

**[Review] Teya Brooks Pribac, *Enter the Animal: Cross Species Perspectives on Grief and Spirituality*. Sydney University Press, 2021, 262pp.**

CAROL FREEMAN  
University of Tasmania

*Enter the Animal* employs passionate writing and a wealth of interdisciplinary evidence to confront the idea of subjectivity, sentience and emotion in the lives of nonhuman animals. In his introduction, Jeffery Moussaieff Masson writes of the difficulty thirty years ago of suggesting that nonhuman animals were even aware and conscious. But even twenty years ago when I approached a potential humanities supervisor with the idea of writing an honours thesis on animal subjectivity in medieval writing, I was met with such disdain that I fled to a department that welcomed both Arts and Science graduates. At that time, Masson's book *When Elephants Weep*, Theodore Barber's *The Human Nature of Birds* and Barbara Noske's *Beyond Boundaries* were making determined steps toward encouraging new avenues of thought about the other animals with whom we share the planet. Brooks Pribac's investigation into grief and spirituality strides further, joining the wave of writing and research we now see in *What a Fish Knows* by Jonathan Balcombe and *The Creative Lives of Animals* by Carol Gigliotti.

Importantly, this book addresses the reader as a fellow animal. The first chapter 'Animal Subjectivity' acts as an introduction to the subject. It outlines historical perspectives, cognitive biases and evidence relating to brain function and neuropsychology, particularly where relevant to attachment theory as it applies across species. Examples such as Lisa Parr's use of chimpanzee faces to test a chimp's capacity for face recognition, rather than the human faces the chimps found difficult, raises the question of how humans would rate if tested for recognition of chimp faces—a reminder that most humans fail to understand the vocalisations and body language of nonhuman animals. In response to the constant use of generalisations in most discussions and assessments, Brooks Pribac urges 'integrated understanding of nonhuman animal' individuality within a species (23), pointing out that 'humans have taken everything away from animals . . . and turned them into unfeeling, unthinking objects' (27).

For every point she discusses, Brooks Pribac provides a thorough analysis and evaluation using examples from trans-species studies. If a reader was ever thinking 'but . . .' there is an answer in the next few sentences. She writes that it is essential for humans to listen to individual animals for they are complex, different and the same. She examines why humans are prejudiced against nonhuman animals: not on historical grounds but based on their neuro functionality.

While I was reading the book, a tiny stray kitten entered my life and Brooks Pribac's cross-species observations seemed to jump from the page. I learnt much from and about the small creature I was caring for as we shared mutual feelings of attachment and loss. There is no doubt that the author's close interactions with the animals she lives with—one of whom meets our gaze from the cover of the book—were a strong motivation for her research. In response to the question 'What inspired your interest in nonhuman grief and spirituality?' when interviewed by Sydney University Press, she tells the story of how one day, sitting in the paddock with her rescued sheep, she wondered whether they experience a feeling of awe, as humans do, when they encounter phenomena that do not fit a pattern known or easily assimilated by them. She goes on to comment on the idea of human exclusivism and the way Western thought, especially in academia, focuses on the differences between animal and human. Indeed, her research helps dismantle this myth.

In the second chapter, intersubjective attachment and loss is discussed, including separation and neglect. Brooks Pribac stresses that attachment relations are a prerequisite for the experience of grief and reveals that food is not essential for bond formation, as is so often claimed. Well-known psychological attachment theories are used as a model to develop ideas about animals. The irony, of course, is that many experiments on nonhuman animals lead to conclusions for humans, while there is little interest in the feelings of the animals involved. Again, the caveat to this model is that experiences of loss differ on an individual level.

Human approaches to grief are examined with examples from folklore and religion, such as Chippewa and Tongan mothers and Alto communities in northern Brazil, showing a diversity of grieving practices and traditions. This leads to the conclusion that animals may have different, unseen ways of grieving, just as many humans do. The possibility of grief in insects is also considered. Wasps remember social interactions . . . so this may be carried through to awareness of absence? Bees respond negatively to ambiguous stimuli . . . so this might suggest a reaction to the death of other bees. Ants have been seen rescuing familial ants from a snare . . . surely this demonstrates an awareness of a fellow ant's distress? There has been no definitive exploration of the feelings of animals in these cases, but it has been assumed that elephants, for instance, cannot anticipate or imagine death. Brooks Pribac notes that assumptions like this fail to appreciate the depth of loss felt by many nonhuman animals. Although current assessments of animal grief in different species show that there is no consistent reaction, there is complex evidence for nonhuman animals recognising and responding to death and loss. Some of the many situations Brooks Pribac considers involve agency, phylogenetic knowledge, instinctive care (in humans), hunting, and animals predicting death.

The possibility of abstract thought in nonhuman animals is also raised. Are they aware of their own mortality and why do some species abandon their aged? If mourning is related to attachment, there are compelling questions regarding commodified nonhuman mothers in a context where humans drink the milk of cows after their babies are removed from them. How do these mothers feel? In highly controlled industrial farms, their grief may be displayed as resignation, boredom or internalised behaviour. In this case, Brooks Pibac postulates, the expression of grief could be seen as a 'privilege' that nonhuman mothers, as well as human mothers in some cultures, cannot afford (136).

In all chapters, perspectives from anthropology, psychology, ethology, ethics and sociology are used to examine the expression of attachment, loss and grief. This densely interdisciplinary approach can be challenging for readers with a background in the humanities and at times may seem at odds with the idea of the animal, whether companions, inmates in factories, or living in the 'wild'. But it is an unfortunate truth that humans require proof, persuasion, or endless argument before acknowledging that animals have feelings, especially in relation to those they eat. One of the most moving passages in the book is the story of how Brooks Pribac became involved with saving Liza, a pregnant pig who was refusing to eat. Veterinary staff could not induce a response from the prostrate animal, but Pribac's reaction was to lie against the pig's back with her arms around the animal's body for a long time. This simple expression of care resulted in Liza successfully delivering her babies, although all were born dead. Liza eventually recovered to live a happy, healthy life.

The last chapter is a difficult read. 'Animals at a Distance' concentrates on advocacy for the billions of nonhuman animals who suffer and die in industrialised environments. Evidence provided by activists who rescue animals from factory farms attest to the appalling conditions these animals live under. There are details of vigils in Australia and Canada that have raised awareness of slaughterhouses, including the trauma and suppressed grief suffered by the humans employed to kill them. Brooks Pribac recognises that people who love animals can experience prejudice that may prevent them from adequately grieving their companion animals. Then there is vicarious loss: that is, grieving for species facing extinction and, once humans face the pain and suffering that animals undergo, there can often seem little hope of finding solace or changing the situation.

The final pages of the book, then, are a call to action. Vigils and other forms of activism challenge the prevailing meat culture by confronting the extreme suffering, trauma and grief that nonhuman animals suffer behind closed doors. When I think of the stray kitten I encountered and the impact of my experience with her, when I picture Brooks Pribac lying with the desperately depressed pig, and then feel concern for the animals now extinct through human ignorance or deliberate violence—I acknowledge that we choose whether

to respond to the suffering of animals. Brooks Pribac's book is an extraordinary appeal for justice for all animals.

*Enter the Animal* appears in Sydney University Press: Animal Publics series and was a winner in the Animals & Nature section of the Nautilus Book Awards 2022 that celebrates contributions to social change, spiritual growth and sustainability.

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