

The predicament: your dog's life is in danger, and you have to decide whether to spend a significant amount of money and time on a remedy. One alternative, among many, is to spend an equivalent amount to help, even save, a number of human lives; the International Red Cross or a United Nations relief fund could use that money to feed the starving or rescue disaster victims. Will you, to put it most pointedly, choose the life (and comfort, and even luxuriance) of your dog over that of human beings? Though one alternative is clearly virtuous, and the other questionable, you—like most North Americans facing this choice—will likely choose the latter. And the choice you make, interestingly enough, calls into question the basic principles of ethics, political philosophy, and human primacy.

Confronted with this question, especially a generalized version about what the proper response should be, there seem to be two predicable answers. The first is an aggrieved “Well, I have a dog, would do many things for him/her, and refuse to accept such a judgmental interpretation of those kind of actions.” The second, oppositional response is “How can anyone value animal life over human life? Such people have lost their

moral bearings!” and presumes that to rehabilitate a dog in some way betrays humanity.

Neither of these responses is particularly interesting. It would be easy enough to explore the defensive psychology of the first or attack the naïve humanism of the second. Yet neither explains the gap between the two views, how one person can feel so strongly about an animal that another cares very little about. Rather than attempting to definitively resolve this predicament, which perhaps cannot be answered satisfactorily, this chapter instead uses it to ask particular questions about the presuppositions and causalities within political theory.

This takes place in three different ways. The first of these investigates how the relationships and connections between humans and dogs bridge profound differences, examining how those are individually and historically constituted. The second calls into doubt the assumed compulsory force of logic within political philosophy, especially the status of logical demands. The third looks at different ways of investigating the intellectual and ideological stakes, eventually arguing that fiction may be more attuned to the everyday complexities of these relationships than other explanatory forms.

That an individual might well prefer to spend money on dog food or veterinarian bills than on helping refugees, victims of natural disasters, or the poor is problematic for political philosophy; indeed, it can logically be extrapolated within most theoretical systems as not only radical injustice but a betrayal of humanity. The value in this relationship escapes political theory. Virtually every democratic theory holds that equivalence and formal equality, both of which are dependent on deep levels of mutuality, are the necessary precondition of just political relationships.

The centrality of equivalence and formal equality is misplaced, in part because any theory that insists on a rejection of some of the most important of human affinities is bound to fail both empirically and ideologically, and in part because these connections provide ways in which humans learn to care for and attend to the world around them. The failure of these theories is in their insistence on the commensurability of political actors, the necessity of “being understood” across the multiplicitous edges

of worlds, and their exclusive privileging of logical formalism. On the contrary, we can learn from those who love their pets that communication is not limited to abstract thoughts or human speech, but can and does happen in startling places and across surprising boundaries.

#### *CANIS FAMILIARIS*

William James describes the incommensurability and unintelligibility between people and dogs at an everyday level: “we to the rapture of bones under hedges, or smells of trees and lampposts, they to the delights of literature and art.”<sup>1</sup> Humans and dogs live in fundamentally different worlds, where the very methods of communication and connection are so disparate that they are untranslatable. A human, in other words, finds insensible much, if not most, of what is interesting to a dog, and vice versa; the two can communicate only through the most rudimentary of language, and even that often seems limited to command and obedience.

Yet, James argues, dogs and people can rely on, develop trust in, and even love, one another: “our dogs and ourselves,” he writes, are connected “by a tie more intimate than most ties in this world.”<sup>2</sup> That people and dogs cannot understand one another’s interests has little to do with their bond. Each fills needs in the other, for caring, companionship, physical and emotional affection, fun: that is the basis for their allegiance. Certainly these needs play out differently in each species and in particular contexts; certainly the needs of food and protection and shelter are paramount, and yet the emotional attachment is not reducible to those needs. Dog (and human) affinity continues beyond the ability to meet those wants. A toothless guard dog often remains part of a family.

Is proof really needed that what people feel for their dogs is actually love? Of course, such a claim is impossible to prove to those who would deny that such a complex emotion is appropriately applied to pets. But let a list of various behaviors, institutions, and items stand in for such a verification. Some are familiar and others strange, some are common and some rare, some are reported as outrages and others as paeans to humane behavior. Such a list would include, among other evidence: pet cemeteries; people leaving property to dogs and cats in their wills; canine health

insurance; cultural and emotional prohibitions against eating dog flesh; neighborhood flyers pleading for the retrieval of lost pets; the history of dog portraiture; pet therapy, including drug treatment; ceremoniously burying and memorializing dead dogs; books and poems “written” by dogs; sleeping with dogs (literally, though bestiality also belongs in this list); pet organ transplants; furniture designed for dogs; attempts to replicate dead pets through cloning; the bestowing of names upon animals; and popular depictions of dogs as central to children’s lives and emotional maturity, such as in *Lassie* or *Where the Red Fern Grows*.<sup>3</sup> All these practices, whether conventional or unorthodox, show the different (but often central) loves that people have for dogs.

