7

Dog politics

> Man's best friends are storybook dogs.
>
> (Coppinger and Coppinger 2016: 21)

Except: they are not storybook dogs. They are dogs whose lives are mostly organised by a storybook story that tells of a special relationship between dogs and humans; a storybook story that serves, whether by design or not, to legitimise human governance of dogs. Because dogs, so the story goes, 'belong' with us. Perhaps, like no other animal, they belong *to* us. The very name, *Canis familiaris*.

In 2009, in the first issue of the first volume of the now well-established journal *Humanimalia*, the sociologist and ethologist Lynda Birke wrote an article entitled 'Naming names – or, what's in it for the animals?'. In it, she argues that '[n]aming, describing other animals is, in the story, a way of not communicating, of not understanding who they are' (Birke 2009: 1). 'The story' to which Birke is referring is Ursula Le Guin's 'She unnames them'. But the point she is making could apply as well to the story that I have been addressing in this book, which is a story about dogs as a species. I have called this dogs' species story. I do not think that dogs' species story is a way of not communicating or not understanding *per se*. I think it is about communicating and understanding in a very *particular* way, a way that is of considerable benefit to humans. Much has been tested on dogs; much has been learned about dogs; and much, arguably, is known about dogs. But mostly, this is dogs in relations with humans.

A lot of Birke's article is about whether animals benefit from animal studies research. 'Does this research I read about take seriously the animals' point of view', she asks, 'or only the viewpoint of the humans thinking about animals?' (Birke 2009: 1). The question is

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

relevant fourteen years later not only because, some would argue, animal studies is no better placed to address an animal's point of view than it was when Birke raised it as an issue (see for example Blattner's (2021) rather sharp critique of animal studies), but also because part of the answer as to why one might not take 'seriously' an animal's point of view is that to do so would be to reinstate problematic, possibly anthropomorphic, conceptions of individual subjectivity, which a long history of philosophical, social science and humanities thinking has attempted to overturn (see for example Chapter 5 of this book; cf. Baratay 2022). I mention this quandary because it is pertinent to this book specifically, and because it is more generally indicative of why it might be difficult to conduct research that benefits animals. Animals are often 'invited in' to debates in which so much energy has already been expended defending or challenging long-standing theoretical preoccupations that it is ultimately simpler to sacrifice the animal to the debate than to change it. Species, in science, is one of these preoccupations. 'The individual', in the social sciences, is another. This leaves dogs in a particularly difficult place with regard to conducting research that benefits them, as I have argued throughout this book, because one key alternative to the individual in animal studies – relationality, entanglement, intersubjectivity – is precisely the defining characteristic of dogs' species story in science.

Even though it is impossible (and arguably undesirable) to cast these theoretical and philosophical preoccupations aside, it is surely worth being sensitive to how they shape and constrain what critiques and interventions are likely to be imaginable, and also, therefore, how important it is to try to reset at least some of the parameters. In the following, rather abstract, discussion, I will illustrate all the points I have been making here by tracing a very brief history of 'the individual' as it is understood, by social scientists and humanities scholars, to be connected to and embedded in modern science – and therefore why it is problematic – and one scientific counterpoint to this figure, the holobiont, which has been warmly welcomed in response. I also ask, however, where these debates leave the *actual* individual, as Alfred North Whitehead might put it: where it leaves, that is, the individual animal, with a specific 'point of view', to whom animal studies researchers, Birke argues, are accountable (Birke 2009: 3). I use Whitehead's work here for

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

two reasons. It enables me, first, to illustrate that there are ways to understand 'the individual', and even 'a point of view', that are not antithetical to relationality; and, second, that relationality itself can delimit an individual's potential. Having cleared this theoretical space, the rest of the chapter addresses some of the more practical and pragmatic implications of my analysis of dogs' species story in this book, and the directions that might follow from it.

'We have never been individuals'

It is no accident that modern science, which proceeds on the basis of the bifurcation of nature into subjects and objects (Whitehead 1985), should bind itself to a most problematic conception of the subject. The founding gesture of modern science, Jessica Riskin argues, is Descartes's. Not because Descartes did away with two of Aristotle's souls (the vegetative soul, present in plants, animals and humans, and the sensitive soul, present in animals and humans), or even because he introduced the idea of 'living machines'. Rather, for Riskin, it is because he introduced a mechanistic view of life *and at once posited an exception to it*, by retaining for humans Aristotle's rational soul. By this gesture, Descartes established the indivisibility of modern subjectivity and modern science:

