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## Loving Animals: Toward a New Animal Advocacy by Kathy Rudy

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***Loving Animals: Toward a New Animal Advocacy* by KATHY RUDY**

U of Minnesota P, 2011 \$19.95

Reviewed by **ELANA SANTANA**

Kathy Rudy's *Loving Animals* argues for a shift in the way humans relate to animals that comes about through a focus on affective relationships. Rudy divides her book into different ways that humans use animals: as pets, as food, in zoos, in laboratories, and for clothing (although this chapter uses clothing as a metaphor for identity and perceptions of subjectivity). Rudy suggests that a focus on particular affective relationships between humans and animals serves as a middle ground between radical animal liberationists and human-centred animal welfarists. Rudy's central claim initially seems to echo much of what feminist animal studies and feminist ethics of care theories have argued. However, Rudy doesn't reference the work of scholars such as Carol Adams or Josephine Donovan and overlooks the important critiques they might offer on her work. While claiming to "step outside that Western way of thinking, into a territory where we connect with animals at very corporeal levels," Rudy's book consistently falls in line with Western notions of human exceptionalism and puts forth a reductive and privileged approach to animal advocacy. A book about the importance of affect, particularity, and stories, in the work of shifting human-animal relations is both timely and crucial, yet Rudy misses this opportunity by keeping the human/animal binary in place throughout her book.

In her chapter about pets it is clear that she has firsthand knowledge of living with dogs and allowing for that experience to guide her approach to troubling

normative human/animal relations. It's her direct and particular experience living with and loving dogs that makes this section the most successful part of the book. In the next chapter Rudy goes on to talk about the horrors of factory farms and the merits of small "ethical" farms.

*Loving Animals* would benefit from a great deal more of what Rudy suggests throughout the book: letting animal subjects speak for themselves through stories. Instead Rudy offers the reader her own opinion—that some animals would want to sacrifice themselves for human benefit or that meat eating is okay only if one is able to drive 50 miles to small farms each week to pick up meat from farmers who at least gave their animals a good life. Rudy's logic is flawed; she writes:

Eating the flesh of animals you've known and loved, or paying farmers higher prices to provide those animals with a good life, can be seen as a good deal for those animals. They would not have the joy of living if they didn't also make that sacrifice. The horror of factory farming moves farm animals indoors to intolerable lives, lives not worth living; but the movement toward veganism banishes them from the earth altogether.

Her discussion of animal sanctuaries in chapter three stands in contrast to the idea that veganism must lead to banishing farm animals from the earth—why can't these animals thrive and experience joy in the safety of animal sanctuaries as many of them already do? Or why can't we promote more sustainable farms that provide animals very happy lives in exchange for their by-products? The idea that beings are better off being raised and then killed at the

hands of those who “loved” them, or experimented on by a scientist who “cared” for them, than to never have lived at all, is questionable, and I would argue that this betrayal is another version of the cruel fate that Rudy rebukes in her discussion of factory farms and lab animals.

In each of the stories Rudy tells there is a clear moral dilemma on the part of the pet owner, meat eater, or vivisectionist that Rudy fails to explore with depth. Instead, she defends their actions as long as she believes they are making an effort. I agree with Rudy that small changes are often better than none at all. If you are a pet owner, letting your particular love for the animal you live with seep into your relationships with other animals you may never come in contact with is a good thing. If you choose to eat meat it is of course better to get it from small, local, and ethical sources. And if your job involves experimentation on an animal it would be better if you confronted what it meant to know and care for that animal so that you might better understand *all* of the results of your experiment. However, it is the baseline of human exceptionalism from which Rudy’s arguments spring that blocks her ideas from contributing to radical shifts in how humans treat animals. Rudy’s insistence that she is not taking a radical position on animals, or any other issues, makes her focus on affect and corporeality rather tenuous.

Rudy’s position on animals is not only human-centred, it is privileged. She writes, “Let’s tell the world that we believe we owe animals a good life in return for their sacrifice, and we will gladly pay whatever the price to have meat that comes from animals that, while alive, knew joy, happiness, love, and peace.” Most working-class people, particularly working

class people of colour, do not have the luxury of paying “whatever the price.” A more inclusive and social justice-minded alternative to Rudy’s proclamation is an approach to animal advocacy that accounts for varying levels of access to food and the environmental justice issues around factory farming. This could entail an animal advocacy that begins by destabilizing the human/animal binary and is sensitive to a diversity of socio-economic circumstances; for example, one that promotes local farmer’s markets and community gardens which best accommodate a vegetarian diet where animal by-products may be consumed but are from relatively happy animals who do not have to “sacrifice” their lives for the humans helping them to have that happy life.

I firmly agree with Rudy when she says that affect can “help us imagine better ways of sharing the planet with animals,” and that “affect is best displayed through stories.” I also agree with the points at which she sheds light on the complexity of human relationships with animals and that it is necessary to understand the context and story of each human-animal relationship before declaring what is best for the human or animal involved. However, I adamantly disagree that imagining that “some animals may be willing to sacrifice themselves for our benefit” is in any way engaging empathically or attentively with animals. This argument is presumptuous and mandates a speaking for animals that supports the privileged position of humans.

Much of her book reads as a personal quest to absolve herself of human guilt. Like white guilt, taking this position is a regressive step for justice politics. I find it helpful when thinking about animals to place the category of species next to the other constructed categories we navigate

daily: race, gender, ability, class, sexuality. Only when species is understood as simultaneously a tool for identifying a real material experience of being in the world *and* as a constructed category of systemic oppression can we begin to really shift our relationships with animals. If we understand species in this way, then honouring, empathizing, and advocating for the different beings we lump into one group called animals is a much more complex task than Rudy outlines in her book. Often the only way to begin this undertaking in our insidiously human-centred world is to insert a human minority where we've written animals and then it is easier to feel deeply how troubling reform-based justice politics can be.

Rudy's book sets out towards a great ideal: to engage in animal advocacy by nurturing and highlighting our deep connections with animals "in order to see

the world from their eyes, in order for them to become their own advocates through relationships with us. To tell their stories well we need to let them affect us."

However, the body of her book tells a very familiar story of human exceptionalism and a dismissal of the thing animal advocacy so desperately needs: an unapologetic, radical approach to justice politics which uses affect and stories to reveal the porosity of the boundary between humans and nonhumans.

**ELANA SANTANA** recently received her Master's in Environmental Studies in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. She is currently working as a teacher and urban farmer in New York City. Her work explores the intersection of lesbian feminism, posthumanism, and environmental politics. She lives with and loves a nonhuman named Olive.