That a wide variety of people love dogs is obvious. This love transcends class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, education, intelligence; it is limited by almost none of the subterranean fault lines that permeate the society of the United States.<sup>4</sup> People do not (usually) love dogs to the exclusion of all others, though some instances—such as when a last will and testament renounces human offspring in favor of Rex—come close. The love of dogs does not usually replace the love of others, but is often thought to encourage it. Marjorie Garber, for example, argues that it is through the love of dogs that we become fully human.<sup>5</sup>

Yet such canine conceptions are relatively recent. Historically, dogs were commonly set up as models of morality, not as objects of human love: their fealty was representative of the highest of human aspirations. The connection between Fido and fidelity is an ancient one, reaching at least as far back as Argos in *The Odyssey* (who is left uncared for while Odysseus is away and happily dies upon his return). John Adams praised those who have “a Fondness for Dogs,” for such feelings show “evidence of an honest Mind and an Heart capable of Friendship, Fidelity, and Strong Attachments . . . [which are] the Characteristicks of that Animal.”<sup>6</sup> In the eighteenth century, the faithfulness of dogs became the model for children’s poems and books, wherein children were encouraged to reproduce the virtues that dogs naturally possessed. Yet this did not translate to their desirability, except for pragmatic reasons. Keeping them solely as pets was limited virtually exclusively to the extremely wealthy, at least until the

late nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> To be able to keep an animal that was ultimately “useless” (in utilitarian terms) was reserved only for those who wished to mimic the behaviors of the upper classes.

But by the nineteenth century, dogs began to be seen within American and European cultures in a different way, as virtuous actors rather than insensate embodiments of abstract virtues. James Turner describes how the Victorians intellectually shifted from merely teaching children to note the steadfastness of dogs to making the claim that dogs were manifestly virtuous.<sup>8</sup> As the Victorian preference for emotion over abstract intellectualism emerged, animals began to be conceived of as morally superior to humans. A dog did not need to remind itself to be loyal and courageous, as did a man; it merely responded with its essential qualities. Moral actions were attributed to dogs: the ideal canine is one with the human ideals of compassion, loyalty, and bravery. If children could overcome their human susceptibilities, the Victorian romanticism asserted, they could approach the glory of dogs. Dogs, it was argued, “posses incontestably all the qualities of a sensible man,” whereas “man has not in general the admirable qualities of the dog.”<sup>9</sup>

For the Victorians (and their pet-loving contemporary descendants), the very goodness of dogs was seen as bred into them. The prolonged domestication of dogs as work companions, whether for mushing, hunting, or herding, had eliminated their natural ferocity and given them an inclination toward virtue. It was a triumph of humanity: the brutal, wild nature of the wolf had been remade into an inborn—one might even say “natural”—obedience. At a time when, thanks to Darwin, humans were increasingly seen as members of the animal family, dogs embodied the best of human creation; to love them was to love human mastery of animal nature.<sup>10</sup>

Thus loving a dog began to be seen as an intrinsic good, with such love thought of as evidence of a caring, kind, humane soul. The emergence of associations for the protection of animals in Britain and the United States and the development of the Audubon Society into a full-fledged political organization joined the emergence of pet ownership for the middle class as examples of the proper concern for the natural and the care of the

dumb: such concern, it was thought, elevated the humans who acted appropriately.<sup>11</sup> People who care about animals and nature, those who transcend their narrow self-interests in the service of the beasts who cannot even speak, such people were understood to be finer than those whose concerns are solely for themselves.

Much of this perspective remains in contemporary society, of course. There is even a commonly understood correlation between the treatment of pets and the treatment of other humans. For example, the skills and patience required for the proper training of a dog is popularly thought to be partially analogous to the skills and patience needed to raise a child. Caring for a dog is commonly seen by young couples as preparation for children; men walking puppies are hoped to be (or themselves hope to be seen as) prime candidates for fatherhood; people whose dogs are well behaved are assumed to also properly discipline their children. Often, too, the companionship offered by a dog is understood as a credible replacement for the departure of grown offspring. In all these cases, the dog functions as an ersatz human in the sense of an object of care giving: a repository for affection, guardianship, and love.

However, the love that people give to their dogs is not universally admired. While there are few who deny that this emotion is experienced as “love,” such love is often denigrated as an inferior imitation of true human emotion. Even some of the great defenders of animals suspect that such affection can border on the pathological. Konrad Lorenz, for example, held that a person “who, disappointed and embittered by human failings, denies his love to mankind in order to transfer it to a dog or a cat, is definitely committing a grave sin, social sodomy so to speak, which is as disgusting as the sexual kind.”<sup>12</sup>

Even those whose antipathy does not run quite as deep as Lorenz’s may still feel grave misgivings about allowing the love of pets a status equal to “true” love. In response to those who would judge the love one feels for a dog as a humanizing experience, Andrew Sullivan argues that such a relationship “is an inferior one, because dogs offer unconditional fidelity . . . and thus offer a much easier and less virtuous relationship than difficult humans.”<sup>13</sup> That is, because of the unrestricted nature of a dog’s affection,

it need not be earned in the same way as a human being's, and therefore lacks the arduous (and therefore superior civic?) negotiations that mark interhuman compassion. Needless to say, Sullivan ignores whatever similarities this may have to a parent-child relationship or to other relationships marked by unequal power or sentiment differentials.

Even within less stringent criticism, a tenuous suspicion remains that the emotional affinity between humans and dogs does not measure up to the standards of true *love*, that the term itself connotes an intensity of emotion that might better be termed "affection," "attachment," or "fondness." But the emphatic term "love" is, I believe, unavoidable. The energy, attention, and sacrifice that people give to their pets bespeak a far stronger affiliation than the other terms imply. In addition, that people themselves choose this term is telling; not only is the iconic phrase that serves as a title for this chapter familiar to all, but children and adults alike usually overtly profess love when speaking of their dogs. Finally, I can think of no other term which makes sense of the intensity of these relationships. People who claim to love their children or spouses or parents are trusted to best understand their own feelings; why deny this to other equally felt claims? The emotion that people have for their dogs should be called by no other name.

