

BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Review
of
*Loving Animals:
Toward a New Animal Advocacy*

Kathy Rudy
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In *Loving Animals* Kathy Rudy wants to bracket traditional rational approaches to animal welfare and defend instead an advocacy model guided by compassion, storytelling, and connectedness. She grounds her position on the concept of affect. Affect points to the ways in which our embodied, spiritual, and “being with” connection we have with animals can foster positive change for them. Her approach promises to forge a revolutionary social movement, one that starts from the love we show toward our pets and expands to other domains such as animal farming, the exotic animal industry, and vivisection.

Rather than be bogged down by unwanted implications of a singular theoretical model (like rights-based theory or utilitarianism), Rudy wants animal advocates to implement a dual, less rationalistic approach. They should use the law to abolish certain cruel practices (e.g., gestation crates, debeaking, sport killing) while also advocating a new mind set, a more inclusive way of seeing ourselves and animals through the lens of affect. We need a paradigm shift in how we think and speak about animals so that they are no longer treated as mere things or possessions, but as sentient beings with emotional capacities and desires. If we act from the heart (rather than solely the rational mind) this paradigm shift can become reality according to Rudy.

For those insisting that affect resembles the ethic of care approach, Rudy provides a brief critique of care theory and how her approach differs. Care theory wants to maintain the biological boundary between species between human and nonhumans, according to Rudy, and as such misses out on the ways in which affective connections can blur that “boundary.” When we love our dogs or cats we become something new, they become something new, something part human. We become a

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part of one another as a result of our relationships, but care theory insists on maintaining essentialist boundaries. Indeed, Rudy's relationship with her animals (six dogs and three cats) altered her identity: "everything about me has become dog-like" (41). Care theory, according to Rudy, misses out on the nature and power of this affective bond.

The ethical debate of eating animals as seen through the lens of affect banishes factory farmed products, but supports non-intensive meat production (or the humane meat industry). As long as we are certain that the animals on the farm have been given good life (i.e. allowed to act on natural behaviors and treated with respect, care, and dignity) it is acceptable to eat meat and other animal products. Rudy seems to support a contractarian model here where farm animals sacrifice their life in return for having been well taken care of on the farm. Appealing to a popular existential claim, Rudy claims it is better to be alive and live a good (albeit short) life than not to exist at all. The affect model also supports the exotic animal industry (animals that may go extinct if it were not for human intervention) on the condition that these programs are bound by systems of education, regulation, and oversight. By way of affect, these animals can live good lives despite some of the limitations of living in captivity.

Furthermore, we might alter the vivisection debate and make the conversation more animal-centered if we were to invoke the concept of affect. Scientists who perform these experiments need to better communicate to the public their goals and projected outcomes of their work if they are to receive less criticism. More interesting is her suggestion that we encourage scientists to better connect with their animal subjects by living with them because "[o]nly when you care for and connect

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with someone should you be allowed to use him or her for your benefit” (171). Look into their hearts, she asks, and determine if these animals would choose to sacrifice themselves and be remembered as heroes. When scientists live with their subjects and share an affective connection with them, she predicts “things would change for the better” (171).

Her project is part of a larger conversation regarding the practical and effective ways in which we can foster positive change for all animals, and it responds to the general worry that appeal to reason alone does not seem to bring about the outcomes we so desire. If we want to change the world for animals we must incorporate/foster peoples’ affective connection with them. While her form of advocacy calls for the importance of emotional bonds, it also seems to bring up some potential inconsistencies. It is not clear, for instance, whether the concept of affect jibes with slaughtering animals for consumption. What’s the moral difference I wonder between the dog I share an identity with and the young pig I raise for slaughter? Can we settle the apparent conflict between the emotional bonds we form with other animals and killing them for food (when it is not necessary to do so)? The project could benefit from a cogent response from Rudy. Otherwise, Rudy’s efforts serve as an important contribution to the debate about how we ought to understand our complex moral relationship with animals.