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Review Essay: Postanthropocentric Political Theories

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Nico Dario Müller: *Kantianism for Animals: A Radical Kantian Animal Ethic*. (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. Pp. xxi, 245.)

Josh Milburn: *Food, Justice, and Animals: Feeding the World Responsibly*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. vi, 216.)

Benjamin Meiches: *Non-Human Humanitarians: Animal Interventions in Global Politics*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023. Pp. 234.)

Sharon Krause: *Eco-Emancipation: An Earthly Politics of Freedom*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023. Pp. ix, 208.)

At least since Aristotle defined human beings as “political animals,” politics in the Western tradition has largely been defined in anthropocentric terms. Politics was a realm of distinctively human endeavors, while nonhuman nature remained outside. Nature might impinge on or set limits to political action, but was conceived as constitutively outside of politics. However else nonhuman entities might engage with humans or each other, these relations or engagements were not understood as political. Until quite recently, Western political theory was decidedly anthropocentric. The rise of environmental problematics, and particularly the political salience of the global climate crisis, however, have made the idea of a constitutive separation between (nonhuman) nature and (human) politics less tenable. Not only the material manipulation of the nonhuman world, but also its conceptual framing, are increasingly understood as political projects.¹ At the same time, Western

¹For early versions of this, see John Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics: Nature, Virtue, and Progress* (London: Sage, 1998); Jane Bennett and William Chaloupka, *In the Nature of Things: Language, Politics, and the Environment* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Robyn Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Toward an*

political thought has become increasingly open to non-Western cosmologies that do not posit a rigid divide between human and non- (or more-than-) human worlds. Environmental (or green) political theory has become an increasingly robust subdiscipline,² and political theory, like a number of other humanities disciplines, has undergone an “animal turn.”³ Three of the four recent books under consideration form part of this latter animal turn while Sharon Krause’s *Eco-Emancipation* is firmly situated in the field of environmental political theory.

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One approach to environmental political theory is to take the ideas of canonical political theorists and apply them in the context of contemporary environmental concerns.⁴ Nico Dario Müller’s *Kantianism for Animals: A Radical Kantian Animal Ethic* fits most closely with this approach. Kant is often regarded as notoriously anthropocentric, but Müller seeks to amend this, taking an approach that is “constructive” (not anti-Kantian), “revisionist” (arguing for a new interpretation of Kant), and “radical” (seeking to embed moral consideration of nonhuman animals at the root of Kantian theory) (9–14). As a pre-Darwinian thinker, Kant would have been quite comfortable dictating that humans stand distinctly above nonhuman animals, who thus do not merit moral consideration. But rather than more thoroughly troubling the human–nonhuman divide (in the way that Benjamin Meiches does), Müller argues for the inclusion of animals in Kantian moral concern by reinterpreting Kant’s theory at a more structural level.

Ecocentric Approach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Arran E. Gare, *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Timothy W. Luke, *Ecocritique: Contesting the Politics of Nature, Economy, and Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); John M. Meyer, *Political Nature: Environmentalism and the Interpretation of Western Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); Robert C. Paehlke, *Environmentalism and the Future of Progressive Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); Kate Soper, *What Is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-human* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995).

²Teena Gabrielson, Cheryl Hall, John M. Meyer, and David Schlosberg, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). The annual meeting of the Western Political Science Association has had a specific section and preconference workshop dedicated to environmental political theory since the early 2000s. For an oral history of the workshop see https://www.wpsanet.org/75_anniv/ept.pdf.

³Arguably the most significant example of the animal turn in political theory is Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), which argues for the inclusion of a variety of nonhuman animals (in different ways) within political communities.

⁴See, for example, Peter Cannavò and Joseph Lane, *Engaging Nature: Environmentalism and the Political Theory Canon* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).

Müller's book is divided into three main parts. The first is a critical reconstruction of Kant's theory that seeks "to investigate what leads Kant to the conclusion that we have no duties towards animals" (9). Müller argues that the key to a strong Kantian account of animal ethics is to recall Kant's understanding of the social role of the philosopher (which is less common today). Kant did not seek to prove the existence of moral duties to a skeptic, but rather sought to clarify and strengthen those duties in ordinary people who already had at least a vague sense of their existence and desirability (50–51). "Duties" here is also a significant term, and as Müller reconstructs it, a crucial element of Kantian duty is to promote the happiness of others (38–42). From a Kantian perspective, everyday intuitions that many nonhuman animals are capable of happiness strongly suggest that we have a duty towards them.