And so the love of dogs ends up in a tenuous spot in contemporary American society: known as vital to many human lives, sacralized for some, dismissed by others, cheered by the culture at large (witness the sales of Elizabeth Marshall Thomas's *The Hidden Life of Dogs*),<sup>14</sup> roundly derided by the culture at large (witness the standard filler newspaper article snickering at the new dog-oriented store, trend, or drug), while—above all—the affections for these animals in our midst endures. Fully assessing what to make of humans' love of dogs seems virtually impossible, but one thing is clear: dogs are loved.

#### POLITICAL SUBJECTS

Rather than speaking of dogs specifically as pets (though the subject will return), let us turn to the human side of the equation. Political philosophy, in investigating the creation and legitimacy of power, must necessarily

address relationships between human beings. Political philosophers intend to ascertain the moral and logical underpinnings of these kinds of problematic questions: what, actually, are the political connections that people owe to one another, and what are the limits to these connections? So in this section I also turn to two fields related to (some would argue subsumed by) political philosophy: ethics and animal rights. The first restates the fact of human attention to dogs as a moral question: *ought* people treat dogs better than people? The second asks a similar but slightly different question: *ought* nonhumans have moral and legal standing? But, ultimately, the answers that these approaches give are unsatisfactory, for the answer in both cases (though there may well be one, or many) does not necessarily resolve anything.

Michael Oakeshott took the problematic nature of political thought seriously, positing a fundamental rupture within its very essence. In his essay “A Philosophy of Politics,” Oakeshott notes that political philosophy “must be a reasoned and coherent body of concepts,” that its very existence as philosophy is dependent on its claims to logic and rationality.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, he notes that political philosophy has another standard to meet: that of conforming “to the so-called ‘facts of political life,’” those empirical aspects of human reality that are, after all, the object of its inquiry.<sup>16</sup> For Oakeshott, these two charges will often be in conflict, splitting political philosophy against itself; when this happens, he argues, the responsibility of political philosophy is ultimately to the latter. Unlike pure philosophy, which is not bound by relevance or tangibility, any adequate theorizing about politics must primarily be about the lived, human experiences of the political realm.

To follow Oakeshott here, then, in trying to understand the ethical and political constitution of people, it is more important to attend to how they behave than how they think they should behave (or, especially, how theorists argue they should think and then behave).<sup>17</sup> One of the implications to be examined in the following pages is that such behaviors are not necessarily logically integrated and causally ordered by the political actor. This is not to say that they are necessarily oppositional: many people would not see support of their pets as contrary to the safeguarding of human life. But

their actual comportment shows that they may often choose the former and disregard the latter.

Yet many, if not most, political theorists continue to treat the function of philosophy as though a politically responsible and ethically coherent conscience follows a careful pattern, first creating a hierarchy of ethical commitments, then correlating those to possible behaviors, and finally acting appropriately. What becomes apparent from a range of them is the overwhelming degree to which this logical causality is presupposed. From basic economic theories to complex ethical systems, this presumption underlies virtually all conceptions of how logic, evaluation, politics, and ethics work together.

Of course human actions and attachments fail to follow these sorts of logics. To return to the example with which this chapter began, people are not unaware that the time, money, and energy that they spend on their dogs could make life better, or even possible, for human beings somewhere in the world. Nor is it the case that they hold an abstract conception that dogs are more deserving of concern and comfort than humans, as though they only need the truth of morality to be spelled out for them to behave in a properly principled manner. Even with this knowledge, they commit time and resources to nonhuman animals, overriding their supposed obligation to the human race. If indeed universalized ethical commitments were the absolute determinants of human behavior, such people would be committing grave errors of omission, and would readily change their behaviors once the proper ethical course was pointed out to them.

Political theory, by Oakeshott's standards, should be concerned with people's actual choices rather than those a philosopher thinks they ought to make. And yet, for all the practical criticisms of ethical philosophy from a political standpoint, most of these critics methodically, even painstakingly, construct the same instrumentalist conceptions of reason and action. These include, but are not limited to, liberalism (such as that of John Rawls), utilitarianism (as presented by Richard Brandt), and libertarianism (as propounded by Robert Nozick).<sup>18</sup> In each of these cases, the philosophical construction of the ethical system is logically sound, more or less, and yet leads to conclusions that, while analytically

following from the premises asserted, are profoundly antithetical to the everyday ethical standards of virtually all people. Admittedly, it is intellectually interesting to conclude, as Rawls does, that the principle of “desert” (e.g., whether people get the incomes they deserve or the punishments they deserve) should have no place in politics, or to conclude with utilitarians that it is logical that “our duty to our own children is not fundamentally different from our duty to all children,” but such stances directly conflict with political and ethical life as understood by the vast majority of people.<sup>19</sup>

In fact, political philosophies qua philosophies assume that the analytical aspect of the “reasoned and coherent body of concepts,” in Oakeshott’s words, are more important than the experiential disconnects between those concepts: that syllogism trumps reality. Indeed, as Michael Smith has convincingly shown, even when people make certain moral judgments, such judgments do not necessarily motivate such people to act in accordance with them.<sup>20</sup> For example, even if one strongly believes that humans are more important to protect than are dogs, one may not necessarily act that way. That someone thinks (or even argues) for a certain behavior’s rightness has no essential correlation with that person’s actions.

