

## ALL ANIMALS MATTER: MARC BEKOFF'S CONTRIBUTION TO CONSTRUCTIVE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

*by Jay McDaniel*

**Abstract.** Along with Jane Goodall, Mark Bekoff proposes that religion can join science in recognizing that animals have minds of their own; that humans can humbly imagine themselves inside these minds, all the while recognizing their independent integrity; and that, as creatures with psyches, animals deserve respect and care. In his various writings Bekoff offers many hints of what a theology of animal minds might look like and how it might be part of a more comprehensive theology of respect and care for the community of life. Process or Whiteheadian theology offers a way of appreciating Bekoff's insights, linking them with the ecojustice movement, showing how they can be linked with various themes in evolutionary biology, and developing a threefold approach to animal well-being: cosmological, ethical, and spiritual. In so doing, process thought shows how the practice of science, particularly as expressed in cognitive theology, involves a marriage of empathy and observation, which represents science and spirituality at their best.

**Keywords:** animal minds; animal protection; Marc Bekoff; cognitive ethology; consciousness of animals; Earth Charter; ecojustice; ethology; Jane Goodall; process philosophy; process theology; spirituality and animals; theology of animals; Alfred North Whitehead.

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When Marc Bekoff is asked who he is, he often tells people that he is a human being first and an ethologist second. We might say that he is a theologian third.

Of course, he is not a theologian in a narrow sense. If *being a theologian* means writing out of a particular religious tradition or to a particular religious people, Bekoff is not a theologian but rather an ecumenically

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minded philosopher of nature. In his books for the general reader he does not write as a Jew or Christian, Muslim or Buddhist, but rather as an advocate for life on Earth with special focus on our closest biological and spiritual kin, other animals. He speaks to a wide variety of audiences: to people who are spiritually interested but not religiously affiliated; to people who are spiritually interested *and* religiously affiliated; and to people who are neither spiritually interested nor religiously affiliated, at least according to their own understanding of these terms, but who nevertheless have a passion for animals. His works are read by many who would not read traditional theology but who find themselves drawn, along with him, to the infinite mystery of each and every animal.

Moreover, Bekoff is not a theologian if *being a theologian* means talking about God. To be sure, he is interested in how ideas of God function evolutionarily. He believes that scientists themselves need to pay more attention to how concepts of God can facilitate an ethic of animal well-being and seems open to the possibility that God—at least understood in a certain way—might be a dimension of the universe and not merely an idea in people’s minds (2003, 121). He is interested in situating science in relation to other fields of inquiry, including those that ponder questions about spirituality, soul, life, death, grace, love, and God. Still, when he articulates his own point of view, he does not talk about God but rather about the interconnectedness of all things, the intrinsic value of all living beings, the primacy of love, the seamless unity of the universe, and, at one point, about an umbrella of love that blankets all things (2003, 198).

Of course, when theologians hear an expression like umbrella of love, they might think “God.” At least this is the case for pantheists, who believe that the word *God* names not a monarch in the sky but a womblike reality in which the universe evolves. As a process theologian, I am among these pantheists. Many years ago I wrote a book called *Of God and Pelicans* (McDaniel 1990) in which I argued for a relational pantheism in which emphasis is placed on the universe not as an expression or manifestation of God but as a self-creative process that is nourished, but also helps complete, the very life of the divine. Without animals and plants, hills and rivers, planets and stars, God’s life would be incomplete. When I hear Bekoff speaking of a blanket of love I think of what Alfred North Whitehead calls the consequent nature of God: a noncoercive yet all-embracing empathy, everywhere at once, that pervades the universe, sharing in the joys and sufferings of each living being, providing the universe with its seamless unity, and yet being completed by the very world it embraces. In fairness to Bekoff, it is important to emphasize that he does not use the word *God* to name this sacred whole, perhaps because the word can suggest a monarchical reality. If being a theologian is defined by using the word *God* in a normative sense, Bekoff is not a theologian. He is instead, to coin a term, a *blanketologist*.

Nevertheless, if being a theologian means being interested in the presence of the sacred in nature and exploring the implications of that presence for how we live our lives, Bekoff is indeed a theologian—and an important one at that, because so few theologians in our time highlight the importance of animals as deeply and sensitively as he does. It is no accident that the final chapter of his book *Minding Animals* is titled “Animals and Theology” and that in this chapter he finds himself lifting up traditional theological virtues of thanksgiving and love and hope as essential ingredients of a life well lived. The final sentence of the book reads like the end of many books in theology, except that it points to animals as its focus: “If I make a difference in how humans and animals interact, even a small difference, then my brief residence on Earth, this most amazing planet, will have been worth the journey” (2002, 199).

My aim in the remainder of this essay is to affirm this theological dimension of Bekoff’s work and to show how it can indeed make a difference to people with religious affiliations, especially but not exclusively Christians. I do not challenge Bekoff’s scientific insights into animals or question his assumptions that animals have minds of their own but instead assume that he is correct about these matters. I expect other theologians, including Christian theologians, to take his insights into account. I emphasize Christianity not because it is the only world religion that needs to take other animals more seriously but because Christians constitute approximately thirty percent of the world’s population. This means that how Christians think about animals makes a tremendous difference to the fate of animals in our world and to the fate of humans as well.

#### MINDING ANIMALS

Bekoff’s parents once told him that, when he was a young boy in New York, he was always minding animals—that is, wondering what other animals feel and think. He has been minding animals ever since. For more than thirty years he has studied a wide variety of animals—coyotes, dogs, Adeline penguins, archer fish, western evening grosbeaks, and stellar jays—all the while wondering what they are thinking and feeling and all the while wrestling with questions of neuroethology, social development, social communication, social organization, play, antipredatory behavior, aggression, parental behavior, and morality function. Moreover, he has brought to his studies a commitment to analytic observation and empathic participation, neither to the exclusion of the other. When he studies coyotes, for example, he tries to understand their lives on their own terms and for their own sakes, in their natural settings; as he does so he tries to imagine himself inside their bodies, running and smelling and sleeping and mating. In his words, “When I study coyote I become coyote” (2002, xix).

As Bekoff has undertaken these studies and published the results in science venues, he also has written books for the general public, advocating

respect and care for animals and explaining how animals have helped give him a sense of his own identity.

All beings are defined as a combination of who is “in here,” in their hearts and heads, and who is “out there,” in the social matrix of the external world. . . . Watching a red fox bury another fox, observing the birth of coyote pups and the tender care provided by parents and helpers, watching dogs blissfully lost in play, and nearly stepping on a mountain lion make me realize how much of “me” is defined by my interrelationships with others. (2002, 196)

Many contemporary theologians will appreciate Bekoff’s point about the “me” or “I” being defined through relationships. Today it is common among theologians and philosophers of religion—Jewish and Muslim, Christian and Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist—to say that we humans are not skin-encased egos cut off from the world by the boundaries of our skin but rather social selves who are defined by our felt relationships with others and our creative responses to them. Indeed, many theologians emphasize that our religious concepts are themselves outcomes of interaction with the world, functioning to validate, reinforce, and sometimes critique the social orders from which they emerge. As process theologians put the point, we are persons in community and not simply persons in isolation. “Persons in community” is meant to suggest that we are partly composed not only of our felt relations with others and our responses to them but also of others themselves, who are inside our selves even as they are outside our bodies. In every moment of experience, says Whitehead, the many of the universe are becoming one.

