



Living Earth Community

Multiple Ways of Being and Knowing

EDITED BY

SAM MICKEY, MARY EVELYN TUCKER, AND JOHN GRIM



<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

© 2020 Sam Mickey, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim. Copyright of individual chapters is maintained by the chapters' authors.



This work as a whole is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs license (CC BY-NC-ND), which allows readers to download parts or all of a chapter and share it with others as long as they credit the author, but they can't change them in any way or use them commercially. Selected chapters are available under a CC BY 4.0 license (the type of license is indicated in the footer of the first page of each chapter). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text and to make commercial use of the text providing attribution is made to the authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Some of the material in this book has been reproduced according to the fair use principle which allows use of copyrighted material for scholarly purposes. Attribution should include the following information:

Sam Mickey, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim, eds, *Living Earth Community: Multiple Ways of Being and Knowing* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0186>

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0186#copyright>

Further details about CC BY licenses are available at, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>

Updated digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0186#resources>

Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-78374-803-7

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-78374-804-4

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-78374-805-1

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 978-1-78374-806-8

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 978-1-78374-807-5

ISBN XML: 978-1-78374-808-2

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0186

Cover image: *Feathers and Fins* (2014) by Nancy Earle, all rights reserved.

Cover design: Anna Gatti.

3. Humilities, Animalities, and Self-Actualizations in a Living Earth Community

Paul Waldau

In preparation for the workshop's dialogue on 'multiple ways of being and knowing' in our shared 'living Earth community', I attempted to ascertain themes relating to the following question: *how might an individual today choose actions that celebrate the plain fact that each of us is a member of a species that has only sometimes, and not often lately, been a responsible member of the Earth community?* I present my findings in this exploratory piece.

My framing of these issues focuses particularly on the importance of different forms of humility. I suggest that different forms of humility are needed because each of us is a member of human-centered communities that have, whether intentionally or not, produced diverse harms beyond the species line that many individuals within our own species and, in particular, the major institutions of modern industrialized societies have long *celebrated* rather than condemned.

My framing also foregrounds our obvious animality, although again I want to spur my own thinking by using the plural 'animalities', since lives on this planet are unbelievably diverse and always embedded in a more-than-animal context. I refer here both to those nonhuman lives we name with words like 'plant' and phrases such as 'the material world' to denote those parts of the universe that our host culture overwhelmingly treats as non-living, and thus merely a resource for our use and benefit.

My experience over the last half-century has suggested to me that no rich form of 'self-actualization' is possible for us when humans

claim to be separate and superior, as occurs habitually through the demarcating property of language that produces categories such as ‘humans and animals’. I take human exceptionalism to be the dominant narrative of our time, even though in our received wisdom traditions there are many profound formulations about recognizing the importance of both human and nonhuman ‘others’ whenever any human individual or group seeks full self-actualization.¹ I offer here a few forthright statements that make plain the importance of such wisdom. The first is from Viktor Frankl.

[S]elf-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence.²

A pair of comments from Thomas Berry takes the issue well beyond the species line:

[W]e must say that the universe is a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects.

Indeed we cannot be truly ourselves in any adequate manner without all our companion beings throughout the earth. The larger community constitutes our greater self.³

Beware Bootlegging. I also use the plural ‘self-actualizations’ in this chapter because I intentionally want to call out another issue — it does not follow that one’s own notions and/or attempts at self-actualization provide any sort of paradigm by which the self-actualization of other animals, whether human or not, can be measured. Instead, I go forward on the assumption that, in any group (and this gathering of chapters

-
- 1 I have previously defined ‘human exceptionalism’ in my book *Animal Studies — An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), as follows (p. 8): ‘Human exceptionalism is the claim that humans are, merely by virtue of their species membership, so qualitatively different from any and all other forms of life that humans rightfully enjoy privileges over all of the earth’s other life forms. Such exceptionalist claims are well described by [James] Rachels as “the basic idea” that “human life is regarded as sacred, or at least as having a special importance” such that “non-human life” not only does not deserve “the same degree of moral protection” as humans, but has “no moral standing at all” whenever human privilege is at stake’.
 - 2 Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, 4th edn (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 115.
 - 3 The second quote is from Thomas Berry, ‘Loneliness and Presence’, in *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*, ed. by Paul Waldau and Kimberly Patton (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 5–10 (p. 5). The first quote was said by Berry on multiple occasions, and it appears at p. 7 of the same collection.

would provide a paradigmatic example of the following), there will be different forms of self-actualization. One widely successful form appears in service traditions, and yet other forms appear in meditation traditions. Many other forms appear in instances where individual humans have found a way to stand outside the penchant for self-preoccupation that individuals in our own species so often exhibit. In such instances, these individuals have *thereby approached particularly fulsome forms of self-actualization*.