G. E. Moore, noting this distinction, argues that logic therefore has nothing whatsoever to do with moral actions; for Moore, logic is best left solely as an academic puzzle. In response, Mary Midgley has shown that Moore was wrong, at least within everyday life: people can and do use rationality to change their emotional states.<sup>21</sup> But the fact that they *can* do so (and actually sometimes do so) does not mean they *must* do so, nor even that they do so often; and without such a normative directive, each of the forms of political philosophy noted above fails. Bernard Williams attacks the notion of ethical behavior as categorical—that is, he does not think that philosophical considerations can (or should) lead to the conclusive governance of behavior. The fact that historical and societal conditions authorize certain ethical outlooks above others provokes skepticism, admittedly, but it is “a skepticism that is more about philosophy than it is about ethics.”<sup>22</sup> If, as Williams holds, the rationalistic standpoint of philosophy and the lived experiences of ethics are not necessarily commen-

surate, then there appears to be an inherent problem in the common and academic view that logic underlies ethical contention.

A brief reiteration of a certain aspect of a well-known animal rights debate can highlight this problem. Peter Singer, among others, has pointed out that the grounds for any specific claim to rights based on a specific attribute of humanity are intrinsically problematic; there is no specific quality such as intelligence, language, or self-awareness which is felt by all humans (including newborns, those with mental impairments, and the terminally ill: what have become known in animal-rights discourse as “marginal cases”) and which is not in some way exceeded by some animals.<sup>23</sup> Since it thus follows that humanity as a whole is not a privileged category, Singer concludes, humans owe some degree of consideration to nonhuman animal existence. Some theorists who disagree with Singer point out that such a position could justify the breeding of humans with brain capacity adequate only for minimal bodily functioning; under Singer’s view, they argue, there could be no ethical opposition to the sale of the meat and organs resulting from this breeding. That we find repellent the eating of human flesh, even from mentally defective humans, they argue, logically compels us to privilege all forms of humanity over the nonhuman.<sup>24</sup>

This is, of course, a highly simplified version of this debate, but it will suffice here for my concerns. For I am less interested in which side has a legitimate argument (both seem to) or the conclusions each draws (both seem drastic and counterintuitive) than I am in examining the use of philosophical deduction in each. The role of logic for either viewpoint, and a host of others in this debate, is seen as the absolute condition upon which concrete public and personal decisions must be made. Both sides understand epistemology as fundamental to ethical behavior: you believe X, of course, and as Y follows logically from X, you therefore must believe Y. Though you think you believe Z, it is shown that Z is incompatible with Y, and therefore you do not, cannot, truly believe Z. Plugged into these syllogisms are various claims about animal rights, human morality, and infant justice, but the causal nature of the logical argument is simply assumed.

Some in political philosophy have tried to avoid this dominance by

displacing or at least reapportioning the station of logic in human judgments and evaluations. Jürgen Habermas, for example, dismisses the notion of humans as discrete, unencumbered political and social beings; instead, he privileges intersubjectivity in his theory of communicative action.<sup>25</sup> In doing so, he places human relations, not abstraction, as the central constituent of existence. The reasons he does this, and the criticisms of those reasons, are well known. Most profoundly, Habermas humanizes ethics and politics by emphasizing the personal interactions that can make up communities, norms, and standards. And yet this solution does not solve the ethical conundrum of the money spent on veterinary medicine any more than does the formulation of a transcendental ethics, for Habermas's intersubjectivity is always and necessarily human; there can be no intersubjectivity unless there is a basic recognition of the self in the other. "Subjects," he argues, "who reciprocally recognize each other as such, must consider each other as identical [as subjects]; they must at all times subsume themselves and the other under the same category."<sup>26</sup> Without the primacy of the subject (that is, without the category of the human that supersedes all other claims), intersubjectivity lacks the ability to stake a moral claim on people. This arises, in part, from the dominance of universalism in his thought, as well as that of his followers such as Seyla Benhabib.<sup>27</sup> For by making all subjectivity equally applicable to all humans, he and they must in turn profoundly differentiate the human from the nonhuman.

Can any philosophies, then, help make sense of this question of dogs? There are two twentieth-century strains of philosophical thought that encourage an escape from these limitations.<sup>28</sup> Not coincidentally, both of these trajectories move away from analytic deduction and toward experiential location.

The first, the loosely associated classification of "existentialism," understands the subject as grounded not in its self-identity but in the conditions of its existence. For this approach, the relationships within life provide the ultimate formulations and adjudications of meaning, truth, and ethics. In the thought of Karl Jaspers, for example, "the 'thrown' or irreducibly situated character or our being-in-the-world and our being-with-others

is the guarantee of, rather than the obstacle to, our existential freedom.”<sup>29</sup> Selves, always in relation to others, are created by (and themselves create) significance from acts of care and consideration. Heidegger situates care at the center of his philosophy. In *Being and Time*, he posits “care” as the “formal existential totality of *Dasein*’s ontological structural whole.”<sup>30</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, in emphasizing the ethical implications of such an orientation, concludes that our own freedom is possible only with our struggle for widespread human freedoms.<sup>31</sup> And Arendt finds the very “condition” of humanity in its activities with the world: work, labor, and action.<sup>32</sup>

The existentialist’s concept of existence, however, remains firmly wedded to the human. For each of these authors, the character of the world, however it situates and is in turn situated by human existence, is important exactly insofar as it relates to human existence. Human relations, after all, are the subject at hand. And to that point each privileges the interhuman interaction over the “thingness” of the nonhuman.<sup>33</sup> Martha Nussbaum, who goes even further in recognizing the centrality of love in the constitution of identity in connections, still must rely on the final word in the following quotation: “Love is not a state or function of the solitary person, but a complex way of being, feeling, and interacting with another person.”<sup>34</sup> The existential focus upon the located nature of being does allow for love’s central place in ethical outlooks, but limits the recognition of being to other humans.