The second part develops the main conceptual building blocks of Kantianism for animals. Müller begins in chapter 4 by arguing for a "formal" rather than "substantive" reading of the Kantian Formula of Humanity. The point of this is to shift from asking whether animals are ends in themselves to asking whether we have a duty to consider their happiness (122). Chapter 5 develops a "first personalist" account of Kantian ethics. Legal duties (and moral duties under a "second personalist" account) are only owed to those with whom we live under a shared law. Nonhuman animals, because they lack the capacity for autonomous choice on this view, cannot be legal persons or moral agents. But Müller's first personalist reading of Kant rules this incapacity irrelevant: "the moral law is autonomous and autochthonous, period" (135). Morally autonomous human beings do not really *share* a moral law; rather, each individual lives under their own moral law, even if all of our moral laws happen to have the same substantive content. While this interpretation is quite helpful for including nonhuman animals in the realm of moral concern, it has the effect of positioning Müller's argument more firmly in the realm of moral-ethical questions, at the expense of political ones. In chapter 6, Müller stipulates an important inequality between humans and nonhuman animals: only humans are capable of exercising practical reason and of making autonomous choices. While this means that nonhuman animals cannot be morally good, it also means that they cannot be evil, thus strengthening the claim that the happiness of nonhumans is an appropriate object of moral concern.

The third section ("Using the Framework") has separate chapters devoted to using animals, eating animals, and environmental destruction more generally. Somewhat predictably, Müller argues against the use or eating of animals. Chapter 8 advocates quite tight strictures with respect to animal use, on the grounds that it is morally objectionable to make the *prima facie* determination that human aims should be placed ahead of nonhuman ones. Rather than moral duty restricting pursuit of our self-interest, in cases of animal use, human self-interest reigns and duty tends to be restricted to "practical benevolence" (199). Here again, the turn towards ethics and away from politics is explicit, as Müller acknowledges that ending animal use is not

feasible. “Of course, we should think twice before taking the Kantian argument as a basis for policy decisions or political strategy. ... What the argument shows is not that all animal use can or should be immediately prohibited, but only that there are reasons for individuals to find the practice morally repugnant” (203). Consistent with what he had said about the social role of the philosopher, chapter 9 seeks “to better understand our [vegetarians’] own ethical outlook” (214). This is described in terms of a “quasi-interpersonal” duty: “a duty to self which we have only because we also have duties towards others” (215, emphasis original), to honor animal corpses by not engaging in ordinary meat eating.

Chapter 10 makes a perhaps more surprising turn, as it confronts the challenges posed by Kant’s apparent strong anthropocentrism for environmental ethics more broadly. While Kantianism for animals expands the line of moral concern to include many nonhumans, there is still a clear line between those who are and those who are not legitimate objects of moral concern. And because the line is defined by a kind of affective or bodily (if not “subjective”) experience, namely, the capacity for happiness, the result is an ethic that is not anthropocentric, but still resolutely individualistic. Müller is explicit that nonanimal entities (plants, geological formations, bodies of water, ecosystems, etc.) should be protected only to the extent that they are conducive to animal (including human) happiness. And in this sense, Müller is at odds with environmental thinkers and activists seeking to incorporate Indigenous and other non-Western antianthropocentric perspectives.⁵

Taking the moral duty to promote the happiness of all (happiness-capable) individual animals could also lead to some strange, if not troublingly anti-human, conclusions. For example, Müller writes that “it is not so clear that climate change is more harmful than beneficial to most animals other than human beings” (231). While anthropogenic climate change is implicated in an ongoing biodiversity crisis, given what we know about the history of biotic flourishing in significantly warmer periods of planetary history, this claim may be empirically correct in the longer term. Does this suggest that fossil capitalists and leaders of petro-states may be acting ethically by working to raise global temperatures? And that generations of activists seeking to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions are ethical villains? And what if animal happiness is maximally promoted by a planetary surface that is virtually all either underwater or too hot for human habitation? For utilitarians, there

⁵Consider the Bolivian Constitution’s inclusion of “rights of Mother Nature” or the legal personhood afforded to the Whanganui River in New Zealand Aotearoa. It is difficult to make sense of these widely lauded environmental developments in Müller’s reconstructed Kantian framework. On the “personhood” of nonhumans in Indigenous cosmologies, see Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed, 2013); Leanne Betasamosoke Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

might be easy, if uncomfortable, answers to this question. But as Müller reminds us in the book's conclusion, Kantianism is not a utilitarian framework. Autonomy, not pleasure/pain, is at the core of the Kantian ethical system. And on this Kantian view, only human animals are capable of autonomy. In the book's concluding chapter, Müller merely notes that "objections from moral intuitions" may provide fodder for future research (240).