What Bekoff emphasizes, though, and what is too often neglected by many theologians, is that the many include animals. If we are persons in community, and if these communities are inside us as well as outside us as part of the very fabric of our being, these communities include other animals who have creative and thoughtful minds of their own. If we are persons in community, directly or indirectly we are persons in community with other animals. Moreover, in their own ways, these other animals also can be conceived as persons in community. Here I use the word *person* to name a living being who embodies what Bekoff calls self-cognizance. In Bekoff’s writings self-cognizance needs not be equated with conscious self-awareness, with self-objectification, or with a capacity to recognize oneself in a mirror. Rather, it lies in the capacity of an individual animal to know that it is similar to but distinct from others of the same species such that it can creatively adapt to new situations from its own subjective point of view. Self-cognizance of this sort is revealed by the fact that individual animals seldom mate with the wrong species, position their body parts in space so that they do not collide with others of their species as they move, travel in coordinated hunting units and flocks, and discriminate members of their social group from foreign group members, relatives from nonrelatives, and close from distant kin (Bekoff and Sherman 2004). In

saying that other animals are persons, I mean that they are self-cognizant in these senses.

Given that we are persons in community with other animals who are also persons in community, it is important to recognize that the communities to which they belong often include humans. This is obviously the case when we are in their immediate presence and they know of our existence through direct perception, but it is also the case insofar as we affect the habitats in which they live. Either directly or indirectly, we humans are among the many that become one in their experience. And, of course, their communities also include the landscapes and waterways of their habitats, the other living beings upon whom they feed, and the other members of their own species with whom they mate and play and enter into various forms of bonds.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is straightforward: Intersubjectivity is not restricted to human-human relations. It also includes animal-animal relations, which include human relations with other animals, the relations of other animals with humans, and the relations of other animals among themselves. From a process perspective, our planet is a network of intersubjective and often intersecting communities, gathered into the horizon of a deep community—a blanket of love—that is the divine life itself. The idea that human and animal communities intersect opens up the possibility that there can be communication between species, if not in shared languages, at least in shared and mutually understood feelings. I return to this possibility at the end of this essay.

Of course, theologically speaking, it is one thing for humans to be in community with other animals in a healthy way and another to be in community in unhealthy ways. We can be persons in community with other animals by exploiting them, abusing them, harming them, neglecting them, and destroying their habitats or by caring about them, respecting them, learning from them, appreciating them, and giving them space to live.

When Bekoff speaks of minding animals, he is speaking of a healthy way of being in community with other animals. For him minding animals consists of two activities. It is recognizing that other animals also have active and thoughtful minds of their own, replete with capacities for fear, play, embarrassment, anger, irritation, love, sadness, and grief, and it is caring for other animals, respecting them for who they are, appreciating their worldviews, and wondering what and how they are feeling and why. The latter—the caring and respecting and appreciating and wondering—is what I mean, later in this essay, by a spirituality of animal connection. Bekoff shows that this spirituality can be part and parcel of not only religious consciousness but also scientific consciousness and that it can enrich a scientific approach to animals.

If Bekoff is right, if it is important for humans to mind animals, theologians in the various religious traditions are called to develop three things: a

theology of animal minds, an ethic of animal protection, and a spirituality of animal connection. A theology of animal minds will need to provide a way of thinking about other animals and understanding how they are subjects of their own lives and not simply objects for human use. An ethic of animal protection will need to offer guidelines for treating animals that is, in the words of the Humane Society of the United States, humane as well as sustainable. A spirituality of animal connection will need to show how human beings can become more whole, more complete as human beings, by entering into rich relations with other animals.

#### BEKOFF'S SPIRITUAL OUTLOOK

What is Bekoff's theology? What is his spiritual outlook? It is quite eclectic and may be best understood as a unique combination of the prophet Hosea, Charles Darwin, Thich Nhat Hanh, Mother Teresa, a mountain lion, a German shepherd-rottweiler mix, and the Earth Charter.

Some explanation is in order. With Hosea, Bekoff believes that humans can and should imagine the world from the vantage point of those who often are neglected by the dominant society: widows and orphans, to be sure, and also, in Bekoff's case, dogs and cats abandoned to animal shelters and primates held in captivity, sometimes for the sake of experimentation. Also with Hosea, he believes that, once the situation of the marginalized is imagined, one must then act on behalf of their well-being, even when such action is unpopular and unfashionable among one's peers. Accordingly, he cofounded with Jane Goodall two organizations that extend the prophetic spirit in directions relevant to science and animals: Ethologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and Citizens for Responsible Animal Behavior Studies.

With Darwin, Bekoff believes that all living beings evolved from a common ancestor and that humans are kin to other creatures both physically and psychologically. For him this means that we humans are flesh among flesh, mammals among mammals, creatures among creatures, and thus that the very word *animal*, deeply understood, includes both human beings and other creatures. As noted above, it also means that emotions that are near and dear to us—fear, play, embarrassment, anger, irritation, love, sadness, and grief—are shared by other animals in their ways. Much of his scientific work is devoted to the task of considering animal minds and animal emotions.

With Thich Nhat Hanh, Bekoff believes that all living beings are present in one another such that the universe is a seamless web of interconnected events. This means that when we love our neighbors as ourselves, the neighbors whom we love, including our animal neighbors, are parts of our selves, even as they also have integrity of their own. In the words of Thich Nhat Hanh, whom Bekoff quotes in *Minding Animals*, "we are the shared emotions of all our brethren" (2002, 197).

With Mother Teresa, Bekoff adds that we find our place in this web most deeply not only by understanding it with our minds but also by opening our hearts to it, amid which we become channels for a deeper love—an umbrella of compassion—that pervades the universe. This means that the fully human life is a life not simply of the mind but also the heart, which finds part of its completion in unbounded love (2002, 198). To be sure, he adds, other animals also can feel compassion. But we humans have a capacity to extend compassion in ways that other animals lack. We can and should love the earth in a way that is not required, for example, of the mountain lion. He speaks of this added responsibility for compassion as a hierarchy of compassion, in the sense that it makes humans not better than other animals but more responsible.

In solidarity with the mountain lion, Bekoff believes that careful and focused attention to the details of one's surroundings is essential for survival with satisfaction and that we become more fully alive by being attentive to the revelations of all of our senses. For him, good ethology, which so often relies primarily on the sense of vision and hearing but which can also be enriched by other senses, including smell, is rightly guided by focused attention and careful observation in the field, where one is attentive to other living beings in their natural settings: "Animals must be studied in their own worlds, which may vary among species and even within species" (2002, 121).

In the spirit of the German shepherd—and more specifically his own companion animal, "Jethro"—Bekoff believes that the good life involves play and wonder in companionship with living beings not of one's species. For him this means that certain kinds of bonds can emerge between humans and other animals in which there is mutual benefit and spiritual enrichment. Even as we are different from other animals, there can be forms of communication, or at least shared feeling, creature to creature.

Finally, in keeping with the Earth Charter, Bekoff knows that respect for animals, important as it is, is part of a larger hope in our world, namely, that of building communities that are just, compassionate, participatory, and sustainable for all animals, humans included. His hope is well expressed by Goodall, who writes that he dreams of a time

when scientists and nonscientists alike will work toward the same goal—creating a world in which people respect and live in harmony with the natural world, leaving lighter footsteps as they move through life. A world where the desperation of poverty and hunger is a thing of the past, and there is equitable distribution of those things necessary for the good life. Above all, a world in which humans live in peace with each other, with animals, and with nature. (Goodall and Bekoff 2002, x)

In Bekoff's writings for the general reader we find the following overlapping themes—some moral, some cosmological, some experiential:

1. It is important to defend the vulnerable, human and other-than-human alike: "After all is said and done, silence is betrayal" (Goodall and Bekoff 2002, 172).
2. We defend other animals, in part, because we are kin to them psychologically, physically, and spiritually, sharing with them many forms of feeling.
3. Our kinship with other animals reflects the fact that we live in a universe of inter-being, of mutual immanence, amid which, as Buddhists often say, all things are present in all other things.
4. In response to this interdependence, and as prompted by the call of love, we are beckoned to live with heightened compassion for all living beings, not because we are better than them but because we are responsible to them.
5. In order to understand other animals and undertake this responsibility, we must learn to think like other animals and also be attentive to them, employing all our senses, in a spirit of empathic connection. In such empathy we become more fully human.
6. In some instances, as evidenced in companion animals, we can sometimes live in mutuality with other animals such that other animals can be, in their own ways, spiritual guides to humans.
7. Even as we are rightly concerned with animals, we best understand this concern as part of a more general hope that in our world communities can emerge that embody respect and care for the community of all life, human life included.