The second group of philosophers who have profoundly challenged the limitations of universalist subjectivity—and those who have come closest to the question at hand—have been feminist theorists, especially those from the strain of feminism influenced by Carol Gilligan’s and Nel Noddings’s “ethic of care.”<sup>35</sup> Like existentialism, such philosophies begin from the epistemological assumption that the located nature of subjectivity is primary to human existence, but add that such located natures are realized more completely (at least in most instances in Western societies) within the experience of women and girls, especially the giving and receiving of nurturance.<sup>36</sup> Gilligan, for example, contends that when people are identified primarily in terms of “self-discovery and self-recognition,” “the language of relationships is drained of attachment, intimacy, and en-

gement.”<sup>37</sup> When the concepts of care and attachment are seen as fundamental, instead, humans become communal creatures, reliant on trust and connection above autonomy and self-interest.

Such an approach is not specifically antirationalist (at least not usually); in large part, it is the opposition between reason and emotion that is being critiqued.<sup>38</sup> That reason excludes emotion, that its most ardent defenders see emotional connection as threatening the very basis of rationality, has historically eliminated these emotional qualities from the ambit of philosophy.<sup>39</sup> Instead of conceiving of analytic rigor and universalized moral rules as the goal of philosophy and ethics, these critics argue, we need to discover and discuss how “commitments occupy a deeper stratum of our moral psychology than do moral obligations.”<sup>40</sup> Nor is the ability and consideration of care necessarily determined by gender. Joan Tronto explicitly decouples any essential link, noting that even though the majority of caring values are associated with “the feminine,” caring can include a wide, diverse range of practices.<sup>41</sup>

Yet, similar to Habermasian communicability and the varieties of existentialism, humans remain the objects of virtually all renditions of care ethics: family members provide the archetypal examples, followed closely by friends and group members.<sup>42</sup> Taking other, nonhuman forms of care into account is rare.<sup>43</sup> One exception is notable, both for taking pet relations into ethical account and for its subtlety. Chris Cuomo and Lori Gruen overtly theorize human relations with “companion animals” and parallel many of this chapter’s themes by arguing that friendship is often an essential component of these relationships, and that moral and political traditions ignore and deny the reality of those friendships.<sup>44</sup> They argue that by attending to such relationships, feminists can see the similarities between oppressive gender binary relationships and oppressive species binary relationships.<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, their goal is to overcome “moral distance” by recognizing the correspondence between the animals we love and the animals we eat: that we can “learn to see nonhumans as beings that deserve our moral perceptions, . . . shift from viewing them as background or mere food to seeing them as enablers of our own abilities to bridge moral distance, to cross boundaries, and to expand our moral orientation.”<sup>46</sup>

In other words, even those who are most interested in theorizing the relationships between humans and animals continue to seek logical lessons from those relationships, and to apply those lessons in particularly normative, even obligatory, ways. If we do indeed love our pets, to continue this example, we must stop eating animals which are essentially similar to them.<sup>47</sup> That is, we are obligated to these experiential understandings and logically extrapolate them to the larger world. Even when specifically about care of animals and the environment, the implications of such outlooks are judged insofar as they fit a generalizable necessary change. Certainly to do so is admirable and no doubt ethical. But what becomes of such an argument if its logic fails to command obedience in human behavior, if people can and do love certain animals and eat others simultaneously?

#### DOGS, ANIMALS, HUMANS

There seem to be two primary responses to the dilemma with which we began, the insufficiency of which these specifically philosophical approaches illuminate. The first (call it the “humanist” critique) is to excoriate the dog owner for misunderstanding how a personal allocation of resources in favor of a dog’s health betrays responsibility to other human beings. Choosing a dog’s veterinary care over human life, it is claimed, equals failing to fulfill necessary political and ethical responsibilities. The second (the “animal rights” critique) extrapolates from the responsibility felt by the pet owner to a sense of responsibility to animals in general, or at least to animals of comparable cognitive status. That one can recognize the worth of a dog means that one must therefore also recognize the value of the animals constantly slaughtered for no higher purpose than culinary pleasure.

What both of these approaches share, as I have argued, is the erroneous presumption that abstract categorical expressions of ethical responsibility must predominate over personal and quotidian emotional existence. Or, to put it more simply, that logic trumps love. When Singer or Tom Regan hypothesizes conflicts between animal life and human life, even these militant defenders of animals argue that, philosophically, human

life must take priority. In this they agree with those who dismiss the possibility of animal rights.<sup>48</sup> And yet as our veterinary example shows, this is not necessarily the case; people may well choose their pets' lives over the lives of distant and unfamiliar humans.

