenge that is still felt. In Kansas in 1997, for example, the 'Board of Education voted to delete virtually every mention of evolution from the state's science curriculum'. And in the same year, a Gallup poll in the US 'found that 40 per cent of those surveyed favoured teaching creationism [an explanation based upon belief in the absolute truth of Genesis] instead of evolution in schools'.[16] What is gone in Darwin's work, and what is maintained in creationism, is the sense of a static nature, with humans on the top rung, and below them apes, and then, by degree, other animals, with no chance of movement between the species. Evolutionary theory proposes in place of this a nature constantly in flux, with no fixed point of perfection.

However, the challenge offered by the theory of evolution was not experienced throughout the world. Where, in America particularly, 'creationism' turned itself into 'Creation Science' to gain credibility,[17] in Japan primatologists accepted evolutionary theory without difficulty. As Frans de Waal has noted, 'to the Buddhist and Confucian mind, both ideas [of evolution and of humans as descendents of apes] are eminently plausible, even likely, and there is nothing insulting about them'. These important religious and cultural differences have, for de Waal, had an impact on the ways in which primates have been understood: 'questions about animal behavior [in Japan] were from the start uncontaminated by feelings of superiority and aversion to the attribution of emotions and intentions that paralysed Western science'.[18] But in the West the impact was far greater: the human, previously a God on earth, was now one among the animals. Dominion, in this world view, must take on a very different meaning. No longer God-given, humanity's rule over the rest of the animals can only be understood as a rule of strength and ingenuity, not right.

But, of course, Darwin's work also offered the possibility of a very different way of thinking about our relation with the natural world. The

theory of evolution could be used as a way forward, as a blueprint for a more equal relation. After all, if we share great- (and great-great-. . .) grandparents, we might also think about sharing with animals in ways that a belief in dominion might ignore. In H. G. Wells's 1896 novel *The Island of Dr Moreau*, for example, the horrors and possibilities of the link between humans and animals are brought to one logical conclusion. The vivisector Moreau cuts up animals to make them more human-like, for, as he says, 'it is a possible thing to transplant tissue from one part of an animal to another, or from one animal to another'. He goes on, more terrifyingly, to make the case for not only the possibility of producing animals with bodily likeness to humans, but mental ones as well: 'the possibilities of vivisection do not stop at a mere physical metamorphosis. A pig may be educated. The mental structure is even less determinate than the bodily.'[19] Moreau's animal-men are monstrous creations used by Wells to speak against vivisection. The very possibility of the link between animals and humans reveals how close those groups are and, because of this, vivisection – the absolute objectification of the animal – becomes a nightmare. Cutting up an animal after Darwin can be read as cutting up a relative, a recognition both shocking and, for anti-vivisectionists, potentially productive, as the ethics of experimentation become more and more difficult to uphold.

Dominion cannot persist comfortably, then, with the recognition of sameness, but somehow, in contemporary culture, we manage to live like Moreau: to have an understanding of a shared origin, and shared capacity, but also, and simultaneously, to believe in the human right to dominion. Wells's fable is shocking, but only because it brings to the surface many of the paradoxes of our own relation with animals. While in the process of reading we regard Moreau as the villain, in the process of co-existing in the real world with animals he might actually represent us more fully than the story's narrator, Prendick, who can declare:

> Poor brutes! I began to see the viler aspect of Moreau's cruelty. I had not thought before of the pain and trouble that came to these poor victims after they had passed from Moreau's hands. I had shivered only at the days of actual torment in the [vivisection] enclosure. But now that seemed to be the lesser part. Before, they had been beasts, their instincts fitly adapted to their surroundings, and happy as living things may be. Now they stumbled in the shackles of humanity, lived in a fear that never died, fretted by a law they could not understand; their mock-human existence began in an agony, was one long internal struggle, one long dread of Moreau – and for what? It was the wantonness that stirred me.[20]

While most of us may not actually engage in vivisection, most of us do engage in what might be termed metaphorical vivisections. We eat meat and wear fur, for example, but at the same time we recognize the capacity of animals to be more than mere meat and fur-bearers. Like Moreau, we can see the similarities, and we can objectify simultaneously.

What follow here, then, are three chapters, each with a different focus. In the first, questions of visibility and invisibility and their impact on human/animal relations are the focus. The second looks at real and symbolic animals, and particularly at the concept of anthropomorphism, the humanizing of animals. The third chapter has as its focus the question of human power, and this discussion is formulated around the question of intelligence: who has it, and what that possession can bring with it. Finally, I turn to the word 'animal' itself, and think about the ways in which we can (and cannot) think ethically with such a word.

What is at stake ultimately is our own ability to think beyond ourselves, to include within the orbit of our imaginations as well as our material existences, those beings of other species. A failure here creates the ground for the continuation of many of those practices that we would regard as cruel and paradoxical. A failure also reveals a limitation to our own capacity, something that might seem to be at odds with the absolute power that we constantly assert over animals.