To these themes we can add one more idea that is important to Bekoff, and this concerns science. Bekoff calls for a science with compassion.

As an ethologist, Bekoff does not focus on what a science with compassion might mean in terms of chemistry, biochemistry, or physics, but it is very clear what it means for ethology. It means that ethology is properly guided not only by a desire for understanding and intellectual mastery but also by a desire to feel with and appreciate other living beings, recognizing that they have individuality and personality of their own. In his words,

I emphasize the importance of broadening behavioral, ecological and conservation science into a more integrative, interdisciplinary, socially responsible, compassionate and spiritual endeavor. I stress the significance of studies of animal behavior, especially ethological research concerned with animal emotion in which individuals are named and recognized for their own personalities, for helping us learn not only about the nonhuman animal beings with whom we share the Earth, but also about who we are and our place in nature. (2003)

Of course, the idea of a compassionate science does not mean that scientists abandon attention, observation, experimentation, concerns for prediction, or a willingness to let the facts speak for themselves. It does mean



that science at its best is motivated by wonder and amazement, respect and care. In the case of other animals, we best understand them not simply by enframing them within the horizons of mental grids that help predict their behavior but also by entering into respectful rapport with them. Without such rapport, says Bekoff, science too easily falls into a will to mastery at the expense of a sensitivity to mystery.

Let me define my terms. By *mystery* I do not mean unanswered questions or unresolved puzzles. I do not mean intellectual mysteries. As a scientist, Bekoff is indeed interested in finding answers to any and every question we might ask about animals. Sensitivity to mystery does not, and should not, require abandonment of inquiry. Rather, by mystery I mean the manifold depths of consciousness—of feeling and awareness—that animals, humans included, possess as subjects of their own lives. I mean what Martin Buber called the “thouness” of another living being. An ethology with rapport is interested in the thouness of other animals; an ethology without rapport is merely the will to master, to enframe them within mental grids, without sensitivity to their consciousness.

Bekoff argues that this will to mastery is fostered by what he calls scientific reductionism. Of course there are many kinds of reductionism, both epistemological and ontological; Bekoff is interested in both. Epistemologically, he is skeptical of a certain kind of reductionism in which people presume that scientific ways of knowing are the only reliable ways of knowing and that poetic, intuitive, musical, or mystical ways of knowing lack any cognitive value. He readily acknowledges that he himself has learned much from companionship with animals, as enriched by, but also as distinct from, strictly scientific understandings.

Ontologically, Bekoff is concerned with a reductionism in which other animals are reduced to what Whitehead calls “vacuous actualities” (1978, xiii). In Whitehead’s thought a vacuous actuality is an actuality—a being of one kind or another—that contains no inward creativity, no sentience, no subjectivity, no capacity for subjective and self-initiated response to environmental conditions. A vacuous actuality is brute, inert stuff. Along with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Whitehead believed that the universe contains no vacuous actualities of this sort. Indeed, he believed that the energy within the depths of an atom contains its own creative capacities and thus that even ostensibly inert substances such as rocks, while not subjects in their own right, are aggregate-expressions of a creative energy within the depths of matter.

Although Bekoff may or may not agree that such creativity extends even into the inorganic realm, he certainly agrees that it is found in the minds of animals. Other animals, then, are subjects of their own lives and not simply objects for human understanding. Moreover, Bekoff insists that reductionist science is strangely anthropocentric. In seeking to avoid the pathetic fallacy, which lies in imposing upon other animals overly human

forms of feeling, reductionist science unwittingly falls into the prosaic fallacy, which denies the majesty and mystery—and the feelings—of other animals. When animals are reduced to mere objects in this way, says Bekoff, there is a lack of compassion and a lack of understanding.

How, then, might science, and more specifically ethology, proceed in ways that foster understanding with compassion or, as I put it, respectful rapport? As I read Bekoff, the answer lies in science's embracing the seven themes listed above. Shortly I show how process thought provides a framework for articulating those themes. What is important, of course, is that process thought has been in intensive dialogue with the natural sciences for many years now. It is a science-shaped theology. First, though, let us consider the bigger picture.

#### THE THREEFOLD NATURE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

Let us assume that the seven ideas in Bekoff's spiritual outlook are probative. The question then becomes: How might insights such as these be included within a religious, specifically Christian, framework? It is helpful to begin with a brief lesson from Islam and Buddhism.

Islam teaches that the healthy religious life consists of three dimensions: practice (*islam*), understanding (*iman*), and spiritual awareness (*ihsan*). Practice consists of activities one undertakes that are visible to the world, such as praying five times a day and giving to the poor. Understanding consists of holding worthy beliefs, such as that God is One and that angels exist and that we are all accountable for our lives. Spiritual awareness consists of inner intentions to surrender to the will of God combined with an awareness of the world, including the world of animals, as a vast display of divine signs (*aya*).

This threefold division has a parallel in Buddhism. The Eightfold Path of Buddhism is sometimes divided into three dimensions: ethical action or right conduct, wisdom, and meditation. Ethical action includes personal morality and an extension of compassion to others. Wisdom consists in understanding the causes of suffering, recognizing that reality is different at every moment, and knowing that all things are interconnected. Meditation includes, among other things, not simply knowing the many states of consciousness of which the mind can partake but also being mindful of what is happening in each present moment.

A threefold scheme of this sort is relevant not only to Muslims and Buddhists but also to Christians who seek to imagine the Christian life as a whole. Following the lead of Islam and Buddhism, we can say that the Christian life, too, has three overlapping dimensions. It involves (1) ethical practices aimed at promoting the well-being of others, (2) understanding the nature of things, including the universe and God, and (3) spiritual awareness, including prayerful approaches to life and the world. The task

of constructive Christian theology, then, is to offer a plausible proposal concerning how life can be lived at each of these three levels.

Today environmentally sensitive Christians recognize that these levels of Christian life must include what ecofeminists such as Rosemary Ruether and Catherine Keller call a “conversion to the earth.” At the level of practice, for example, Ruether and others say that ethical practices should include, in the words of the Earth Charter, “the adoption patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard the Earth’s regenerative capacities and that protect biodiversity.” At the level of understanding, they add that this should include a recognition, again in the words of the Earth Charter, “that humanity is part of a vast, evolving universe; that earth is alive with a unique community of life,” and that the divine reality, however understood, embraces the whole of the universe and life on earth, not human life alone. At the level of spiritual awareness, they say that such awareness should include a sense of mystery and amazement, wonder and appreciation at the hills and rivers, trees and stars, all of which can be sacraments through which humans meet the sacred. Indeed, while various theologians may emphasize one or another of these themes, all three have become fairly common in the many kinds of ecological theology: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox; African, Asian, and North American; Ecofeminist, Ecowomanist, and Postcolonialist; biblical, liturgical, and mystical. An excellent sampling of such theologies can be found in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of the Earth*, edited by Dieter Hessel and Ruether (2000).

*Christianity and Ecology* is one of many books that have emerged from a three-year series of conferences called “Religions of the World and Ecology” sponsored by the Forum on Religion and Ecology. I mention the Forum because it is “the largest international multi-religious project of its kind [that is] engaged in exploring religious worldviews, texts, and ethics in order to broaden understanding of the complex nature of current environmental concerns” ([www.environment.harvard.edu/religion](http://www.environment.harvard.edu/religion)). Christian ecological theologies are best understood in the larger context of the work now being done by people in many world religions who likewise seek to address environmental concerns. The Forum has sponsored anthologies on Islam and Ecology, Buddhism and Ecology, Taoism and Ecology, and Judaism and Ecology. If we ask “What might the religious traditions say about the Earth?” the good news is that there is now an abundance of scholarly material addressing the question.