> Seeing the world as a pure machine, lifting his thinking soul out of the world, even out of its own bodily interface with the world, Descartes accomplished the distancing of self from world that defines modern subjectivity, the sense of fully autonomous, inner selfhood, and modern objectivity, the sense of regarding the world from a neutral position outside of it. It was in Descartes's philosophy that modern selfhood and modern science created one another.
>
> (Riskin 2016: 61–62)

Descartes's aim was not to 'reduce life to mechanism' but 'to elevate mechanism to life: to explain life, never to explain it away' (Riskin 2016: 45). Nevertheless, it is by way of this mechanistic conception of life that animals (and indeed 'nature') are constituted as objects, and distinguished from the human subject. Whitehead demonstrates the inadequacy, if not the absurdity, of this bifurcation in the broader context of his critique of what he calls the materialist theory of evolution – which in fact, according to

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

him, is no evolutionary theory at all, because '[t]here is nothing to evolve' (Whitehead 1985: 136). Nothing, because the bifurcation of nature reduces the relations between subjects and objects to 'the bare relation between knower to known. The subject is the knower, the object is the known' (Whitehead 1967: 175). As a consequence, all meaning, experience and value are assumed to originate with the human subject, while nature appears as an altogether 'dull affair': 'soundless, scentless, colourless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly' (Whitehead 1985: 69). Or perhaps, in more contemporary parlance, the hurrying of material, endlessly, mindlessly (see Chapter 3 of this book).

Descartes's subject has bounced down the centuries, and down numerous units of scientific analysis. It is Haraway's modest witness, exemplified by Robert Boyle, 'the legitimate and authorised ventriloquist for the object world, adding nothing from his mere opinions, his biasing embodiment' (Haraway 1997: 24). It is the genetic individual, as described by the modern synthesis, who is characterised by 'autonomy and physiological unity', internal genetic homogeneity, and genetic uniqueness (Bernabé Santelices in Godfrey-Smith 2009: 85), and whose reproduction depends on the identification of individuals and their parents (Godfrey-Smith 2009: 69). It is the germ cell, which lies at the heart of a 'clean', self-contained theory of species self-replication, guaranteeing that offspring will be protected from genetic changes in the parent, as long as those changes 'do not affect the germ cells' chromosomes' (Tsing 2015: 140).

What all these figures (and there are many others) have in common is that, by way of their boundedness and autonomy, they are assumed or assume themselves to be 'protected from the vicissitudes of ecological encounter and history' (Tsing 2015: 140), and protected especially from the vicissitudes of relationality, of being in and of the world. It is into this specific context, a context in which worldly units take on, troublingly, some of the characteristics of the Cartesian subject (the subject constituted hand-in-hand with modern science), that the principle of symbiosis and the holobiont erupt. And they erupt not only into science. As Scott Gilbert, Jan Sapp and Alfred Tauber anticipate, part of the attraction of symbiosis lies in the challenge it poses to some of the axioms of majoritarian western philosophy (Gilbert *et al.* 2012: 326).[1] Evidence of

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

symbiosis, they write, is fundamentally transforming 'the classical conception of an insular individuality into one in which interactive relationships among species blurs the boundaries of the organism and obscures the notion of essential identity' (325). Although microbial and botanical sciences have long challenged 'the autonomous individual' and an 'individualist conception of the organism', '[t]he discovery of symbiosis throughout the animal kingdom' finally offers some resistance, 'even' within the zoological sciences, to that bastion tenet of genomic individuality: 'one genome/one organism' (327). '[A]nimals are composites of many species living, developing, and evolving together' (325).

Concepts such as symbiosis, or the holobiont, can be an '[incitement] to theory' (Tsing 2015: 38) because they reveal that no individual, 'in reality', is bounded and/or autonomous. An example of a holobiont might be a human or an animal, plus the bacteria and other microbial and eukaryotic species that the organism 'hosts' and without which it would lose 'functionality'.[2] They are an incitement to theory and, arguably, a confirmation of it, for by returning not only history, the contingency of encounterings and relationality to evolutionary biology, disciplines such as evolutionary developmental biology ('evo-devo') and ecological evolutionary developmental biology ('eco-evo-devo') support and offer further impetus to those analyses of the social world that are organised around, for example, contact zones, relatings and entanglements. In effect, the figure of the holobiont not only challenges and disputes the existence of the autonomous individual but also, seemingly, offers scientific 'proof' of heterogeneous, contingent and temporary processes of making-with, becoming-with, worlding-with etc. (Haraway 2008, 2016). As Haraway puts it:

> Critters do not precede their relatings; they make each other through semiotic material involution, out of the beings of previous such entanglements. Lynn Margulis knew a great deal about 'the intimacy of strangers', a phrase she proposed to describe the most fundamental practices of critters becoming-with each other at every node of intraaction in earth history.
>
> (Haraway 2016: 60)

'Encounter-thinking', whether in the biological or social sciences, posits that the world is different from what we thought it was. Just as 'we have never been modern' (Latour 1993), so 'we have never

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

been individuals' (Gilbert *et al*. 2012: 336). Instead, Gilbert *et al*. conclude, '[w]e are all lichen' (336) – i.e., associational.[3] Nature selects relationships (Gilbert *et al*. in Tsing 2015: 142).