It may well be, logically, that those who eat meat should indeed have no compunctions about eating dogs, even their own dogs. Of course, such an argument will prove attractive only to those whose affinity for logic exceeds their affinity for dogs. Those whose love of pets is genuine and fervent may well recognize the logic of one or more of these arguments while continuing to love their dogs, eating meat, and showing relative indifference to abstract humans (and, not irrelevantly, showing even more indifference to the other animals killed to make dog food). How can we—as writers, as readers, as political theorists—make sense of these logical disconnections? The final pages of this chapter attempt to uncover how such love can coexist with humanity (and humane-ity); what is it about the love of animals, in other words, that can transcend both the rigors of logic and the demands of the vast majority of political and ethical philosophers?

One way to begin to answer this question is to note the attitudinal differences toward dogs that are pets and dogs in general. The tenor of affection toward a particular animal is far more intense than it is toward a generalized category of animals. The specific connection between an owner and a pet can be so intense that it overwhelms linguistic and spatial boundaries. The ethnographers Arnold Arluke and Clinton Sanders, for example, have studied the ways in which different sets of humans reinforce or break down the divide between humans and animals.<sup>49</sup> One set may reaffirm it (e.g., animal researchers) while others see it in necessary but problematic ways (e.g., shelter workers). Arluke and Sanders note how pet owners often transgress this division, for example, when deciphering symptoms to veterinarians. These elisions of the distance between pet and owner can be subtle, as in explanations of a pet's moods ("She's upset that we have a new baby"), or blatant, as when the dynamic between them is spoken for dyadically ("We aren't feeling well today), or even transposing speakership from the human to the dog ("Oh, Doctor, are you going to give me a shot?").<sup>50</sup>

On the other hand, it would be misleading to assume the likelihood of a similar connection with distant or previously unknown animals. People virtually never feel that dogs in general are equal to humans. There is an important and popular endorsement of the distance between dogs generally and particular pets. Many people support the efforts of animal shelters to decrease the numbers of feral dogs by euthanizing (that is, killing) them; few would support similar treatment of homeless and impoverished humans.<sup>51</sup> Not that they want their particular pets killed, but they do regard a (random, unowned) dog's life as inferior to that of a (random, unconnected) human being.

Of course, these conceptions are not totally separate; dogs as pets and dogs as animals bleed into one another. For many, dogs have a semisacred position below humans but above most other animals. Contemporary reluctance to recognize dog flesh as meat exemplifies this. This ambiguous stature has been in place for many years: witness Captain James Cook's reluctance to eat dog when it was offered to him by Tahitians (though, after consuming it, he was gracious enough to allow that the taste of "South Sea dog was next to an English Lamb").<sup>52</sup> Thus the European prohibition against dog eating in the eighteenth century was not a full-blown *tabu*, but merely a common presumption. In the contemporary United States, however, this status is most clearly seen when it is violated. When a Hmong immigrant sacrifices a puppy to save his wife from evil spirits in Southern California, he is arrested for felony charges of animal cruelty.<sup>53</sup> Greyhounds may be used for racing (and killed when they are no longer serviceable) but this practice is under increasing pressure, outlawed by populations untroubled by horseracing.<sup>54</sup>

These examples point to a curious aspect of dog love: its particularity. To outlaw their consumption or their racing is to treat dogs as a class different from other animals. Clearly, a kind of generalization of the category "dog" as different from, say, "pig" has occurred in American culture. But dogs are not usually loved in general; in the veterinary example beginning this discussion, it is the specificity of a particular dog that is loved. And yet that specificity leads to general implications which outstrip the specific example: dogs exist not only as individual beings, but as a classificatory

category. One does not need to describe *why* one loves one's dog; that it *is* one's dog is enough.

The specific relations of dogs to humans also complicate the political nature of their social position. As pets, as owned animals, they are necessarily in a servile position within a household. A "natural" order of domination is always at play in the relationships between humans and dogs. There is clearly an imbalance of power inherent in pet ownership; that one party controls access to food, the timing of exercise, and the propriety of play (both temporally and spatially) bespeaks a clear domination. Indeed, the language of control seems troublesome for many who want to exalt the relationship between people and pets. Such exaltation often results in the rhetorical reversal of ownership, recourse to terminology such as "companion animals" and "guardians," and the understanding of pets as mystic and transcendental.<sup>55</sup>

Many have been happy to connect the imbalance of power between canines and humans with other, equally "natural" forms of authority between humans. Racial and gender analogies are less common than they used to be fortunately, but there are still plenty of commentators who draw similarly fatuous parallels: "the dog clearly flourishes in a regime in which he is 'dominated'—kept in order, like children in school, which many psychologists as well as teachers and the children themselves will explain they prefer: they want to be controlled."<sup>56</sup> Such a justificatory theory premises far too much about both children and dogs. But without entering the territory of exculpation of dominance, we can indeed note its presence in pet ownership.

Thus one way, albeit a dangerous one, to think about the role of dominance in pet keeping is to recognize the possibility, variety, and validity of love within and throughout severe imbalances of power. That such a conception of love is politically troublesome does not mean that it has no legitimacy in human's lives (it clearly does) nor that those ethical and philosophical systems that want to exclude such a relationship from the proper channels of meaningful relationships are right to do so (they are not).