However, if we ask “What might the religious traditions say about animals?” the list of available scholarship is much shorter. This is because scholars in the various world religions have focused for the most part on environmental concerns—and thus on the relationship of humans to the broader web of life and its landscapes and waterways—than on individual animals. Fortunately, in May of 1999 the Forum on Religion and Ecology

sponsored an additional multireligious conference at Harvard University that dealt specifically with animals. Participants in this conference included scholars from various religions and also animal behaviorists. Among the latter was Bekoff, who rightly encouraged many of the scholars in religion to consider ever more deeply the relevance of their traditions to individual animals, both domesticated and wild.

The threefold scheme offered above helps frame a context for responding to the range of Bekoff's challenge. At the level of practice, for example, Christians and others who are shaped by Bekoff's work will necessarily ask: If we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, and if, as Bekoff proposes, our neighbors include individual animals both domesticated and wild, how can these animals be loved in behavioral terms? Should we eat them? Should we trap them? Should we perform tests on them? Should we protect their habitats even at human expense? What should our practices be with regard to other animals?

At the level of understanding, Christians and others ask, Do animals have minds of their own? Indeed, do they, as Bekoff proposes, experience emotions such as fear, play, embarrassment, anger, irritation, love, sadness, and grief? What might this mean for an understanding of God? If, as Christians claim, God is unbounded love, does God share in the joys and sufferings of each sparrow, each chicken, each dog, each cat, each mountain lion? Moreover, at some level, do human beings do the same? Is the universe itself, in the words of Thomas Berry, a communion of subjects and not simply a collection of objects? As spiritual kin to other animals both biologically and spiritually, are we gathered together into a unity that includes, but also transcends, our humanity?

At the level of spiritual awareness, Christians influenced by Bekoff will further ask: As human beings care for other animals, respecting them for who they are, appreciating their worldviews, and wondering what and how they are feeling and why, can these internal and subjective activities be understood as modes of spiritual awareness in its own right? Can what Bekoff calls "minding animals" be understood, at least by Christians but perhaps by others as well, as a form of meditative prayer?

In the remaining sections of this essay, I aim to show how process tradition offers a way of dealing with these questions. I begin with a process approach to the first question—that of animal minds.

#### A THEOLOGY OF ANIMAL MINDS

By the process tradition I mean an intellectual and spiritual lineage inspired by Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne and since amplified by John Cobb, Marjorie Suchocki, David Ray Griffin, Mary Elizabeth Moore, Catherine Keller, John Haught, Karen Baker-Fletcher, Ian Barbour, and numerous others. This lineage is quite diverse in its agenda, perhaps be-

cause it consists of at least three subtraditions. One is process theology, which is primarily Christian in orientation but also includes Jewish, Buddhist, and Hindu expressions. A second subtradition is process philosophy, which, while having minimal influence in Western philosophical circles, is growing in other parts of the world, especially China, where there are now five centers for Whiteheadian studies. The third is process interdisciplinary thought, which applies Whiteheadian approaches to ecology, economics, physics, biology, education, psychology, feminism, and cultural studies. In the latter decades of the twentieth century, influential examples of this thinking included *For the Common Good* by economist Herman Daly and Cobb (1994) and *The Liberation of Life: From Cell to Community* edited by biologist Charles Birch, Cobb, and Eugene Hargrove (1990).

In terms of a dialogue with Bekoff, the process perspective is especially important, because it has been in such intensive dialogue with the natural sciences for the past thirty years. In Barbour's popular book *When Science Meets Religion* (2000) he uses process philosophy and theology as his paradigmatic example of a form of religious thinking that seeks to synthesize, not separate, scientific and religious insights. In particular, process thinkers have tried to integrate religious insights with the findings of quantum theory, evolutionary biology, chaos theory, relativity theory, and ethology. Hartshorne is noteworthy in the latter regard because he was an ornithologist as well as a philosopher, and he wrote an interesting book titled *Born to Sing* (1973) in which he argued that birds sing not only for purposes of survival but also because they enjoy the experience of singing itself. There is an aesthetic dimension in bird life, said Hartshorne, which means that they, like human beings, are drawn to beauty. The process thinker closest in spirit to Bekoff, who has also worked with birds, is perhaps Hartshorne.

Process thinkers have criticized the kinds of reductionism Bekoff critiques, serving as allies in his call for a science with compassion. In process thought, as in Bekoff's thought, a dialogue between science and religion involves mutual appreciation and mutual critique, and in the process both are partly transformed. A systematic presentation of the process approach, with special attention to evolutionary biology, can be found in Griffin's *Religion and Scientific Naturalism* (2000). As Griffin's work illustrates, the general proposal of process thinkers is that process philosophy, drawing especially upon the cosmology of Whitehead, can serve as a frame of reference by which scientists and nonscientists alike can interpret many of their findings. In the case of cognitive ethology, process philosophy can encourage new research projects of the very sort Bekoff has so often undertaken, precisely because it offers a cosmology of animal minds.

What do process thinkers say about the universe and about animals? They would agree with the many themes in Bekoff's writings. With Bekoff, process thinkers propose that the universe is an evolving process in which every being is present in every other being; with Bekoff, they believe that

each living being has intrinsic value, that humans share with other animals many ways of feeling and thinking, and that animals have minds of their own; with Bekoff, they are open to the possibility that there can be communication between species, not only linguistically but also through empathy and shared feelings; with Bekoff, they believe that it is especially important in our time to integrate concerns for animals with concerns for a more just and sustainable world for all; and with Bekoff, they believe that there is an umbrella of love blanketing all things, within which each living being is valued on its own terms and for its own sake.

Process theologians in the Christian tradition (I among them) further emphasize that a Palestinian Jew from Nazareth, namely Jesus, both revealed and expressed this love in a special way, thus offering an intimation of how life can be best lived—namely, in that loving spirit for which Bekoff calls. Moreover, and again in keeping with Bekoff's ecumenical outlook, these process-oriented Christians (I among them) believe that Christians have much to learn from Buddhism in how this love might be embodied more deeply. In Cobb's *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (1999), for example, there is an entire chapter devoted to what Cobb calls the perfection of love. His argument in this chapter is that Buddhism can help Christians and others grow into this perfection. I have written along the same lines in several books, including *Living from the Center: Spirituality in an Age of Consumerism* and *With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Dialogue* (McDaniel 2000).

Process-oriented Christians, as well as process-oriented Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims, will appreciate Bekoff's ecumenical outlook, in which he draws from many sources to articulate a perspective that is spiritually sensitive while not overtly religiously affiliated. Process thinkers have developed a philosophy of what they call deep pluralism, in which emphasis is placed on the fact that the different world religions contain different but complementary insights into that manifold mystery philosophers call reality, such that it is shortsighted to believe that one and only one tradition has truth relevant to the fullness of life. Bekoff draws upon different resources to articulate his perspective—some Buddhist, some scientific, some Western. More traditional theologians might criticize this approach as being too eclectic. What some call eclectic, though, process thinkers are inclined to call organic, ecumenical, and synthesizing: a potentially healthy example of that hybridity of self-identity in which the many become one moment by moment. In a world of deep pluralism, it is only natural that, even as people might find most meaning in one or two sources of wisdom, they are open to wisdom in other sources as well.

Of course, Bekoff stretches the process commitment to deep pluralism by reminding process thinkers that it is not only from the religions and philosophies and sciences that one can learn but also from other animals; to scientific and religious wisdom Bekoff adds canine and feline wisdom.

In this happy and healthy way, Bekoff encourages process thinkers to become still more deeply pluralistic, realizing that wisdom is not reducible to the human sphere. This claim hinges on some notion of animal minds, which can be the repository and channel for such wisdom.