Müller's book raises interesting philosophical questions. Its resolutely ethical as opposed to political stance, as well as its rather narrow focus on Kantian philosophy, makes it the least likely of the texts under consideration here to be of particular use for students of politics.

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Josh Milburn's *Food, Justice, and Animals: Feeding the World Respectfully* is similarly focused on questions of justice for animals, but takes a less individualistic approach than Müller. Like Müller, Milburn begins by taking the general precepts of animal rights as given. He goes on to ask what this should entail for our food systems. Rather than what he characterizes as the "old" approach to animal rights, which focused on moral arguments for veganism, Milburn follows the more recent animal turn in humanities disciplines more broadly and the political turn in animal ethics, which focuses on political, rather than moral, arguments.⁶ Importantly, for Milburn, this newer approach to animal rights remains "explicitly open to non-vegan diets and states" (5).

Following a brief introduction, Milburn begins by laying out the case against a strictly vegan food system and argues that "the zoopolis should (probably) actively endorse and support a non-vegan food system" (18; emphasis original), as long as "such a system could be consistent with respect for animal rights" (19). For the most part, for Milburn, the "political" elements are institutional structures and state actions. There is also some limited attention to "politics" as the art of the possible and the pragmatic building of popular support. Noting that there is a "hostility around veganism in the public eye" (21), he asks us to "imagine the converts we could attract to a zoopolitics allowing people to keep their beloved companion dogs and their beloved hot dogs" (22; emphasis original). But Milburn positions his work as "ideal theory" and largely seeks to ground his argument against a strictly vegan food system on principled rather than pragmatic reasons (15). As the term "ideal theory" suggests, Milburn is a political philosopher firmly ensconced in the Anglo-American analytic tradition (with the strengths and limitations that this implies). Despite a passing nod to Plato in defining

⁶A key influence for Milburn is Donaldson and Kymlicka, *Zoopolis*. See also Robert Garner and Siobhan O'Sullivan, eds., *The Political Turn in Animal Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Marcel Wissenburg, "An Agenda for Animal Political Theory," in *Political Animals and Animal Politics*, ed. M. Wissenburg and D. Schlosberg (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

justice (7), the approach throughout the book is liberal, with a resolute focus on individual rights and duties, and questions of legitimate coercion. "If animals are someones, entitled to protection," Milburn writes, "it is only *natural* that this is put in the language of rights" (10; emphasis added).

In terms of principled arguments against a vegan food system, Milburn argues first that in a number of ways (related to humans' food practices and tastes, and desires for certain kinds of work and relationships to the land), veganism closes off "reasonable conceptions of the good" (31), and that it may have negative consequences for food justice. Beyond its implications for humans, Milburn argues that a strictly vegan food system may also have problematic consequences for animal rights, as such a system would create greater land-use demands and the near extinction of domesticated animal species.

While arguing for "animal rights without veganism" (186), Milburn remains deeply critical of our current food system and in particular its reliance on large-scale slaughter of sentient (rights-deserving) animals. The chapters forming the central core of the book work through a number of cases that probe the limits of nonvegan but appropriately animal-rights-respecting food systems. Chapter 2 thus delves into questions of sentience, arguing that the killing of plants as well as animals that are not even narrowly sentient (unable to feel pain, e.g., jellyfish) should be permissible, and offering ways to deal with animals whose sentience remains uncertain. Milburn shows a greater appreciation of the uncertainties here than Müller, who seems confident that the boundaries between those animals that are capable of experiencing happiness and those that are not is clear and easily drawn. Chapter 3 defends plant-based meat, arguing for "a culinary metaphysics of meat" (63) which allows us to recognize plant-based meat as meat, rather than a "historical" or "material" metaphysics (emphasizing its provenance or substance) which forecloses such recognition. A culinary metaphysics of meat allows plant-based meats to fulfill some conceptions of the good (in terms of food consumption practices and tastes) without violating animals' rights.