The questions of whether or not the human domination of dogs is "nat-

ural” or “right” or “necessary” are not the ones that are so threatening for traditional philosophy; the language of ethics and political subjectivity are designed for precisely these kinds of questions. Perhaps, as against the liberal traditions which underlie contemporary Western politics, equality in most respects may be neither possible nor optimal. Liberalism famously particularizes citizenship to a strange, socially disembedded, competent, and rational adult (who is also usually presumed to be white, male, autochthonic, and educated). The ideals of republicanism, similarly, presume nondomination as a central goal of governance and politics.<sup>57</sup> What makes the humanist and the animal rights approaches seem to be the only traditional answers to the veterinary dilemma is the unwillingness for philosophy to recognize the emotional connections between humans and their pets. That such strong connections exist across the registers of powerful and vulnerable, human and nonhuman, is troublesome not merely for the role of domination in these relationships, but for the ways in which they put the very idea of a privileged human subjectivity into question.

Clearly the humanist position rejects the strength of these connections, dismissing them as sentimental or even anthropomorphism. But what is surprising, and indicative of the stakes involved in such a discussion, is the extent to which the animal rights approach dismisses it as well. Peter Singer, for example, disclaims any interest in love. He goes so far as to state that he does not love animals, that his arguments for animal rights rest entirely upon reason, which is “more universal and more compelling in its appeal.”<sup>58</sup> Love for an animal, in other words, is not reasonable in that it cannot command obedience to its conclusions in the way that (he assumes) rationality does. This is not to say that Singer does not love animals (or that he does not hate them), but that he finds such emotive registers irrelevant to ethical arguments and, hence, to ethics.

The idea that caring for an animal can so strongly affect humans (even those humans who are philosophers) intrudes upon the primacy of reason, and thus on humans as reasoning beings. The moment when Nietzsche throws up his arms about a horse being viciously beaten and starts to cry, it is commonly believed, is the beginning of his descent into madness. Peter Singer thinks he knows that logic, not love, compels people to act

and to sacrifice. Deprived of its coercive force, logic would be something else, something less powerful, something that would not demand action. People may recognize logical specifications and yet still make choices that slight those specifications; this common practice has long been the bugbear of normatively inclined philosophy.

Additionally, recognizing that animals may take preference over humans at certain times also profoundly disturbs the centrality of mutuality in the presumed conceptions of political subjects. For the essential tenet of liberal politics (as well as virtually all antiliberal politics) is the primacy of the citizen. Those marginal to the status of citizen provide the grounds of debate over issues of equality, rights, and political participation, for example, past questions about women and slaves and contemporary questions regarding minors and the imprisoned. Yet these debates concern the boundaries between the human and the citizen. How much more dramatic are the debates over the boundaries of the human?

The problem common to these approaches is simple: all presume that logic drives action and ethics, that ethical and political theories should strive above all for analytic internal coherence. If philosophy, even (or especially) ethical and political philosophy, provides little help in answering this question, then other types of writing may prove more useful. An easy reversal, however, will not do; merely assuming that dogs are equal to people would not help understand people's political commitments and behaviors either. The spoony narratives of pet owners, for example those who refuse to speak of their "ownership" of animals or who look to their pets for spiritual guidance, are just as amblyopic as those who deny the love of animals entirely.<sup>59</sup> Instead, I turn to the novel, specifically a novel which dramatizes the connective, even redemptive, powers of dog love.

When J. M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* begins, the protagonist, David Lurie, is a university professor incapable of love; by its end he is an unemployed volunteer at an animal shelter whose main responsibility is the disposal of dog's bodies.<sup>60</sup> In the pages between, he undergoes humiliation, assault, incomprehension, and ultimately a kind of rebirth. Coetzee, a novelist for whom relationships between humans and animals are central moral concerns, places his protagonist in the metaphorical position

of a dog in his world, a location from which he can learn what it means to love.

Lurie sees himself as a clear-thinking, righteous, and self-contained human; occasionally bewildered by his urges, it is true, but with a categorized understanding of the order of the world and an articulate moral outlook. He is, in other words, a fully rational being. And he is not prone to transformation: in the beginning pages of the novel, he is convinced that his personality is “not going to change; he is too old for that,” his “temperament is fixed, set” (2).

It is not until his world has ceased to make sense to him on his terms that he begins to realize the tenuousness of his identity and existence (at the same time, not coincidentally, as the “rise of lawlessness” in post-Apartheid South Africa). Dismissed from his job for seducing an undergraduate, Lurie goes to live with his estranged daughter Lucy in the provinces, where both of them are attacked by unknown local men. Lucy is raped and impregnated. His rationality has led him to a position where he no longer comprehends his daughter, his neighbors, humanity, or himself, where his disgrace is complete: “I am living it out from day to day, trying to accept disgrace as my state of being” (172).

Coetzee repeatedly draws parallels between this disgrace and the lives of dogs. Canines are not privileged here; Lurie and Lucy are forced to recognize that their state of disgrace is not a redemption. Before they are attacked, Lurie likens being controlled by desire to the situation of a dog, a dog which “might have preferred being shot” (90). By the novel’s end, as Lucy puts it, they must learn to live with “nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.” To which Lurie replies, “Like a dog” (205).

But Lurie becomes involved with exactly such animals, dogs in an animal shelter where he volunteers to help put them to death. The dogs for which Lurie ends up caring (in all the complexity of that term) are not exactly alive, but neither are they dead. Within his life, the pragmatic purpose of dogs has proven ineffective. The guard dogs which are meant to protect him and his daughter have failed. Working at Animal Welfare, however, he discovers a need to care for the dogs being killed; not to keep them from death, but to make their last moments as pleasant as possible

and to care for their bodies beyond what is necessary. Rather than merely leaving the animals at the dump, for example, Lurie incinerates the bodies himself. “He may not be their savior,” Coetzee writes, “but he is prepared to take care of them once they are unable, utterly unable, to take care of themselves” (146).