With their technical notion of *dominant occasions of experience*, process thinkers do propose that certain kinds of animals—those with brains—have minds of their own, replete with emotions and cognitions and capacities for novel response to new situations. A dominant occasion of experience is that subjective vantage point from which, at any given moment, an animal takes into account its own body, the surrounding world, and its range of possibilities for responding and adapting to the immediate situation. It is deeply shaped by the animal's brain but not numerically identical with the brain, at least as the brain is perceived from an external perspective. It is, as it were, the "mind" of the animal. The way in which the world is in this mind is different from the way in which the brain is in the body. The dominant occasion of experience is that subjective horizon within which, for the animal, the world is present. This is the animal's mind.

In process thought, then, a mind is not a single entity that endures unchanged over time but rather the process of experiencing itself, as lived from a subjective perspective that simultaneously includes the external world. For example, when a fox smells a rabbit, the rabbit is inside the experience of the fox even as it is outside his body, which means that the inner nature of the fox—the fox's own identity—is partly composed by the rabbit at that moment. It is a verb rather than a noun, and it is slightly different at every moment, even as, at any given moment in the history of an animal, it is the animal's own inner nature. Bekoff speaks to this inner nature when he writes, "All living beings are defined as a combination of who is 'in here', in their hearts and heads, and who is 'out there' in the social matrix of the external world" (2003, 194). The mind is the *in here* that includes and is shaped by the *out there*.

Given this notion of mind, process thinkers suggest further that each moment of an animal's psychic life includes the following three activities, which typically occur simultaneously: one receptive, one cognitive, and one self-creative.

**Receptive dimension:** In a given moment of an animal's life, the receptive dimension is an act of receiving causal influences from the body and the surrounding world and thus being shaped by that world. Process thinkers call this "experience in the mode of causal efficacy" and suggest that in human life and in the lives of other animals it is typically vague, powerful, dim, and unconscious. In human life, for example, such receptivity would be the feeling of having a stomach ache and being immediately shaped by the aching in one's stomach. In such moments we are partly determined by the events in our own bodies even as we have capacities for responding to those events.

*Cognitive dimension:* In a given moment of an animal's life, this is an act of feeling potentialities, consciously or unconsciously, for responding to those influences, and thus for adapting to the given situation. Process thinkers speak of this as the mental pole of an animal's mind: that side of the animal's subjective experience that is attentive to possibilities rather than actualities, to what can be as opposed to what is. In human life, such cognition might take the simple form of realizing that drinking something might help ease the stomach ache.

*Self-creative dimension:* In a given moment of an animal's life, this is an act of cutting off certain possibilities for responding to the given situation and thus actualizing others. This act of cutting off is an act of decision, conscious or unconscious. The particular form of the decision may be determined largely by genetic and environmental influences, but it is not completely so determined. In the moment at hand, there is always the possibility for the animal to choose, consciously or unconsciously, among responses. In human life, for example, such self-creativity might take the form of drinking something to try to ease the ache in the stomach. The act of drinking is a concrete response and adaptation to the immediate situation, and it then forms part of the subsequent history of the mind. If it helps, chances are good that, the next time a stomach ache emerges, such a decision will be made again. In this way animals, humans included, can learn from their successes (and, of course, their mistakes).

Amid this threefold structure process thinkers further propose, along with Bekoff, that animals (humans included) have emotions and aims. The emotions are called subjective forms. These forms are not the objective behavior of the animal as witnessed by the eye but rather the inner feelings that often are expressed in the behavior: feelings of attraction and repulsion, or, as Bekoff would add, compassion and fear, hope and embarrassment, playfulness and terror. With Bekoff, process theologians propose that emotions are a primary form of energy and that what we call energy at an inorganic level is itself a primitive form of emotion. It is in animal life, though, that emotions become what we usually call feelings.

These emotions are always conjoined with what process thinkers call subjective aims. In most animals, process thinkers propose, the aims are to survive and then to survive with satisfaction, relative to the situation at hand. In Whitehead's words, they are to live, to live well, and then to live better. In the lives of all animals, the aim to live better includes an aim to enjoy various kinds of beauty, as illustrated in Hartshorne's thesis that some birds are born to sing and to enjoy the singing itself. In human life, process thinkers propose (and Bekoff agrees), this impulse to live better—that is, to live with quality in relation to the surrounding world—also includes an impulse to love: to welcome other beings into one's horizon of concern with sympathetic care and appreciation. Bekoff would argue that for many humans this growth into love is itself a form of evolutionary adaptation,



given the exigencies of our time. Process theologians would agree. This is why the perfection of love, noted above, serves as one of the highest ideals for humans. It adds beauty to the world and, at the same time, is conducive to a continuation of human life.

As noted above, the technical name for the mind thus conceived is the *dominant occasion of experience*. Process thinkers propose that the mind, or soul, is a series of dominant occasions of experience and that each dominant occasion, as lived from the inside, inherits from predecessors in its linear series and contributes to its successors such that an animal, including a human being, can remember its own past, learn from it, and acquire new skills and insights over time. In some animals the dominant occasion may function primarily to serve the needs of the animal body, with little sense that it carries within it a personal past and future that are important in their own right; in other animals the dominant occasion may use the body to serve its own ends such that it will engage in forms of delayed gratification for the sake of psychic ends. In many animals there are moments when it functions one way and moments when it functions the other way. Different animals can have different degrees of mind, and the growth of an animal over time may well be the growth of heightened degrees of mind. In human life and in the lives of other animals, embryonic life typically has less mind than postnatal life.

In the history of an animal mind, human included, there may or may not be self-consciousness, and this can occur by degrees. Whether or not an animal is self-conscious depends on how self-consciousness is defined. If being self-conscious means bearing the influence of a personal past in the present, many animals are self-conscious; many carry the history of their personal pasts. If it means consciously remembering the personal past in the present, some animals are self-conscious and others not, and those that are may sometimes be self-conscious and sometimes not, depending on the situation. If self-conscious means reflecting upon one's own life as a subject of experience, with a history different from other histories, animals are again sometimes self-conscious and sometimes not. If self-conscious means being conscious of one's own experience as it is occurring, all animals are self-conscious, though not always in a conscious way.

Everything hinges on what is meant by *consciousness*. In process thought the word is used in a restricted sense to name a form of experience that is clear and distinct, as in conscious visual awareness. In such awareness there is a sense of distance between object and subject and a capacity for perceiving the object. Staring at a patch of red, for example, would be an act of conscious perception, just as apprehending a clear idea is an act of conscious intellection. In such moments there is a feeling of clarity, said Whitehead, and in such clarity there is consciousness.

By this definition, most experience, including most human experience, is not conscious. It is dim and vague, and it does not include within it clarity or a sense of separateness from the world. Even self-consciousness, in the senses defined above, is not conscious in the sense of being clear and distinct. When we reflect upon ourselves as subjects of our own lives, and even when we consider our pasts and futures, we often do this intuitively and dimly, at the fringes of conscious experience, rather than directly. We are dimly aware of ourselves as different from others with destinies of our own. And so it would be, suggest process thinkers, with other animals.

Bekoff uses the expression *self-cognizance*. Process thinkers would agree that that form of experiencing is not necessarily self-conscious in the latter sense, although, in some animals, self-cognizance may include moments of self-consciousness. Self-cognizance is best understood as an unconscious but consistent response to inwardly felt urges and aims that are unique to the individual animal and that help coordinate that animal's behavior with others of the animal's species, as evidenced, for example, in the flight of a flock of birds. Each bird is inwardly drawn by subjective aims that are unique to its position in relation to the other birds, and in this sense each bird is self-cognizant even if not self-conscious.

Another reality needs to be named that pertains to the question of individuality. In process thought it is recognized that every moment of experience—including every moment in the life history of a given animal—contains a degree of what Whitehead calls self-enjoyment. Such enjoyment is a primal form of self-knowing that occurs by degrees and that usually involves an implicit comparison with others. When, for example, animals recognize members of their own species, such self-knowing occurs, even if not at a conscious level. In short, all animals, including humans, are self-cognizant and self-enjoying in the moment-by-moment history of their lives, even if not always self-conscious or self-aware.