And yet. To return to Birke's version of the question *cui bono?* (Star 1990: 43), one might ask how, from the 'point of view' of an animal, this version of the world differs from the one that it replaces, or whether it is the same story, differently told: animals are not individuals. In *How Forests Think*, Eduardo Kohn asks whether attention to relations, encounters and entanglements is an invitation to think about ethics and politics differently, or whether it an ethics or a politics in and of itself. On the one hand, he writes, '[t]he multispecies encounter is, as Haraway has intimated, a particularly important domain for *cultivating* an ethical practice' (Kohn 2013: 134, my emphasis). On the other hand, 'in the hopeful politics we seek to cultivate, we privilege heterarchy over hierarchy, the rhizomatic over the arborescent, and we celebrate the fact that such horizontal processes – lateral gene transfer, symbiosis, commensalism, and the like – can be found in the nonhuman living world' (Kohn 2013: 19). Kohn makes this point because he finds evidence of hierarchy – verticality, one might say – in the living world (19). But one also finds in the living world horizontal processes (as Kohn puts it), such as becomings, that do not necessarily bear positive ethical or political value.

The notion that horizontal processes, entanglements, relationality etc. are inherently ethical implicitly subtends much of my previous work (see for example Motamedi Fraser 2019). The more I have focused on animals, however, and specifically dogs, the more this position seems problematic to me, as this book has illustrated. My argument throughout the book has been that this story of relationality – or associationality – is very often a problem for dogs; that, where dogs are concerned, relationality itself has become reified, not only as a concept, but as a series of expectations and practices that shape what a dog should and must be; and that, as such, relationality is now potentially a violent abstraction that limits what dogs, and especially those dogs who live and work closely with humans, are able to become. This is a difficult conclusion to draw, however, for one can hardly return again to the very figure that has been instrumental in justifying centuries of violence against both animals and humans. For not only is Descartes's subject cleaved

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

from animals, to the extent that only he – that bounded, adult, autonomous, self-governing, white, male, bourgeois, heteronormative, able-bodied individual (to offer something of a caricature), replete with his box of 'god-tricks' (Haraway 1991: 188–196) – can truly achieve this separation, animality remains a key part of racist, sexist and ableist constructions of distinctions among humans. No amount of 'inclusion' can erase that 'originary' splinter, for it defines the normative human subject (Derrida 2008: 45). Herein lies the problem with liberal humanism, as Cary Wolfe summarises it, which has a 'penchant for the sort of "pluralism" that extends the sphere of consideration (intellectual or ethical) to previously marginalized groups without in the least destabilizing or throwing into question the schema of the human who undertakes such pluralisation' (Wolfe 2009: 568).

My argument in this book, therefore, obliges me to find a way to conceive of individuality (or singularity) differently, preferably without compromising relationality. I find that way in Whitehead's concept of endurance, and of an enduring concrete percipient. I will sketch out Whitehead's thesis very briefly here, for what it offers in itself, but also – to go back to Birke's question as to who benefits from animal studies research – because it offers a kind of guide by which to establish how something (research, in this instance) might become relevant to animals and also how it might be recognised as having been achieved.

Whitehead is best known for his argument, essentially captured in the title of his magnum opus, *Process and Reality*, 'that the actual world is a process, and that the process is the becoming of actual entities' (Whitehead 1978: 22). But this is only the half of it, for becomings perish, while actual entities, or societies, as Whitehead also sometimes calls them, endure. Whitehead gives the example of '[a] man, defined as an enduring percipient, [as] such a society' (Mays 2013 [1959]: 263). The word 'society' is significant here. In Whitehead's schema an 'enduring percipient' must be understood to be a society (or nexus) of societies, '[y]oking together all the way down' (Haraway 2008: 31). And all the way 'up', too, for 'there is no society in isolation' (Whitehead 1978: 90). '[T]he single organism', Whitehead writes, 'is almost helpless' (Whitehead 1985: 140).