It is precisely the particularity of the dogs that Lurie begins to notice and care for. He considers himself an antisentimentalist, and the novel is far from a sentimental one, but this caretaking becomes central to his meaning, to his identity. If Lurie is to be saved, Coetzee implies, it is not through grand gestures or even art; it is, instead, through the tending of others, non-human others.<sup>61</sup> Emotionally, Coetzee has crossed what Ian Hacking calls the “species boundary,” where he has become attuned to the possibilities of “sympathy between some people and at least some animals.”<sup>62</sup> By the end of the novel, this is all the choleric, superior, and self-centered protagonist has learned, and yet it may be enough: “He has learned by now . . . to concentrate all his attention on the animal they are killing, giving it what he no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name: love” (219).

In Coetzee’s work, dogs are both the debasement and the expiation, at least in this final possibility of love. In these cases, dogs are neither political actors nor subjects of politics. They are, instead, *actants*: nodes of love where the intersections of love, intensity, proximity, belonging, and interspecies relationships interwork one another.<sup>63</sup> But is it only the love of dogs which upends the presumptions of human centrality? How far does our recognition extend? What if, in other words, these attitudes are not limited to our affection for dogs? Perhaps they extend to things that seem even more distant from humans than dogs, not merely those species with whom we share our homes, but also those with which we share other things: attitudes, appetites, even space. Might we, following Christopher Stone’s groundbreaking legal work, even need to ask if trees and other natural objects should have legal standing, if political recognition should transcend humans and human constructs?<sup>64</sup> That we give legal recognition to human abstractions such as states and corporations shows that absolute individual humanity is not a necessary prerequisite for political, legal, and ethical status, he argues. So what prevents the recognition of

other entities which can be equally important, both to humans and in their own right?

Moreover, it is easy to doubt that such emotional connections are limited to organic, living beings. Some theorists of animal rights have drawn critical parallels with the human interest in cars: cars are certainly valued by their owners, who may well value the qualities of some cars more than others.<sup>65</sup> As troubling as the line between our selves and our dogs, then, is the line between our selves and our things. Fanciful as it may seem, however, the idea of constitutive and identity-related political theories about things is not inconceivable. Timothy Kaufman-Osbourne, for example, has investigated the ways in which objects at specific historical and cultural times actively gender those who “use” them.<sup>66</sup> To see politics in the use of a tire iron or the wielding of an eggbeater in mid-twentieth-century American suburbia is indispensable to feminist theories of power. Similarly, Jane Bennett has explored the politics of what she calls “enchanted objects,” those material things in quotidian life which literally embody promises of transformation and dynamism.<sup>67</sup> Bruno Latour has explicated the means by which even the things we care virtually nothing about, such as a doorstep, are themselves part of our social beings; they can even be said to have their own sociology through their literal transformation of political geography and attachment.<sup>68</sup> And all three of these theorists are indebted to Donna Haraway’s conception of the human body as already a cyborgian organism.<sup>69</sup>

If, then, it is the very surroundings of humanity that makes up humanity, why pay any special attention to dogs at all? Why, in other words, not pay equal attention to all things that envelop us as political actors? I do not doubt that one could, though to do so would seem even more outrageous than to recognize dogs as such. But humans and many dogs continue to share one trait that is central to this discussion, a diffuse, difficult-to-comprehend thing, to be sure, but one that goes by a single name: love. It is love, Coetzee’s protagonist recognizes, that allows him to overcome his distance from a world around him that he no longer recognizes. And it is love that convinces a pet owner that the pet should be cared for, even at great expense, even at the expense of another human.

What, then, does attention to the love of dogs provide political theory? Certainly the attention to familial relations in this book does more than merely plead that love needs to play a serious role in political theory. Exploring the reality of these relationships brings up three more interesting approaches. First, it brings into focus certain complexities within political connections: the unacknowledged possibilities of relations between humans and animals, the unattributed importance of particularity in ethical commitments, and the underappreciated effects of distance and proximity in relations. Intersubjective relationships, even those of an ethical and political nature, are not limited to those between humans, nor can the specificity of the object of love (the importance of one actual dog as opposed to another) be ignored. Second, it encourages the uncommon recognition that the political implications of imbalance and inequality, even incommensurability, are not necessarily pernicious. The complex history and specificity of the role of dogs within Anglo-American culture shows that compassion and community can and do coexist with control and disparity. Finally, it can help to overcome the naïve assumption that political and ethical philosophy's relationship to behavior should be normative, that excellence in logical composition has direct compulsory results. People's love of dogs does not necessitate them, or anyone else, to stop eating other animals, to give dogs equal legal and civic protections, or to place the suffering of distant, unknown humans above their pet's needs and pleasures. To treat reason as coercive is as absurd as treating it as irrelevant.

These are not claims that the political overcoming of distance is impossible, even of the "moral distances" described by Chris Cuomo and Lori Gruen. Nor should indifference be embraced, especially in those cases which make thoughtless cruelty possible, allowing for banal evil by encouraging mechanized obedience. Often we do care about those who are radically unlike us, those whose spatial locations or ethnic affiliation or class status or racial identification we see as remote and of little relation to "us," whoever the "us" may be. These claims instead point toward a recognition of the legitimacy—an embattled legitimacy but a legitimacy nonetheless—of the kinds of love which attach humans to animals.