So far I have offered what might be called a cosmology of animal minds. The foregoing analysis of experience may offer a vocabulary by which ethologists such as Bekoff can interpret their findings. Sometimes, for example, ethologists are interested in subjective aims, sometimes in emotion, sometimes in capacities for decision, sometimes in the causal efficacy of the past on the present, and sometimes in an animal's own entertainment of possibilities for reacting to different situations. For process thinkers, cognitive ethology can then add empirical flesh to these more metaphysical claims, discriminating kinds and degrees of decision-making capacity and subjective aims. To the question "Can animals have such experiences?" process thinkers answer "Yes." To the question "Do they have such experiences?" process thinkers answer "Ask the cognitive ethologist."

How might a cosmology of animal minds also be understood as a theology of animal minds? The answer is twofold. First, if theology deals with what is sacred, and if the word *sacred* points to the value that an animal has

in itself and for itself, this cosmology is also a theology. This is because the cosmology affirms the intrinsic value—the importance that each animal has to itself—of each animal. This sense of self-importance is implicit in the animal's impulse to live with satisfaction relative to each particular situation.

Second, though, and more specific to process thought, there is still another dimension of animal experience that needs to be considered that is quite explicitly theological. As has already been noted, Bekoff speaks of an umbrella of love that blankets the whole of nature. In process thought this blanket of love would be the divine reality, and it would be understood as both surrounding or encircling the whole of the universe in a compassionate way and residing within each moment of experience, including animal experience, in a compassionate way. Put simply, God embraces animals, and God is inside each animal. The question, of course, is: How?

In process thought the divine reality is within each creature as that creature's own indwelling lure to live with satisfaction relative to the situation at hand, or, in the technical terms of Whiteheadian thought, the initial phase of the subjective aim of each moment of experience (Whitehead 1978, 108, 224, 244, 283). The general idea is that each moment of experience contains a potentiality for responding and adapting to the immediate situation that is the best for the situation at hand given the needs to live, to live well, and then to live better. The initial aim is the way that God is present in each animal life, and it is adjusted to the conditions of the animal, including its genetic makeup, environmental conditions, past history, and social setting. This initial aim changes from moment to moment, because the living conditions change from moment to moment. In some instances it may be to play, in others to flee, in others to eat, in others to sleep, in others to mate. It may include impulses simply to enjoy beauty and to create.

Ultimately, say process thinkers, the indwelling lure within each animal, humans included, is to live with beauty—that is, with harmony and intensity relative to the situation at hand. Each animal has its own kind of beauty and its own way of living with beauty. The task of the cognitive ethologist is to discern the particular kinds of beauty to which animals are drawn, the kinds of subjective aims that characterize their lives. In so doing, these ethologists are, in their way, doing theology. They are helping others to sense the way in which God is present in the animals' lives.

#### AN ETHIC OF ANIMAL PROTECTION

I have explained that process thinkers propose that all living beings, by virtue of their capacities for inwardness or subjectivity, have intrinsic value, which means that all living beings deserve respect and care on their own terms and for their own sakes, not simply for their usefulness to human

beings. Of course, all living beings include single-celled organisms, multi-celled microorganisms, and plants, which process thinkers propose are colonies of single cells. Process thinkers do not recommend that we treat amoebae, bacteria, and plants with the same moral regard that we treat, for example, coyotes and penguins and cats. The difference, they say, lies in the fact that, according to our best evidence, the latter have higher degrees of sentience than the others, including capacities for suffering and joy.

Accordingly, process thinkers recommend that, in terms of ethical practices, individual animals elicit greater moral sensitivity as individuals than other living beings such as plants and cells. They then combine this sensitivity to animals with a broad commitment to what might be called ecojustice.

#### THE ECOJUSTICE MOVEMENT

*Ecojustice* names a moral perspective that is part of the worldwide ecumenical movement within Christianity. It links concerns for justice and peace with concerns for environmental well-being such that ecology *and* justice, not ecology *or* justice, is the norm. Accordingly, as explained by Hessel, it “provides a dynamic framework for thought and action that fosters ecological integrity and the struggle for social and economic justice. It emerges through constructive human responses that serve environmental health and social equity together—for the sake of human beings and otherkind” (Hessel 1996, 17). It has four basic norms:

- solidarity with other people and creatures—companions, victims, and allies—in each community, reflecting deep respect for creation
- ecological sustainability—environmentally fitting habits of living and working that enable life to flourish; using ecologically and socially appropriate technology
- sufficiency as a standard of organized sharing, which requires basic floors and definite ceilings for equitable of fair consumption
- participation in decisions about how to obtain sustenance and to manage community life for the good in common and the good of the commons (Hessel 1996, 19)

Ecojustice advocates belong to many Christian traditions, and they have different racial, ethnic, sexual, economic, and gender identities, but generally they emphasize these four themes in their ethical deliberations, their advocacy, and their actions.

A process approach to ethics agrees with this general ecojustice orientation and then includes within its horizons attention to individual animals and their suffering. In *The Liberation of Life* Birch and Cobb borrow from the Humane Society of the United States and recommend the following moral principles as guides to action, each of which can guide individual behavior and public policy:

- It is wrong to kill animals needlessly or for entertainment or to cause animals pain or torment.
- It is wrong to fail to provide adequate food, shelter, and care for animals for which humans have accepted responsibility.
- It is wrong to use animals for medical, educational, or commercial experimentation or research unless absolute necessity can be found and demonstrated and unless this is done without causing the animal pain or torment.
- It is wrong to maintain animals that are to be used for food in a manner that causes them discomfort or denies them an opportunity to develop and live in conditions that are reasonably natural for them.
- It is wrong for those who eat animals to kill them in any manner that does not result in instantaneous unconsciousness. Methods employed should cause no more than minimum apprehension.
- It is wrong to confine animals for display, impoundment, or as pets in conditions that are not comfortable and appropriate.
- It is wrong to permit domestic animals to propagate to an extent that leads to overpopulation or misery.

These mandates answer many of the questions raised by Bekoff pertaining to the treatment of animals. They are the kinds of moral guidelines that, in combination with a theology of animal minds and a spirituality of attunement to animals, respond to Bekoff's challenge. It is to the idea of attunement that I now turn.

#### A SPIRITUALITY OF ANIMAL CONNECTION

An interesting feature of Bekoff's thought is that he often emphasizes attunement to animals. By attunement I mean two activities, both of which are forms of empathy. I mean wondering what another living being is feeling and why, which is an act of imagination, and I mean, in some instances, a more direct apprehension of the feelings of other animals in intuitive ways. The first I call imaginative empathy and the second direct empathy. Process thought provides a way of appreciating both forms of empathy, should they occur in human life, and of interpreting them in spiritual ways. I treat imaginative empathy first, showing how, from a process perspective, it can be understood as a form of contemplative prayer.

*Imaginative Empathy and Prayer.* Process thought speaks of certain potentialities for feeling—such as anger or embarrassment or compassion or generosity—that can be abstracted from the particular living beings who embody them and considered in their own right. For example, we humans can reflect upon anger intellectually and get a taste of its tone without being in the presence of someone who is angry or being angry ourselves.

When process thinkers encounter Bekoff's work, they naturally think that he is considering such emotions in the abstract and then wondering if, while humans experience them in one way, other animals might experience them in other ways. Of course, the ecological and genetic context of the animal would shape the way an emotion is felt. A bird would feel "angry" in one way, a dog in another, a human in still another. But it is the same pure potentiality for feeling embodied by different animals.

Moreover, from a process perspective, human beings can imagine such feelings as abstracted from their own experience and then rightly ask: How might this feeling be embodied in the life of another creature? This is exactly the method that Bekoff uses in his studies. He is considering certain emotions and forms of intelligence that he knows as a human being and then wondering how other animals might also experience that emotion and why. The why question is critical, because it enables him to consider the evolutionary advantages of certain emotions—certain pure potentialities of the subjective species—for given objective species.