Nevertheless, the fact that 'everything is connected!', as Martin Savranksy (2016: 90) drily puts it, does not mean that an enduring

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

percipient (a dog, say) experiences the entirety of the world. Rather, it is the connectedness of the world that experiences the singularity of the percipient, as Vinciane Despret explains in her moving account of extinction:

> What the world has lost, and what truly matters, is a part of what invents and maintains it as a world. The world dies from each absence; the world bursts from absence … When a being is no more, the world narrows all of a sudden, and a part of reality collapses. Each time an existence disappears, it is a piece of the universe of sensations that fades away.
>
> (Despret 2017: 219–220)

To understand a dog as an enduring percipient is to understand them to be both 'connected' and singular. That singularity derives not from a projection of a unique essence of individuality (as in the liberal humanist subject), but from the particularity of the processes of unification (particular processes, out of all potential processes, out of potentiality itself) that give rise to a dog. A dog is, in effect, 'the decision amid "potentiality". It represents the stubborn fact that cannot be evaded' (Whitehead 1978: 43). Although this specificity of existence is not 'proof of subjectivity', it does nevertheless define 'a point of view, a locus' (Latour 2005: 230). It is a temporary occupation of a position or, 'much more accurately … [it is] what keeps you busy' (Whitehead in Latour 2005: 229). This is how Whitehead makes it possible to speak of a point of view, without simultaneously implying that an anthropomorphic conception of the subject underlies it.[4]

The salient issue here, however, is that while Whitehead's enduring percipient, a dog, is connected to 'the world', not *everything* – not the everything that is connected – is relevant from that particular dog's point of view. Yes, when we analyse the society that is the individual dog, we find, as Gilbert *et al.* argue, a society of symbionts, for unification 'yokes' them, as Haraway puts it, indivisibly and irreversibly together.[5] But whether the specific modes of becoming of a society of symbionts, as they complete an animal's metabolic pathways, are relevant to that dog's experience of herself *as* an enduring percipient is an open question. And if it is relevant, then there is also the question of *how* it is relevant, or, by what selected mode of unification it becomes relevant. Does a

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

dog experience being a holobiont in the mode of a philosophical challenge to individuality? I doubt it. Could they potentially experience it in the mode of illness (as they would, if a microbe were to evade the immune system and become a cancer or pathogen)? Probably. Similarly, will a dog appreciate, as I have just argued, that their singularity 'is made up of myriad multiplicities of unification' (Donaldson 2013: 191)? Frankly, no. Will she appreciate that the significance of her singular unification is erased by the concept of species? In terms of its consequences, this is more than likely. In fact, it is why I give the epigraph of this book to Lynda Birke, who argues that while animals 'may indeed be supremely indifferent to the names we give them … they are not indifferent to the naming of oppression' (Birke 2009: 7).

In *Staying with the Trouble*, Donna Haraway writes that '[t]he fusion of genomes in symbioses, followed by natural selection – with a very modest role for mutation as a motor of system level change – leads to increasingly complex levels of good-enough quasi-individuality to get through the day, or the aeon' (Haraway 2016: 60). This is characteristically funny: nothing more than a comma separates this unexpected temporal leap from the day to the aeon. But it also points to a kind of disregard for quasi-individuality. It suggests that there is no difference between being a quasi-individual for a day or being a quasi-individual for an aeon, between being a particular, singular individual and being an individual member of a species. Part of the problem for animals, however, is that 'what it is to be an individual', or a quasi-individual, for a day is strongly affected by human perceptions of animals as aeonic individuals. It is in part *because* particular individuals are seen to be aeonic individuals – at some level all the same – that they often *cannot* get through the day. I opened this book with an account of Beth, who was euthanised for her disinterest in humans. *This* Beth could not be an aeonic dog. *This* Beth could not get through the day.

Despite the significant influence of Whitehead's work on contemporary social theory, the concept of endurance is often overlooked. One reason for this neglect might be that endurance has been used – by human scientists specifically, Isabelle Stengers argues – to validate what exists now, over what could be (Stengers 1999: 204). And it is true: the on-going iteration of 'now' is baked into Whitehead's concept of endurance insofar as endurance is, in

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

large part, the successful demand that new becomings comply to an 'order' that has already been established – to an order, in other words, that exists here, now, today.[6]

One might understand dogs' species story thus: as a largely enforced mode of becoming in the present, a pattern or an order of becoming, to which most dogs are obliged to conform and from which they depart at their peril. This particular mode of becoming – lured by a story that privileges the becoming of dogs with and through humans, a mode of becoming that is widely relayed in science, as well as in the popular domain, and which, in practice, bears daily upon and shapes the lives of individual dogs from their births through to their deaths – is less about novelty and difference, less about the boundless potentiality that is the vector for creative actualisation, and more about conformity to likeness. Endurance is both the product (achievement) of the becoming of the species 'dog', and the price paid by individual dogs.