Milburn moves on to cellular agriculture: "growing [meat] products at the cellular, rather than organism, level" (88). This is an emerging technology, currently with limited availability and requiring animal slaughter to create a cost-effective growth medium. But the technology is not static and Milburn sees good reason to imagine a future in which cellular meat can be made widely available, affordable, and without requiring the killing of organisms. Here Milburn displays a commendable command of cutting-edge scientific and technological research. It takes no small amount of skill to convey this in terms that are accessible in layman's (or political theorists') terms. Milburn argues that it is plausible to foresee a future with cultivated meat that respects animal rights. Chapter 5 goes further, to make a positive case for cultivated meat. Recall that one of the problems with universal veganism would be the (near) extinction of many domesticated animals. Cultivated meat requires the acquisition of animal cells to start the production process. The current

dominant visions for cultivated meat systems either involve keeping an animal for each household or local community from which stem cells can be harvested (“pig in the backyard,” 116–19), or having the cells delivered from an open-source catalog in which animals disappear from the picture (“mail-order cells,” 119–22). Neither of these affords a respectful place for the animals that provide the cells. Instead, Milburn proposes that “we keep [animals] on the farm” (121) in order to harvest their cells, which would have the added benefit of preserving agrarian lifestyles and their concomitant values and landscapes.

Crucially, these animals should be protected with workers’, as well as animal, rights (121–22). Such an approach, Milburn argues, satisfies a number of otherwise competing claims: “Animals’ rights are respected; meat is plentiful for those who want or need it; power is decentralized; the (for some) uniquely valuable institution of the family farm is preserved; liberated animals have a home and place” (127). In chapter 6, a similar argument is made with respect to eggs. The contrast with Müller is again instructive. While Müller argues that virtually all animal use is inherently anthropocentric and thus morally repugnant, Milburn sees the possibility of a kind of equal exchange in systems of animal labor. And while some might criticize the limitations of Milburn’s liberal political economic framework, his fleshing out of how workers’ rights for animals might operate in practice is impressively thoughtful and detailed, and a real highlight of the book.

The book’s final substantive chapter shifts the focus from specific foods and production methods to food systems. Milburn warns that readers “may find my exploration unsatisfactory, or at least incomplete” (160). He does not offer a food system blueprint, but rather a set of parameters, again reflective of his liberal orientation. Just food systems could be embedded within political systems that range from liberatarian (“minarchist”) to social democratic, and in all cases, state action should be grounded in public reason (166). Despite the book’s radicalism in other respects, the possibility of political systems that eschew either states or markets receives only a cursory mention (171).

Milburn’s book will likely be of greater interest to those sympathetic to liberal politics and adherents of the philosophical side of the political theory/philosophy divide.⁷ His analytical approach provides a set of arguments that is rigorous and carefully reasoned. But it is not dry and is indeed at times—as in his characterization of industrial-scale slaughter in our current food system (192)—quite emotive. In the conclusion Milburn describes how his thinking changed over the course of writing the book, away from his earlier presumption “that animal rights meant veganism” (185). He describes his

⁷A similar distinction is made between “ethical” and “political” approaches to environmental philosophy in Jonathan Maskit, “Was Environmental Ethics a Mistake?,” *Environmental Ethics* 46, no. 4 (2024).

discomfort in having his initial assumptions unsettled, and concludes that “serious research and reflection can lead to conclusions that are both alarming *and* correct” (185; emphasis original). His candor and openness to change is particularly remarkable and exemplary.

On the other hand, readers less favorably disposed to political liberalism and/or analytic approaches may find a kind of narrowness in this book as Rawlsian liberalism provides a kind of political horizon beyond which Milburn rarely ventures. At the level of political systems, liberal democracy is presumed, and the ideological spectrum considered ranges roughly from Robert Nozick to Martha Nussbaum. The focus on public reason restricts the political horizon in another way, by limiting “politics” to rational debate and deliberation. Consider again the pragmatic arguments against veganism and the “hostility in the public eye” that surrounds this. Milburn assumes a kind of good faith in the arguments of veganism’s critics. After citing Piers Morgan’s dismissal of a vegan bakery as “PC-ravaged clowns,” he claims that “a non-vegan, animal-rights-respecting, food system” would be desirable for such critics of veganism because it allows them to consume meat and also to “make good on claims to regret animal suffering and death” (21). We should be careful not to presume that such expressions of regret are always sincere, or even that such regret would be universally expressed. *Ressentiment* and the desire to dominate remain potent political forces, as the resurgence of anger-based right-wing populism demonstrates. And to the extent that in such contexts, as the saying goes, “the cruelty is the point,” Milburn’s appeal to good-faith reasoned debate may have limited practical use.⁸