Process thinkers would add that the very act of imagining and wondering is, in its own way, a spiritual practice. If the divine reality is present to and in each animal, empathically receiving that animal's feelings into its own life, the act of wondering and imagining what another animal is feeling is then one way of conforming to and participating in the divine life. It is, so to speak, putting on the mind of God. Not completely and perfectly, of course; there always is more to an animal's mind than any human can ever know, and sometimes humans project onto animals feelings that they do not have. Empathic imagination in relation to other animals is an art that can assist science, but it is not a science itself. It is rather, as Bekoff shows, an aid to science.

Saying that an act of empathic participation is a way of participating in the divine life is to say that it is a form of contemplative prayer. Contemplative prayer is different from but potentially complementary to prayers of address, which seek to communicate with the divine and listen for responses from the divine. By contemplative prayer I mean prayer that seeks to listen to the world with the heart of the divine. More specifically, I mean the kind of prayer that Christian writer Kallistos Ware calls the contemplation of nature. In his classic introduction to Orthodox Christianity, *The Orthodox Way*, Bishop Ware writes: "All things are permeated and maintained in being by the uncreated energies of God . . . and so all things are a theophany" that mediates divine presence. "The whole universe is a cosmic burning Bush, filled with the divine Fire not yet consumed" (1995, 118). According to Ware, a recognition of the divine fire rightly leads Christians to an appreciation of the sheer uniqueness—Ware calls it the *thusness* or *thisness*—of particular things, persons, and moments. "We are to see each stone, each leaf, each blade of grass, each frog, each human face, for what it truly is, in all the distinctiveness and intensity of its spe-

cific being” (1995, 119). He speaks of this seeing as a contemplation of nature.

If Bekoff and process thinkers are right—if other animals do have minds of their own—this kind of seeing also includes empathic imagination as defined above, and this kind of imagining is a form of prayer. Interestingly, this would mean that minding animals is a form of prayer. It would also mean that, when it occurs in the context of the natural sciences, including field studies, the scientific study of other animals is a form of prayer.

Here we have a connection between not only science and theology but also science and prayer. Additionally, the insights gained from cognitive ethology can be material for prayer, which is then available to nonscientists as well. Bekoff’s books such as *Minding Animals* and *The Ten Trusts* can then be understood not simply as appeals for caring about animals but also as invitations to a prayerful way of looking at the world of animals, and the anecdotes shared by Bekoff in *Minding Animals* and by Jane Goodall and him in *The Ten Trusts* can be understood as sacred literature—literature aimed at helping people attend to the intrinsic value of animals.

*Direct Empathy and Communion.* By direct empathy I do not mean uninterpreted empathy. In the context of process thought, empathy means feeling the feelings of others, such that the feelings of others become part of one’s own immediate experience. Such feeling is commonplace in human life. When we talk with others, for example, the tones of their voices often express the subjective conditions that inform their lives at the moment, and we sense their moods as they speak. Through their words a feeling is communicated, and sometimes we may feel this feeling in ways that go beyond the words. Nevertheless, the feeling thus received is always and inevitably interpreted in our reception of it. This interpretation is shaped by our personal background, our cultural conditions, our social location, our bodily position, and our chemical makeup. What may be genuine care from the sender’s point of view, for example, we may receive as undesired pity. In the house of misinterpretation there are many rooms.

Nevertheless, it also is the case that feelings are transferred from one human to another in many ways. (Witness a football game, a worship service, a rock concert, or a potluck supper, should there be doubts.) There are exercises in collective sharing of common emotions where they are seemingly transferred from one person to another. Process thought is likewise open to the possibility that feelings can be transferred between species, such that what one animal is feeling can be sensed by another animal, a human for example, even though they belong to different species. The technical term for such mind-to-mind communication is *hybrid physical prehension*. A hybrid prehension is an intuitively felt feeling of what is happening in the mind of another, and it can, under certain circumstances, transcend physical and chemical mediation.

Are there circumstances in which human beings and other animals communicate with one another through shared feeling and thus enter into inter-species communication? Bekoff's writings for the general public are filled with stories that suggest as much. In *The Ten Trusts*, for example, Goodall tells the story of an African gray parrot, N'kisis, who lives with a woman named Aimee Morgana and reportedly communicates telepathically with Aimee. When Goodall herself visited Aimee and N'kisis, the parrot said "Got a chimp!" As Goodall explains, Aimee had been showing N'Kisis photographs of Goodall with chimps and introducing her to the word *chimp*, which was her 701st word.

During the visit, reports Goodall, N'Kisis also kept saying "Show the psi," using *psi* to refer to telepathic communication. Goodall's account proceeds as follows:

And so I watched a video of an experiment designed by Rupert Sheldrake and Aimee in which Aimee is in a downstairs room, with the door closed, where a video camera (number 1) shows her actions. N'kisis is alone upstairs in his cage, with a second video camera (number 2), synchronized with Aimee's, trained on him. The two images of Aimee and N'kisis appear simultaneously in a split image on our screen. Camera 1 shows Aimee opening a sealed envelope in which an independent party has placed a picture of some flowers—which she now sees for the first time. Aimee looks at the picture; almost simultaneously N'kisis starts talking: "You gotta go get the camera, put some flowers on now. . . . You go put pictures on flowers on there. . . . I gotta put some picture, flower. . . . Look at the little flowers, yea." A second envelope contains a photo of a man talking into a cell phone. "Whatcha doin' on the phone," says N'kisis, twice. (Goodall and Bekoff 2002, 47–48)

To this story Goodall adds: "It is clear that a new and exciting field of research is opening before us. N'Kisis' accomplishments are amazing, but will be received with scornful skepticism by mainstream science" (p. 48).

Of course, Goodall is absolutely right about one thing: many scientists, and for that matter most theologians, will be scornfully skeptical of the idea that there can be communication between humans and parrots. For their part, process thinkers will be sympathetic to the skepticism, but they also will suggest that the scorn be left behind, because, at least from the vantage point of Whiteheadian cosmology, it is metaphysically possible that feelings can be transmitted between the dominant occasions in a parrot's experience and those in human experience. Given the differences between species and given the realities of physical chemistry, such transmissions are improbable; still, from a process perspective, they are not impossible.

Indeed, in *Parapsychology, Philosophy, and Spirituality: A Postmodern Explanation* (1997), Griffin has written an extensive and philosophically nuanced interpretation of paranormal phenomena between human beings, showing how, from a process point of view, such communication can be appreciated. For process thinkers, then, reports of telepathy may be met with curiosity and healthy skepticism but not with scorn, because the uni-



verse is so constructed that such experiences can occur. The question of whether there is communication between humans, or for that matter between humans and other animals, is an empirical question to be tested, not a metaphysical question to be dismissed.

Goodall reports that Aimee wants to install a surveillance system that will accurately record everything N'kisis says and much of what he does. "Then," says Goodall, "some of the skeptics might be humbled" (2002, 48). Process thinkers would welcome just these kinds of tests.

Of course, communication is one reality and communion another. By communion I mean not only shared information but also sympathetic conformity to the subjective forms of another with an intention to share in that one's joys and sufferings. Ideally, of course, such communion is two-way. Still, it seems to me that, in human-human interactions, one person can commune with another even if the other person does not commune back. We do this when we feel the sufferings of others who are in our presence, somehow sharing in what they feel, even if they are not aware that we are doing so. Bekoff's work shows that this kind of empathy might also be possible between humans and other animals, in which, at least from the human end, there are direct prehensions of another animal's state of consciousness.

This seems most evident, at least in his own writings, with the dog Jethro. I focus on Jethro because, in much traditional theology, the distinctive kinds of human-animal bonds that emerge with companion animals are neglected. It is obvious to anyone who reads Bekoff's work that he has special affinities for Jethro, whose photograph appears in *Minding Animals* with the caption "Jethro, listening to me read aloud some sentences from my book, before yawning and continuing to wonder what it's all about" (2002, xvi).