Where violence lies

Disputes with the figure of the individual can, in my view, be problematic, given that the classification 'animal', and the classification of animals into species, depend in large part on the erasure of animals as individuals, which in turn contributes significantly to and legitimates the on-going war against them (Wadiwel 2015). 'The very definition of the creation act' (Stengers 2010: 6), as Haraway said in a joint seminar with Isabelle Stengers in 2006, constitutes creatures 'not as individuals but according to a "kind" that prepares them for use and classification by Adam and Eve … and justifies the dominion given to humans over everything else on earth' (Stengers 2010: 6–7). Or, as Henry Buller puts it: the 'challenge to [animal] individualisation … has been singularly useful to humankind … It is, after all, through this rendering plural of non-human "beasts" that *Homo sapiens* takes its dominant place in the driving seat of the anthropological machine and has done so ever since' (Buller 2013: 157).

Because classification, among other practices, renders animals 'plural', many theorists have rightly addressed how numbers or multitudes 'help us to stop thinking' (Despret and Porcher in Buller

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

2013: 158) and/or have sought to find ways to make the 'multitude without power' (Buller 2013: 156) ethically meaningful (for example Davies 2012). While I agree that the 'numbering up' of animals certainly contributes to their de-individualisation, some distinction between how different 'numbering-up categories' operate and what they achieve might be useful. For example: Buller cites James Serpell, who argues that '[t]reating animals as groups of organisms (populations, species, ecosystems and so on) creates ethical problems when it encourages people to ignore or devalue the well-being of individual animals comprising those groups' (Serpell in Buller 2013: 161). And Buller himself writes that 'there is no herd nor shoal – no "heap of stones" – without the individual animals that compose it' (Buller 2013: 158). The words 'comprise' and 'compose' are an important part of what Serpell and Buller are saying here, because they serve to connect these 'groups' – populations, species, herds etc. – to individuals by implying that such groups would be meaningless without the individuals who constitute them.

While this is usually the case as far as the concept of a population is concerned, for a population must at least pay lip service to being populated (I am not sure about herds or shoals or heaps), it has been the argument of *Dog Politics* that it is not often the case with regard to species concepts. Species concepts, as I have illustrated (see Chapters 3 and 6 especially), give no *reason* to recognise the particular individual animal because they gather together animals not on the basis of who they are, but of what they represent.[7] Just one representative, therefore, is enough. Or even, where extinct species are concerned, none is enough. Herein lies the atrocity of species thinking, and its injury: with no reason to recognise an individual life, and no reason, therefore, to recognise an individual death, where lies evidence of a life destroyed by violence? In her important analysis of how identity serves to create a cause for a death, and drawing on the work of sociologists Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, Despret writes that:

> a cause results from the collective work of production of an identity that aims to mobilize, in order to denounce and stop an injustice … What ties [deaths with causes] together is that they would not have happened if something had been done, if those who have been victims were taken into account, if their causes had been acted on behalf of.
>
> (Despret 2016: 82)

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

For Boltanski and Thévenot, statistics on the causes of human deaths 'desingularise' humans, because 'it is only through their deaths that victims are presently defined' (Despret 2016: 82). Despret gently objects. When it comes to the billions of deaths of food-farmed animals, 'desingularization does not operate in a consistent manner: animals that are killed are translated into pounds of meat, deceased humans into persons' (82). But perhaps food-farmed animals are not *even* desingularised by their deaths, for that would assume that they were perceived to be singular in life. Without the identity of an individual, is there a difference between the living and the dead? Can there *be* a cause of death?

In her book *Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question*, Bénédicte Boisseron argues that neither animals nor oppressed groups of people are perceived as individuals. Instead, '[a]nimals, women, blacks, and Jews become merely ideas and concepts, caught in a rhetoric of similes, analogies and metaphors' (Boisseron 2018: 22). If there is a difference, it is perhaps that the rhetoric of similes, analogies and metaphors in which animals are routinely caught is only very rarely called out, in the public domain, as a form or symptom of oppression. The idea of 'an exaltation of larks' or 'an ostentation of peacocks' or 'an unkindness of ravens' is more likely to be considered lyrical than it is to be perceived as lethal.