Based on the personal and communal experiences that have led me to describe issues as I do above, and based on the challenges I tried to meet in my previous book-length projects (both single-author publications and the two edited collections *A Communion of Subjects* and *An Elephant in the Room*),⁴ I am currently finishing a book that will carry the title *The Animal Invitation: Science, Ethics, Religion and Law in a More-Than-Human World*. This book is an attempt to say what five different human domains — science, ethics, religion, law, and education — might look like if we took our animality seriously.

To introduce the issue further, I include next the opening two paragraphs of the book, after which I will try to sketch out ways in which I think each of the four eminently human efforts described in the subtitle — science, ethics, religion, and law — must always be living efforts (this claim, which is by no means novel in regard to any of these four domains, is related to how I discuss our own animality throughout the book). In my closing comments below, I will address both formal and informal education, since this theme is a meta-topic, as it were, of the chapters addressing science, ethics, religion and law.

Animals invite us. This world-constituting fact is true whether we are talking about humans inviting humans, or, the focus of this book, nonhumans inviting human awareness, co-existence, appreciation, and even awe. One domain after another of our human existence, including often our daily lives, reveals the astonishing variety and depth of these invitations.

It is both of these features — variety *and* depth — that are, tellingly, reflected in the human domains we know as ‘science,’ ‘ethics,’ ‘religion’ and ‘law.’ Admittedly, the great variety of approaches, which has

4 *An Elephant in the Room: The Science and Well-Being of Elephants in Captivity*, ed. by Debra L. Forthman, Lisa F. Kane, David Hancocks, and Paul Waldau (North Grafton, MA: Center for Animals and Public Policy, 2008).

spawned many different ways of talking and thinking about the animal invitation, reflects both deep acknowledgements and facile dismissals. Considered alone, the variety is revealing, for it reflects basic features, especially the finitudes, of our human capacities. But it is the depth evident in many humans' recognition of the animal invitation which, though less commonly encountered than diversity, reflects best the fecundity and vivifying power of human thinking and action. As this book will show, human possibilities, narrow and broad, play out in the depth and variety of responses to the animal invitation that are evident in different human groups' claims of identity, community, compassion, awareness, self-delusion, self-inflicted ignorance, and so much more.

In the following four sections, I raise the issue of whether our astonishing achievements in science, ethics, religion, and law are (i) helpfully seen as *eminently animal achievements*, and (ii) better understood when each of these four domains is discussed primarily as an ongoing commitment of our kind of animal that *must* be understood and experienced as 'living now', rather than 'eternally fixed' or as an 'absolute truth'. Correspondingly, treatment of any of these domains as irrevocably fixed defeats what can be thought of as the vivifying and enabling genius of each of these living domains as a human achievement. I suggest in the book, then, that it takes truly living, responsive forms of each of these human achievements to move individual humans in the direction of full actualization of our human animality.

Human Science in a More-Than-Human World

That our sciences have organic features is strongly hinted in the long history of shifts in ideas and changes in governing paradigms across the centuries. Organic features of many sciences are also seen in the unbelievable rate of new discoveries in recent decades, for these discoveries have produced shifts in particular scientific communities' dominant ways of thinking. I want to add, though, that it remains my impression (perhaps a result of my 'education') that the western science tradition in some ways still does not feature 'living aspects' quite as fully as do ethics, religion, and law.