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While also seeking to incorporate nonhuman animals into politics, and sharing a concern with nonhuman animals as workers, Benjamin Meiches’s *Non-Human Humanitarians: Animal Interventions in Global Politics* contrasts with Milburn’s work in a number of ways. Where Milburn takes an analytical approach in the Anglo-American tradition, Meiches draws mainly on Continental theory. Where Milburn’s focus is on the construction of a just political order within a state, Meiches’s attention is on the insertion of animals into international politics. And where Milburn is largely focused on the use of

⁸On the significance of resentment in the context of environmental politics, see, for example, Romand Coles, *Visionary Pragmatism: Radical and Ecological Democracy in Neoliberal Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Cara Daggett, “Petro-Masculinity: Fossil Fuels and Authoritarian Desire,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 47, no.1 (2018): 25–44; Sean Parson and Emily Ray, “Drill Baby Drill: Labor, Accumulation, and the Sexualization of Resource Extraction,” *Theory & Event* 23 (2020). Also worth recalling in this context is that the industrial slaughterhouses of late nineteenth-century Chicago were sensationally popular tourist attractions. Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 92–104.

animals in food systems, Meiches examines the role of animals in humanitarian campaigns.

Meiches begins with the work of Emmanuel Levinas. On the one hand, Meiches says, Levinas's philosophy offers a profound ontological defense of humanitarianism. For Levinas, "the other precedes the self ontologically" (3) and so an ethical obligation to the other is an existential imperative. On the other hand, though, Levinas restricts this imperative to human beings. "Ethical responsibility to the other dissipates at the threshold of nonhuman life" (5). For Meiches, this problem is "widespread in humanitarian discourse where concern for the other is defined largely in human terms" (6). This obscures the ways that nonhuman animals are occluded from being seen as the objects of humanitarian concern as well as the subjects that engage in humanitarian actions.

Meiches understands humanitarianism as an always-evolving set of ideals and institutions, a modality of dealing with live political problems and at the same time an "apparatus of capture" (30) that constantly seeks to reinscribe ungroundable distinctions between human and nonhuman. It is an instantiation of what Giorgio Agamben calls the "anthropological machine," which deploys "anthropocentric reason ... understand[ing] nonhuman animals as useful or disposable instruments strictly for human ends" (15) and "anthropocentric feeling, or a set of sympathetic affiliations and emotional similarities presumed to exist between human and nonhuman animals" (33). Meiches emphasizes how human–nonhuman distinctions are politically constructed rather than naturally given. The project of humanitarianism—often deployed as an apolitical response to crisis—comes in for critical scrutiny. Meiches emphasizes that his project is not merely critical or deconstructive, but that humanitarianism contains "the occurrence and potential for new means of contesting violence and the possibility of pluralist, generous forms of political engagement that span communal and species difference" (24).

After an extended introduction, the book's three main chapters move through a series of case studies, each discussing how a different animal species does a particular kind of work in humanitarian campaigns. Chapter 1 describes the work of dogs in demining campaigns. Chapter 2 discusses how rats similarly work in land mine detection and also in the detection of infectious diseases like tuberculosis. Chapter 3 focuses on the work done by milk-producing animals (primarily cows and goats) that are donated in famine relief campaigns. Differences between these campaigns, and how nonhuman animals are understood and used, illustrate that each can be understood as "experiments in multispecies justice" (40).