Species as story

In her splendidly titled article 'Bad with names', Brianne Donaldson points to the senselessness of the word 'animal', which 'spans fairy flies to blue whales' (Donaldson 2013: 182), and suggests that, '[a]s a common-place word in biology, agriculture, popular culture, law, and the humanities, it has lost accurate meaning' (186). This loss of *accurate* meaning does not equate with the loss of *all* meaning, however. On the contrary, the word 'animal' is electric with meaning, for it denotes, Jacques Derrida argues, 'all the living things that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, or his brothers' (Derrida in Donaldson 2013: 182). In my view, species categories operate rather in the reverse. They disguise their political work precisely to the extent that, mostly, they appear to mean nothing much at all beyond their 'accurate' meanings – by which I assume

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Donaldson means specific meanings – that are 'accurately' indexed to particular groups of animals. House sparrows, *Passer domesticus*. Dogs, *Canis familiaris*. Woolly mammoths, *Mammuthus primigenius*. It is this perceived accuracy, I think, that obscures the contribution that species thinking makes to the on-going exploitation and subjugation of living animals. Simply put, unlike the category 'animal', species categories appear to be relatively coherent, relatively empirical, and therefore less, or even not at all, political. Should a case be made, then, against species, as it is against 'animal'? I believe it should, although *how* to make that case, especially in a way that is of benefit to animals, deserves some reflection, for the problem of species is not purely conceptual. As I have argued throughout this book, species are stories that materially shape the lives of individual animals.

For example: Gilles Deleuze challenges the biological species concept by proposing that 'bodies change the most without any filial or hereditary modification at all … The symbiosis between wasp and orchid is not at all due to descent or genes but to the circumstances and context of bodies colliding and cooperating' (Donaldson 2013: 184). Or affecting and being affected. In his book on Spinoza, Deleuze argues that an animal should be defined not 'by its form, its organs, and its functions', but by 'the affects of which it is capable' (Deleuze 1988: 124). This contribution is welcome because it cuts refreshingly through and across species lines. It enables Deleuze to propose, for instance, that there are greater differences between a race horse and a plough horse than there are between a plough horse and an ox (Deleuze 1988: 124). But it is also problematic, because the revised categorisation of plough horses and oxen by way of affects is no more likely to recover the singularity of an individual animal than is species, for it does not appear to be much bothered with *this* plough horse or with *that* ox. I have argued throughout this book that the negation of the significance of the singular individual is one of the most devastating consequences of species thinking. For me, therefore, any critique of, or alternative to, species must necessarily have something to say to the individual.

But not *solely* to the individual! The reason Donaldson finds value in being 'bad with names' is because, for her, names are bad: because names and naming are too often a way, to return to Birke's analysis of Le Guin's story, of not communicating and not

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

understanding. Being bad with names, therefore, is a way of orienting oneself toward singularity. 'Our forgetfulness', Donaldson writes, 'may allow us to come to situations open to the demands of that moment, without recourse to prescriptive ethics or the fixed identities on which such ethics are based' (Donaldson 2013: 198). Although this too I very much welcome, I also think that more may be required – from 'the animals' point of view', as Birke puts it – than pitting species against singularity (and celebrating singularity), not least because the singularities of animals will be shaped by the names we call them. It does not seem possible to me, therefore, to forget. And even if it were possible, this is arguably not the moment for forgetting, as species concepts gain ever more traction, especially in the context of debates about anthropogenic climate catastrophe. Rather than forget species, I would argue that this is precisely the moment to make species visible and legible not as an 'accurate' classification, neutral and unbending, but as a *story*, decked with the power to frame, judge, legitimise and delegitimise animals' behaviours and, by extension, how they are treated; to make visible and legible that what matters about a species story is not its truth or falsity, but the forces it has the power to harness, and the modes of living and dying it facilitates and authorises. Although this attention to species stories risks giving new life and substance to the very category (species) it seeks to dismantle, the risk, I think, is worth it. Because unlike species thinking, species stories always lead back to individuals. Indeed, this is what they are: an invitation to ask how *this* individual's life is empirically and substantially shaped – how, even, it was ended – by the stories we are (or are not) telling.

'[A] focus on individual animals', Beth Greenhough and Emma Roe write, 'can be accused of misrepresenting the realities of animal lives, given many animals are rarely treated as individuals but as flocks of chickens, herds of pigs or tanks of exotic pet fish' (Greenhough and Roe 2019: 376). But this is the point: a flock is not a herd or a tank. How, exactly, does the story of a flock determine the life of *this* individual chicken, and how does it determine it differently from *that* pig in a herd or *that* exotic pet fish in a tank? Species stories may well have overlapping elements, but they will also vary, in their structure and content, and in their implications. Although relationality is the key driver of domesticated dogs' species story today, my guess is that it is unlikely to be the force

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

behind domesticated cats' species story, just as I think the predator status of dogs probably carries less significance in their story than does the prey status of horses in theirs (see for example Tomlinson (2024)). How do these differences bear on the individual animal? And how do they determine what modes of (re)individualisation are possible? The answers to these questions depend on empirical investigation.