Human Ethics in a More-Than-Human World

I'm only too aware that ethics has long been taught in the western intellectual tradition as a set of answers to questions such as 'what is the right thing to do?' and 'what does it mean to be a moral and/or good person?' Having taught ethics now for over twenty years, I do not think such formulations are helpful, nor do I think these formulations reflect that ethics is, and always needs to be, *very alive indeed*. For this reason, I have come to see such views of ethics as a failure to detect the true heartbeat that takes place as we embrace, develop, and seek full actualization of our human ethical abilities. A question that does prompt us to hear more clearly the heartbeat of our ethical abilities is what I have come to call 'the root question' of ethics, namely, 'who are the others?' This is an abbreviated version of what is, in our daily lives, a far more complicated rendition of this root question, which can be stated in a variety of ways — here's one version that I think captures some of the animal and human genius of the abilities we call 'ethics': 'Who are the others about whom I should care *given that I have finite abilities and there are, as a practical matter, many other limits on my ability to care?*'

The principal point in the book's chapter on ethics is that such root questions, and of course the abilities that we use in pursuing our own answer, reflect what can only be described as *eminently animal abilities*. I do not mean to suggest with 'eminently' in the prior sentence that each and every kind of animal features the high-level abilities we call ethics — my guess is that only some animals do (caring about 'others' is more common, I suspect, in mammals, but there is much to suggest that some birds and a variety of non-mammals also have some feature in their life that, in effect, can be described as a version of the 'who are the others?' question).⁵

5 Note, for example, the great range and diversity of life explored in the following titles: Frans de Waal, *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2016); Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed, 2013); David Haskell, *The Songs of Trees: Stories from Nature's Great Connectors* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2017); David Abram, *Becoming Animal: An Essay on Wonder* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 2010); M. D. Olmert, *Made for Each Other: The Biology of the Human-Animal Bond* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2009); Jonathan Balcombe, *What a Fish Knows: The Inner Lives of Our Underwater Cousins* (New York, NY: Scientific American/Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016); Jennifer Ackerman, *The*

In this chapter, I suggest that one *cannot* understand an ability of the ethical sort without affirming that ability's animal origin and nature. As a segue into the following comments about humans' spiritual/religious awarenesses, let me add that I have come, after a half-century of studying religious traditions, to think that much, if not *all*, of great value in our religious traditions follows from the eminently animal nature of ethics. Religious traditions are of particular interest to me on account of their following aspects: the role of narrative; the pervasive degree to which our worlds feature sacredness and gift in connection with real places and other living beings; and the insightful observation that relational epistemologies are crucial to each of us recognizing much of who we are.

Human Religion in a More-Than-Human World

Here I tread on sensitive ground — I do this intentionally *and reverentially*, recognizing that there is no single definition of religion that I might employ to argue that 'religion must be alive in order help humans self-actualize.'

As I get older, I'm less inclined to preface the following claim with *mea culpa*, but perhaps I should as a way to underscore my theme of 'humilities' — much that is called 'religion' fails to help 'adherents' or 'believers' self-actualize (in the sense I use this term in these short comments). Yet our spiritual/religious domains seem to me, after a half-century of immersion in studying religion, to include a great variety of options, some of which embrace responsibly rather than repudiate what it means for religious awareness to respect and nurture our many animal-based abilities, finitudes, fragilities, organic births, decline, and eventual death. Religious awareness, when it acknowledges our animality in responsible, foundational ways, will itself be *truly alive and living in every sense* that I am an animal now alive and living.

Genius of Birds (New York, NY: Penguin, 2016); Marc Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals: A Leading Scientist Explores Animal Joy, Sorrow, and Empathy, and Why They Matter* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2007); Neil Shubin, *Your Inner Fish: A Journey into the 3.5-Billion-Year History of the Human Body* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2008).

Human Law in a More-Than-Human World

Law (by which I mean ‘legal systems’, of which there are at least seven distinct major traditions and obviously many different minor variations) may also seem, like science, somewhat of a challenge to fit into the ‘living’ paradigm. Yet any study of comparative law makes it obvious how fully *constructed* each individual legal system is, and how such ‘construction’ has features that are easily discerned to be ‘living’, in the sense that I’m using that broad term in this short paper. This can be observed in these two comments by Robert Cover:

To live in a legal world requires that one know not only the precepts, but also their connections to possible and plausible states of affairs.⁶