Dogs provide a logical starting point because they are positioned so closely to human communities and because anthropocentric feeling with respect to dogs is particularly strong (recall Milburn's reference to "beloved companion dogs"). Their humanitarian work is also long-standing. Dogs have been detecting explosives since the Second World War and used specifically by humanitarian organizations since the 1970s (52). Two key observations stand

out here. The first is Meiches's deconstruction of dogs' "natural" aptitude for demining work and thus more broadly of the kinds of distinctions between humans and nonhumans that undergird humanitarian discourses. Rather than being "natural deminers," dogs require significant training to detect explosives effectively. And the capacity to be trained in this way is reflective of both a general evolutionary flexibility (contra the Kantian view that only humans can make autonomous choices) and a more specific process of long-term human-canine coevolution. The second is what Meiches sees as dogs' affective stance while demining. Rather than somber work detecting devices that are designed to kill and maim, "dogs often seem to find the work of discovering explosives joyful, fun, or playful" (68). One might be tempted to read this as dogs not comprehending the gravity of their work. But Meiches seeks to take the dogs' disposition on its own terms, with "joyful demining" that "seems to be a response to sensorially rich encounters with explosives and other objects that make up an ecology of cooperation with human companions" and that "has little to do with orthodox forms of human compassion" (73).

A similar point is made about rats, for whom tracking bacteria "appears to be a source of intrigue" and of "pleasure" (104). Of course, while rats do similar humanitarian (explosive detection) work to dogs, they exist at the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of popular perception. Part of the work that is done by humanitarian organizations that deploy rats, then, is to confront and critique this popular perception. Rats (or at least the African giant pouched rats discussed in this chapter) are animals who are receptive to social relations with humans. Notwithstanding the more general lack of preexisting anthropocentric feeling, these social relations create some felt obligations to the nonhuman animals. As Milburn does, Meiches finds the discourses of "animal rights" and "animal welfare" to be insufficient to describe these obligations. For both, the work that nonhuman animals do generates (or ought to generate) a distinctive set of human responses. As mentioned above, for Milburn, this leads to a fairly elaborate discussion of workers' rights for nonhuman animals, including consideration of how those workers can be fairly compensated for their labor and how their needs and interests can be represented in negotiating that compensation. The actual treatment by humanitarian organizations of dogs (53) and of rats (89) does not live up to what Milburn imagines in terms of mechanisms for representation, but in terms of substantive outcomes, it does seem to fairly closely resemble his ideal. Dogs and rats performing humanitarian labor are materially rewarded, including the provision of benefits beyond the end of their labouring period into "retirement."

While acknowledging this treatment, Meiches also seeks to push beyond the apparent transactionalism of this account. Chapter 3 focuses on Heifer International (HI), a humanitarian organization that began in the Second World War era by providing livestock, rather than food supplies, as a form of aid, and whose organizational principles include "passing the gift" (121).

Both here and in the discussion of rats in chapter 2, Meiches seeks to frame human–nonhuman relations within a symbolic gift economy. There is an implicit critique here of Milburn’s vision, which would protect nonhuman animals with state-enforced labor laws and formally represent their interests via labor unions, but which fails to see beyond the horizon of liberal capitalist labor markets. Further, there is a reminder that humanitarianism as a concept, premised on giving rather than negotiated exchange, forecloses the kind of equality that Milburn’s vision imagines. Species differences render the sort of equal exchange that liberalism is premised on impossible. To the extent that the views of humanitarian organizations remain grounded in anthropomorphism, “there is no bridge across intensities of human and rat experience” (107). Thus, humanitarianism is incapable of achieving “justice” and can at best achieve a changed legal order “with a different distribution of equities and inequities” (111).

With respect to Heifer International, the gift economy is complicated here by the fact that cows and goats are both the objects being gifted and gifting subjects through their provision of milk. And while HI’s promotional literature trades on the anthropocentric feeling generated by images of baby goats, anthropocentric reason limits the extent to which these animals can be seen as subjects. After all, these animals are not only a source of milk, but are in at least some cases also destined for slaughter for their meat. To the extent that cows or goats are recognized as gifting subjects, or as cooperative participants in humanitarian projects, “humanitarian organizations also come perilously close to recommending that the recipients of humanitarian aid directly consume their fellow humanitarian actors” (144).⁹

Finally, for Meiches, consideration of HI’s commitment to small-scale farming highlights ambivalent political commitments that undergird its putatively apolitical humanitarianism. “Passing the gift”—one of HI’s central principles, whereby aid recipients are asked “to commit to passing on some of their animals, supplies, or knowledge to their neighbors” (121)—also marks a distinct political choice in terms of social reproduction. HI’s emphasis on the importance of small-scale farming (implied in the invocation of “neighbors”) provides a break from dominant practices of global industrial agriculture. But at the same time, it reductively positions milk-producing animals as economic resources, and as essential to an agrologistic development that is the other of “bare life” subsistence.¹⁰ As Meiches notes, “teaching

⁹Interestingly, all three books on animals discuss cannibalism. Müller cites ritual cannibalism as the example of meat eating that could be ethically permissible, precisely because it involves honoring the body of the deceased (218). Another example of Milburn’s—a committed vegan—intellectual openness is his statement that “We *could* create cultivated meat from human cells. Should the zoopolis permit cannibalism? In short, yes. Why not?” (95, emphasis original).