For the love of a dog

> 'Tied up?', said the wolf: 'so you don't run Where you want?' – 'Not always; but so what?'
>
> (Jean de La Fontaine in Porcher and Lécrivain 2019: 113)

This is the epigraph of Jocelyn Porcher and Élisabeth Lécrivain's article, discussed in Chapter 4, which is entitled 'The wolf and the patou dog: Freedom and work'. In it, Porcher and Lécrivain object to the opposition between freedom and work. Elsewhere, Porcher and Sophie Nicod argue that there is a freedom in labour that can be contrasted to the 'costly freedom' of 'wildlife' (Porcher and Nicod 2020: 255) that animal liberationists propose for domesticated animals. Theirs is a disingenuous proposal, Porcher and Nicod add, for it 'hides the fact that our social, political and environmental constraints, as well as the economic system in which we live as a whole – capitalism – leaves no place for animals' (256).

Like the wolf, I too have a question: why should the relevant comparison be between a 'free' wolf and a 'working' dog? Why should it not be between how domesticated dogs live with humans now, and how they *could* live with and alongside us? By this question I hope to indicate explicitly that the argument in this book is not an abolitionist one. I do not share Gary Francione's view that humans are so exploitative, and the lives of domesticated animals so impoverished by that exploitation, that the only alternative is extinction (extinction of domesticated animals, mind, Francione says, not of humans). Among the very many reasons for not supporting Francione's position is the fact that extinction, as Nicolas Delon points out, 'does not repair the historical injustices of domestication' (Delon 2020: 174). 'Reconstructing our relations with [domesticated animals]', however, might (Delon 2020: 174).

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

How our relations with animals, domesticated and otherwise, might be reconstructed is an open and urgent question. Among other tactics and strategies, it is a matter for public debate. What I hope this book has illustrated, among other things, is that there is no reason at all – above all, no reason such as 'the bond' – that would justify the exemption of dogs from such a discussion. In the USA, Karla Armbruster argues, dogs may feel to some people like 'beloved canine "family members"', but 'from a societal perspective they are categorized as something closer to pigeons and rats: potential or actual nuisances, indulged only as the lifestyle choice or accessory of a human being' (Armbruster 2019: 118). This contrast between a beloved family member on the one hand, and a lifestyle choice and a nuisance on the other, is a common one. It is easy to criticise the latter two. The notion of a dog as a 'lifestyle choice' can be condemned on the grounds that it equates a dog with a consumer object, and also because it obliges the dog to live their life in the mode of an embodiment of a 'reason' that is not their own. (As does, of course, the notion of a dog as a devoted companion, or an animal model, or an exercise regime, or a play partner, or a form of therapy, or a drug detector.)

As for being categorised as a public nuisance; again, this can and should be deplored. It might be noted, for example, that while pigeons and rats are subject to all kinds of violences, including enforced sterilisation and extermination, they are not required to live their public lives under the pressure of extreme behavioural and emotional control in order not to be a 'nuisance'. So great are the constraints on dogs today that one almost feels obliged to ask whether mechanism has made a come-back: not in science, maybe, but on the public street and in public policy. For it appears that the only way that a dog could meet the demand to be 'under control' – not to fart here, not to sniff there, not to get too close, not to bark in fright, not to growl in anger, not to jump from surprise, not to run up in delight – is to be a machine.

But what I have tried to argue in this book is that profoundly problematic practices, such as the objectification and 'machinisation' of dogs, are not the only reasons why we should be motivated to reconstruct our relations with them, as Delon advises. The third conception of dogs that Armbruster identifies, of dogs as a 'beloved family member', is perhaps the most wide-spread

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

and intuitive source of 'evidence' for dogs' species story and the so-called bond that underpins it. Yet it is precisely *this* notion of dogs, of dogs as human kin, that poses, I think, a most dangerous threat to dogs today (especially to dogs in the Global North). In his book *Environmental Enrichment for Captive Animals*, Robert Young (2003) includes – unusually, especially given the date of publication – a chapter on companion animals. He begins with this statement, which I quote in full, because it exemplifies for me how obfuscating the love of an animal can be:

> Unfortunately, we have virtually no information on the welfare of these [companion] species within the home environment. People normally only become concerned about the welfare of their pet when it is physically injuring itself, for example, fur and feather plucking in mammals and birds, respectively. The reason why we do not investigate the psychological well-being of companion animals is something that is not understood. It has been suggested to me by various scientists that the topic is too controversial and emotionally charged to touch because we are often talking about a 'loved family member'. Thus, to imply the welfare of a pet animal is not good would be perceived by the owner as a direct criticism. There seems to be an unspoken sentiment that because we 'love' our companion animals then their welfare must be good. Yet, in the UK and North America the number of consultants dealing with behavioural problems is growing at a rapid rate; there are books on the subject in most languages and television programmes that specifically deal with such problems.
> (Young 2003: 76)

I wager that, over the past twenty years since this was written, the numbers of dog consultants, dog books and dog television programmes have increased in proportion to the tightening of dogs' species story. Love, as Young says, is too often mistaken for welfare. But where dogs' species story is concerned, the point extends still further, for here love, being loved by a human, is too often mistaken for life, for the meaning of a life for a dog.