Law is the projection of an imagined future upon reality.⁷

The need for stability in legal systems, especially as they are part of complex societies, creates features and pressures that tend to make legal systems ‘conservative’, ‘predictable’, and subject to forces that easily and often have made enactment and enforcement of ‘law’ the prerogative of reactionary forces.⁸ Consider the exclusion implied in Cicero’s seemingly inclusive comment that ‘we are all servants of the laws, for the very purpose of being able to be freemen.’⁹ The ‘we’ today might seem to refer to the human group alone, but Cicero through this claim in actuality hides two recurring facts. Human groups now use, and seemingly forever have used, ‘law’ (developed legal systems) to subordinate not only nonhuman animals and the more-than-human Earth, but also marginalized, politically powerless human groups.

Although the contemporary movement widely known as ‘animal law’ has for the last two decades challenged such a narrow construction of law, public policy circles today nonetheless remain ignorant of and

6 Robert M. Cover, ‘The Supreme Court, 1982 Term – Foreword: Nomos and Narrative’, *Harvard Law Review*, 97.4 (1983), 4–68, at 10.

7 Robert M. Cover, ‘Violence and the Word’, *Yale Law Journal*, 95.8 (1986), 1601–29, at 1604, <https://doi.org/10.2307/796468>

8 It should be noted that my generalizations here do not apply to Indigenous legal systems.

9 Cicero makes this comment in ‘The Speech of M. T. Cicero in Defence of Aulus Cluentius Habitus’ (M. T. Cicero, *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, trans. by C. D. Yonge (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1856), Perseus Digital Library, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0019%3Atext%3DClu>). See paragraph LIII, paragraph 146.

unconcerned about the 'animal question'. There are changes afoot today by which the living features of law can be seen, but since, characteristically, 'the political trumps the legal', the full potential of public policy for the more-than-human world remains, as of yet, unrealized.

Some Final Comments on Human Education

The education theme is, as noted above, a meta-theme in the forthcoming book. In my *Animal Studies — An Introduction*, I worked with both formal and informal education, both of which are encapsulated by an observation made by the English philosopher Stephen Clark: 'one's ethical, as well as one's ontological framework is determined by what entities one is prepared to notice or take seriously'.¹⁰ I entered the academic world because, for me, it *is* a place a daring, and so much so that, at its best, the academic world fosters critical thinking that allows for self-criticism along the lines of Theodore Roszak's 'But then let us admit that the academy has very rarely been a place of daring'.¹¹ David Orr adds a further dimension to this discussion, extending the issue across the species line — 'The truth is that without significant precautions, education can equip people merely to be more effective vandals of the earth'.¹²

One way in which our society has been equipping 'educated humans' to be 'effective vandals' (or, in Aldo Leopold's phrasing, 'conqueror of the land-community' rather than 'plain member and citizen of it') is categorical division of humans from other animals.¹³ This framing defeats us even as it prompts ignorance that leads to great harms to other animals and their local communities. Teachers and students who insist on language that foregrounds a 'human/animal dualism' seem to me to have less chance, often none at all, of accurately assessing themselves or counseling other humans in ways that lead to greater prospects of self-actualization. Why do I suggest this? Because our evident mammality,

10 Stephen Clark, *The Moral Status of Animals* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), p. 7.

11 Theodore Roszak, 'On Academic Delinquency', in *The Dissenting Academy*, ed. by Theodore Roszak (New York, NY: Vintage, 1968), pp. 3–42, at 4.

12 David Orr, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1994), p. 5.

13 Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, with Essays on Conservation from Round River* (New York, NY: Ballantine, 1991), p. 240.

primatehood, and ape-ness are radically (that is, at the root) denied by the dualism.

A key feature of our local formal education — the two-part division of ‘higher education’ into the sciences, on the one hand, and the ‘arts and humanities’, on the other — continues to foster the notion that human possibilities are the paradigm of achievement for any living being. In effect, the two-part university has features that legitimize human exceptionalism in a more-than-human world — this is one way that it equips us to be effective vandals of our shared world. Moreover, education further vandalizes in those areas of formal education *where the ideology ‘all humans matter’ inadvertently masks harms done to many human animals as well*. Thus, in the book, I suggest that teaching about science, ethics, religion, and law in virtually all mainline institutions today presents a face of human exceptionalism that goes beyond harms to nonhumans and their communities because, ironically, formal education in practice continues to hold in place the privilege of only some humans.