¹⁰Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

people to farm" is "an admirable aspiration that directly improves many lives," but also "a form of governance" (135). As the latter, it forecloses certain modes of existence ("conceptions of the good," in Milburn's terms), by declaring that the absence of animal agriculture is a marker of a "subsistence" existence that is the opposite or outside of "civilized life." "Managing nonhuman animals becomes, in effect, a method of signifying one's participation in a more equitable humanity" (140). Coming full circle from Müller's argument that our distinctly human capacities for moral autonomy militate against the use of animals, Meiches's deconstruction of humanitarianism suggests that it is the use of animals that is seen as the very foundation of "human" life.

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Sharon Krause's *Eco-Emancipation: An Earthly Politics of Freedom* is unlike the other three books under consideration here, in that it does not focus specifically on nonhuman animals. Krause does similarly seek to move "beyond our human-dominant frames" (26), and gives some attention to the "animal turn" in political theorizing. But her focus includes nonanimal beings, with specific attention to the problem of domination and possibilities for emancipation: "to diagnose the dynamics that sustain domination and envision alternatives to them" (4). For Krause, the phrase "human domination of nature" wrongly suggests both that humans are separate from nature, and also that all humans are equally complicit in a project of domination. Krause instead uses the term "environmental domination," intended to capture a multifaceted phenomenon that includes human domination over nonhuman nature, the unequal distribution of environmental harms and burdens among humans, and the inability of even relatively privileged humans to extricate themselves from systems that cause environmental degradation. Krause carefully argues that there is a universal human need for ecological emancipation, but without suggesting that all humans are equally complicit in causing environmental harm. Both bringing people together (under the umbrella of a universal need) and drawing lines of separation are of course political acts, and Krause's project (as the book's subtitle suggests) is explicitly and unapologetically political. Ethical and individualized approaches to environmental problems are "radically insufficient because they are no match for the structural conditions that constitute environmental domination" (9).

After laying out the book's project in the first chapter, the five remaining chapters focus on a series of interlinked concepts: agency, domination, respect, responsibility, and emancipation. In each case, the concept under discussion is repurposed for ecological use, or made "earthly." Methodologically, in most cases, this is done by taking two or three contrasting established readings of the concept, pulling from each what is useful for contemporary ecological theorizing, and developing this newly synthesized account. Chapter 2 begins with an analysis of George Kateb's influential *Human Dignity*, which asserts human superiority (and moral equality among humans) on the basis of our individual agency. Such an anthropocentric view, for Krause, is both empirically inaccurate insofar as agency always requires more than just individual will and normatively undesirable insofar as it

legitimizes the domination of nonhuman nature. Krause instead sees agency as a more distributed phenomenon, drawing on Hannah Arendt to frame agency as “socially distributed” and Jane Bennett to frame it as “materially distributed.” The two complement each other in ways that highlight Krause’s attention to identity and difference. Arendt’s focus on collective human action helps to blunt the criticism that Bennett and other “new materialists” provide an overly “flat” ontology, while Bennett’s focus on the agency of nonhumans is used to soften Arendt’s anthropocentrism.

Chapter 3 argues for a similar kind of synthesis, between the Frankfurt School and civic republicanism. Members of the Frankfurt School make the important point that “domination” can be a pervasive or “mass phenomenon”: even relatively privileged populations can be subject to domination. But their account is rooted in a Hegelian struggle for recognition, and hence requires “consciousness of subordination” (66, quoting William Leiss), making the domination of nonhuman nature more difficult to diagnose. The civic republican tradition provides a useful supplement in this regard, where domination is defined more broadly as having “to live at the mere mercy of others” (67, quoting Philip Pettit). The two also complement each other insofar as the Frankfurt School focuses on culture and consciousness while civic republicanism focuses on governmental institutions. An ambivalence about the role of the state is articulated here that runs through the book: the state is an institution that can set limits on the exercise of power but is also itself a form of concentrated power. If domination is a perpetual temptation, then something like a state may always be required to contain it. But if the urge to dominate is culturally conditioned rather than universal, then the need for a state to restrain dominating impulses may be more transitional.