Many people who live with dogs are likely to find something to identify with in Nigel Clark's description of a social life with domesticated animals. That life, Clark writes,

> can be seen to rest … primordially on a kind of mutual *dis*possession [rather] than on the possession of animals by human actors; a letting go of customary precautions and boundary maintenance on the part

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

> of each participating species. Whatever benefits and utilities might eventually emerge, any ongoing interspecies association … hinges on 'a gift of the possibility of a common world'.
>
> (Clark 2007: 57, emphasis in the original)

While I genuinely appreciate the spirit of Clark's dream here, it is difficult to imagine how living with dogs could be reconceived of in terms of a mutual dispossession, a 'letting go of … boundary maintenance'. Because to my mind, one of the greatest obstacles to building a 'common world' with dogs is exactly the naturalisation of the blurring of dog–human boundaries in dogs' species story – the *dis*respect for those boundaries. Dogs' species story justifies and legitimates that disrespect at every level, from imagining that a dog welcomes every human touch to the notion that it is the *raison d'être* of a dog to be loved by, or to work for, or to be friends with, or to play with, or to simply *be*, with humans.

Humans create dependencies in dogs, and then use dogs' species story to claim those dependencies as an intrinsic, evolutionary characteristic of dogs. This story, as I have tried to demonstrate in this book, is in fact a prescription for 'normal' dog behaviour, a prescription to which individual dogs frequently object. For me, therefore, the first step toward the reconstruction of human relations with domesticated dogs would be to recognise – in theory and especially in practice, in our hearts and in our houses (and on the street, and in the workplace, and in kennels and shelters, and in every place where dogs are found) – that these prescribed behaviours are what humans demand of dogs, and not the inherent property of each and every member of the species *Canis familiaris*. The first and foremost gesture of 'dispossession' is thus the dispossession of this story of 'the dog', which judges every individual dog by how well they play their part in it. It is not that we who love dogs should not love them. Only, that we might love dogs differently.

Notes

1 The biologist Scott Gilbert, who is closely associated with these developments, has been especially good at drawing out the implications of his work for philosophy. It is interesting to note that, as well as a Ph.D. in biology, Gilbert has an M.A. in the history of science.

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

2 All animals are part of such holobiontic associations, because '[t]here are no germ-free animals in nature' (Gilbert *et al*. 2015: 612).
3 Lichen, as Peter Godfrey-Smith notes, are a 'classic example' of symbiosis, being 'associations between fungi and various kinds of green algae' (Godfrey-Smith 2009: 73): 'the fungi reproduce, the algae reproduce, and the lichen does as well' (75).
4 This notion of an individual, as a specific mode of unification of and abstraction from becomings/relationality, is not entirely dissimilar to Vinciane Despret's concept of an agent as the product of a rapport of forces (see Chapter 5 in this book). The difference for me is the important role played by potentiality, which ensures that the unification of the subject/agent is not reducible to any particular spatio-temporal assemblage (Fraser 2006).
5 Whitehead writes: '[t]here are not "the concrescence" and "the novel thing": when we analyse the novel thing we find nothing but the concrescence' (Whitehead 1985: 211).
6 How is compliance to an order of becoming achieved? '[T]here is a memory', Whitehead writes, 'of the antecedent life-history of its [the event's] own dominant pattern, as having formed an element of value in its own antecedent environment' (Whitehead 1985: 131). That value not only inheres in an entity's 'specious present' (131), it also reaches out to its future. '[T]he uniformity along the historic route increases the degree of conformity which that route exacts from the future' (Whitehead 1985: 56; on the immanence of the future, see Whitehead (1967): Chapter 12). Which means: a history of conformity to conformity is itself an accrued and accruing value, making conformity cumulatively more difficult to overturn.
7 Except, as I have explored at various points throughout this book, insofar as an animal departs from species norms. But as Buller notes in his discussion of 'mass' farm animals, the becoming 'visible and identifiable' as an individual, by way of such departure, also often signals an animal's 'undoing': '[t]heir moment of singularity is also that of their culling' (Buller 2013: 156).

Mariam Motamedi Fraser - 9781526174819
Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 04/24/2025 07:19:12AM
via Open Access. CC BY-NC-ND
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/