Jethro indeed looks confused in the photograph. What is interesting to imagine, though, is what it is like for Bekoff to be in the presence of this dog. He gives us a hint in the preface:

Early every morning I take a nice and easy stroll with my buddy, Jethro, along Boulder Creek, near my mountain home. This is "his time" and I follow him and let him do what he wants to do. . . . Jethro is a dog of few barks, but when he speaks it behooves me and others to listen well, for his messages are entrenched with deep insights into, among other matters, human nature. I let him speak freely and I want to know what he has to say. His language is richer and deeper than mere words. (2002, xv)

Of course, Bekoff knows that he can never enter fully into Jethro's mental world and that he may well misinterpret the barks. Yet he speaks of Jethro as having a language that is "richer and deeper than mere words" but that is somehow transmitted through the barks.

What is this language? From a process perspective it is, at the very least, the feeling—the mental condition of Jethro—as he barks. However, an

interesting feature of feeling for Whiteheadians is that it can transmit what Whitehead called propositions. A proposition is not a linguistic entity but rather, in Whitehead's words, a lure for feeling; that is, a lure offered by one living being who seeks to communicate with another. Through words or gestures, sound or motion, a proposition may say, in effect, "Here, consider this possibility! Try looking at the world this way! Take heed of this!" or "I am so sorry. I wish I hadn't done that!" or "Isn't this fun? Let's do it again" or "Help! I am hurting!" or "I love you." The words are but vessels for the propositions, which occur, in the words of the New Testament, "in sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:26)—perhaps sighs even too deep for barks.

The point is that sometimes barks or words can carry the lures for feeling, as can, of course, eye contact. We humans are thus given ideas, even insights, from our nonhuman kin through their attempts to communicate with us. In process thought, as in much religion, it often is assumed that human language is the sole medium by which such propositions are transmitted. But most of us also recognize that they can be transmitted through eye contact and music and through dance and touch. People say things, and we receive what they are saying, in such ways.

Bekoff opens up the possibility that other animals, too, sometimes say things to us quite directly through their gestures and that in this communication there can be communion, a direct knowing of what the other is feeling and trying to say. A clear example of this is his story of Jethro and "Bunny":

Jethro, my companion dog for more than a decade, is low-key gentle, and well-mannered. He has never chased animals who live around my mountain home, and he just loves to hang out and watch his animal friends. Twice he went out of his way to be nice to two small animals who needed care. Whether Jethro expected something in return for his acts of kindness cannot be known, but it seems unlikely.

One day, when Jethro was about two years old, I heard his footsteps on the porch. Instead of whining as he usually did when he wanted to come in, he just sat there. Through the glass door I noticed a small furry object in his mouth. My first reaction was, "Oh no, he killed a bird." But when I opened the door, Jethro dropped at my feet a very young bunny—drenched in his saliva—who was still moving. I couldn't see any injuries. The bunny was just a small bundle of fur who needed warmth, food, and love. I named her Bunny. I guessed that Bunny's mother had disappeared, probably eaten by a coyote, red fox, or mountain lion. Jethro looked up at me, wide-eyed, looking for praise for being such a good friend to the bunny. He was so proud of himself. I patted him on his head, rubbed his tummy, and said, "Good boy." He liked that.

When I picked Bunny up Jethro got very agitated. He tried to snatch her from my hands; he whined and followed me around as I gathered a box and a blanket. I gently placed Bunny in the box. After a while I put some water, mashed up carrots, celery, and lettuce near her, and she tried to eat. All the while, Jethro just stood behind me, panting, dripping saliva on my shoulder, and watching my every move. I thought he would try to snatch Bunny or the food, but he just stood there, fascinated by this little ball of fur slowly trying to get oriented in her new home.

When I had to leave the box, I called Jethro to come with me, but he simply wouldn't come. He usually came immediately, especially when I offered him a bone, but now he stayed near the box for hours on end. When I tried to get Jethro to go to his usual sleeping spot, he refused. I trusted Jethro not to harm Bunny, and he did not during the two weeks I nursed her back to health. Jethro had adopted Bunny. He was her friend. He made sure that no one harmed Bunny.

Finally, the day came when I introduced Bunny to the outdoors. Jethro and I walked to the side of my house, where I released Bunny from her box and watched her slowly make her way into a woodpile. Bunny was very cautious. Her senses exploded with new sights, sounds, and odors. Bunny remained in the woodpile for about an hour until she boldly stepped out to begin life as a full-fledged rabbit. Jethro remained where he had lain down and watched the whole scenario. He never took his eyes off Bunny and never tried to snatch her. (Goodall and Bekoff 2002, 56–57)

This story illustrates at least one kind of communion that can occur between humans and companion animals, in this instance humans, dogs, and rabbits. From a process perspective, this communion can be understood not only as a mutuality between Bekoff and Jethro but also as a way in which God is present in human life.

#### FAITH IN GOD

I have explained how, for process thinkers, the word *God* names both an all-inclusive empathy in which the universe is enfolded, which shares in the feelings of all living beings and is completed by their very existence, and an indwelling lure to live, to live well, and to live better as present within each living being. Whiteheadians speak of God in the first sense as the consequent nature of God and God in the second sense as the initial aim of each moment of experience. But there is more to God than this, at least for many process thinkers. *God* also names a quality of relationship that can be enjoyed between living beings, amid which they are mutually enriched and creatively transformed through the relationship itself.

If God in the first sense is One-embracing-many and God in the second sense is One-within-each, God in the third sense is One-between-many. For process theologians of a Jewish, Christian, and Muslim orientation, this third sense is extremely important. The idea is that God is found in community and in communion: in the betweenness of mutually enhancing relationships. For some Christians, this is the deeper implication of the doctrine of the Trinity. The point is not that God is to be imagined on the analogy of a triangle with one person at each point but rather that God is a relational reality and is thus found in healthy relationships “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

In contemporary forms of ecological theology, emphasis often is placed on human-human relations and human-earth relations as contexts in which communion can occur but not often on relationships between humans and individual animals. Bekoff's pioneering work in cognitive ethology,

and more importantly in reflecting upon the minds of animals for human life, is thus an invitation for Christians and others to consider more deeply what it can mean to find the divine *in* individual animals and also in those special relationships that humans can sometimes have with other animals, as evidenced in his own relationship with Jethro. Uncounted human beings on our planet have enjoyed similar kinds of relations with dogs, cats, horses, birds, and other living beings.

In my own work, I have spoken of finding the divine in mutually enhancing relations with the earth as green grace. My point has been that such grace—such healing—occurs when we enter into rich bonds with the natural world. There is a special quality of such grace that is discovered when green grace is enjoyed with other living beings whom we know as individuals with names and personalities of their own.

For process thinkers, and perhaps for many other people, the value of having a relationship with God lies in this healing, this grace. Faith in God does not protect a person from tragedy. Nor does it provide a person with perfect assurance in an afterlife where all will be well; some process thinkers believe in an afterlife, and others do not. What faith in God does offer is a recognition that, with or without an afterlife, and with or without tragedy, what Bekoff calls *our* journey (2002, 199)—that is, the journey of living beings on Earth—is itself part of a deeper Journey that encompasses the whole even as it resides within each individual. For process thinkers this greater Journey, this Great Becoming, is the divine life itself, in whom all animals “live and move and have their being” (Acts 17:28). Bekoff’s contribution to constructive Christian theology, and other forms as well, is to show how much more complete our journey can be if, as human beings, we take it together with other animals. With so many people on the planet, they are forced to take it with us, even if they might rather be without us. Minding animals can be a human way of taking it with them, too, trustful not only that the whole of creation, but also each living being within creation, is blanketed within a wide umbrella of love.

#### NOTE

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