Chapter 4’s focus on “respect” draws on theorists also discussed in the other three books above: Kant, Derrida, and Levinas. Similar to Müller, Krause seeks to develop Kantian respect beyond Kant’s own narrow anthropocentrism. For Krause, rather than rational autonomy, what makes beings deserving of respect is the “fact that their existence unfolds according to logics that exceed the purposes of others” (77)—note the fit with the civic republican definition of “domination.” Broader than the capacity for happiness, Krause’s “assemblage view of agency” (78) allows for a less individualist ontology than Müller’s. At the same time, Krause’s emphasis on cultivating nondomination affords greater latitude for political judgment and conflict. We can—indeed, must—use other beings to meet our needs, but such use should not be merely instrumental. Like Meiches, Krause finds useful Derrida’s famous encounter with his cat, which attunes us to the independence and alterity of the nonhuman other,¹¹ as well as Levinas’s emphasis on the ontological priority of the other. Krause sees less

¹¹Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

anthropocentrism in Levinas's philosophy than does Meiches, although she acknowledges that a broader understanding of communicative capacity is required to see the Levinasian "face of the other" in nonhuman animals, let alone nonanimal assemblages like rivers or forests.¹²

The last two chapters discuss eco-responsibility and eco-emancipation, respectively. The two concepts are closely linked, as "eco-responsibility is a crucial component of liberation, even itself a practice of freedom" (115), and emancipation is "the special responsibility we bear" (50). Responsibility and hence emancipation are thus demanding, on Krause's view. While rejecting the sort of anthropocentric exceptionalism that sets humans above the rest of nature, eco-responsibility for Krause does impose special responsibilities on humans: our capacity for (relatively) autonomous decision-making means that humans must be held responsible for ourselves, within the context of a world of distributed agency and social inequality.

While not explicitly thematized in a specific chapter, the concept of democracy is also one that Krause makes "earthly." While maintaining its positive normative valence—a necessary counterforce to the concentrations of power that enable domination of some humans by others—a political system that literally means "rule by people" needs rethinking to incorporate the needs and interests of nonhumans. And because Krause's ontological framing focuses on "more-than-human assemblages" rather than animal individuals or species, the incorporation of nonhuman animals into a rights-based political framework, as for example Milburn suggests, cannot be the whole story. What is needed is a rethinking of political community that incorporates nonhumans, acknowledging that equal rights and duties across species lines is not always feasible, without relegating nonhumans to forms of "second class citizenship," and also while maintaining equality among humans. This is no small feat, and we can thus understand why Krause characterizes eco-emancipation as "a radical reconstruction of selves and societies" (28).

The book's epilogue is comprised of seven brief vignettes of "current efforts to create more eco-emancipatory practices" (152). The accomplishments of the movements described here are certainly more modest and partial than a "radical reconstruction," and described too sketchily to do much load-bearing work in her argument (also, four of the seven are in the United States). But Krause introduces the epilogue by noting that

¹²On broadening this communicative capacity, see Danielle Celermajer, David Schlosberg, Dinesh Wadiwel, and Christine Winter, "A Political Theory for a Multi-species, Climate-Challenged World: 2050," *Political Theory* 51, no. 1 (2022): 39–53; Andrew Dobson, "Democracy and Nature: Speaking and Listening," *Political Studies* 58, no. 4 (2010): 752–68; Soren C. Larsen and Jay T. Johnson, *Being Together in Place: Indigenous Existence in a More Than Human World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Ben Mylius, "The Stories We Share: Learnings from a Hundred Years of the Three Communities," *Political Theory* 51, no. 1 (2022): 178–89; and more generally, the increasingly rich literature on "multispecies justice."

eco-emancipation is “continuing practices of liberation—with no fixed end point” (152). It thus makes sense to read it as an iterative and reflexive project, in which more modest and achievable reforms are understood as steps towards broader and deeper transformations. The significance of such “earthly” political practices should be read in light of Krause’s thoughtful and nuanced rethinking of some of the “essentially contested concepts”¹³ that shape our current ecological predicament(s) and point us—as the other three books reviewed here also do—towards a postanthropocentric politics.

¹³William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).