A Near-Term Task

I have come to think of our personal and social tasks as finding ways to re-assert our animality, even though these fundamental features of our lives are hidden in plain sight, as it were. These animal abilities are, I suggest, the very condition of our (i) doing science thoroughly and effectively, (ii) pursuing ‘living’ forms of ethics, (iii) fostering diverse opportunities for spiritual and religious awareness that are truly alive and free, and (iv) creating legal systems that create and project for ourselves a future of responsible membership in the larger community.

A Longer-Term Task

My sense that we can do such work by returning to a full, gracious acknowledgment of our own animality needs, I think, to be supplemented by affirmations of the fact that ‘our larger community’ includes more than animals alone — insights about the plant world are cascading into our awareness again by virtue of creative scientific work, and our connection to the whole earth is, of course, something that many small-scale

cultures have long known. The senses of ‘gift’ and ‘community’ found in writers such as Robin Wall Kimmerer, Richard Wagamese, and Linda Hogan reveal that our human forebears knew a great deal about setting the stage for the emergence of a larger community and for forms of self-transcendence that such a community offers, and thereby helps make our own self-actualization possible and fuller.

Let me end on notes that are intentionally provocative and personal — I have come to think of denials of humans’ evident animality as cowardice in the face of reality. I am an animal, and so are members of my human community. I love them not in spite of their animality, but because of their animality. And I have come to recognize that I cannot ‘know myself’, nor it seems to me can any human come to know the possibilities of their life well, without coming to terms with the plain fact that *we are now and have always been and will always be animals*. By acknowledging our animality, we stand to open up key possibilities for self-actualization. This is why my forthcoming book, as well as the present volume in which this chapter appears, attempts to explore our scientific, ethical, religious, and social sensibilities that permit forms of life and a rule of law that are fair to all members of our extended, larger community.

Bibliography

- Abram, David, *Becoming Animal: An Essay on Wonder* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 2010).
- Ackerman, Jennifer, *The Genius of Birds* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2016).
- Balcombe, Jonathan, *What a Fish Knows: The Inner Lives of Our Underwater Cousins* (New York, NY: Scientific American/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016).
- Bekoff, Marc, *The Emotional Lives of Animals: A Leading Scientist Explores Animal Joy, Sorrow, and Empathy, and Why They Matter* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2007).
- Berry, Thomas, ‘Loneliness and Presence’, in *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*, ed. by Paul Waldau and Kimberly Patton (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 5–10.
- Cicero, M. T., *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, trans. by C. D. Yonge (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1856), Perseus Digital Library, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0019%3Atext%3DClu>
- Clark, Stephen, *The Moral Status of Animals* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977).

- Cover, Robert M., 'The Supreme Court, 1982 Term – Forward: Nomos and Narrative', 97 *Harvard Law Review*, 4 (1983).
- 'Violence and the Word', *Yale Law Journal*, 95.8 (1986), 1601–29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/796468>
- de Waal, Frans, *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2016).
- Forthman, Debra L., Lisa F. Kane, David Hancocks, and Paul Waldau, eds, *An Elephant in the Room: The Science and Well-Being of Elephants in Captivity* (North Grafton, MA: Center for Animals and Public Policy, 2008).
- Frankl, Viktor E., *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, 4th edn (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992).
- Haskell, David, *The Songs of Trees: Stories from Nature's Great Connectors* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2017).
- Kimmerer, Robin Wall, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed, 2013).
- Leopold, Aldo, *A Sand County Almanac, with Essays on Conservation from Round River* (New York, NY: Ballantine, 1991).
- Olmert, M. D., *Made for Each Other: The Biology of the Human-Animal Bond* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2009).
- Orr, David, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1994).
- Roszak, Theodore, 'On Academic Delinquency', in *The Dissenting Academy*, ed. by Theodore Roszak (New York, NY: Vintage, 1968), pp. 3–42.
- Shubin, Neil, *Your Inner Fish: A Journey into the 3.5-Billion-Year History of the Human Body* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2008).
- Waldau, Paul, *Animal Studies — An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

