

BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Scavengers of the In-between: Feminist Ruminations on Dogs, Love, and Pragmatism

ABSTRACT

Western philosophy's frequent conflation and denigration of animals, human others, embodiment and emotions has been powerfully documented over the past many decades. I explore the impact of this fear and loathing of the body, a somatophobia that infects much of the Western philosophical canon and its orientation toward people of color, white women, and animals. As I share reflections that are meant to enact and reveal an embodied pragmatism, I consider the potential of our love for dogs to ground a more embodied philosophical approach to love. Rooted in my own journey (as philosopher and dog lover), I pose questions about the significance of love and dogs both to the academy, and to flesh and blood theorists. How might our love for dogs support a more attentive, embodied engagement with both the world and the world of ideas?

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“I have seen Ben place his nose meticulously into the shallow dampness of a deer’s hoofprint and shut his eyes as if listening. But it is a smell he is listening to. The wild, high music of smell that we know so little about” (Mary Oliver 2013, 111).

“So, then, one has no hope of understanding the nature of knowledge, reality, goodness, love, or beauty unless one recognizes the distinction between soul and body; and one has no hope of attaining any of these unless one works hard on freeing the soul from the lazy, vulgar, beguiling body. A philosopher is someone who is committed to doing just that” (*Elizabeth V. Spelman* 1982, 113).

As he pondered tolerance and pluralism, American pragmatist William James made an audacious interspecies comparison:

“Take our dogs and ourselves, connected as we are by a tie more intimate than most ties in this world; and yet, outside of that tie of friendly fondness, how insensible, each of us, to all that makes life significant for the other!—we to the rapture of bones under hedges, or smells of trees and lamp-posts, they to the delights of literature and art” (1899, 76).

I too exercise my empathetic imagination as I walk with my dogs. The cool sidewalk under my four toughened paws, the breeze lifting my hound’s ears, my twitching nostrils filling with the perfume of wormy earth, crocus shoots, rabbit dung. Like James, I am a philosopher who pays attention to dogs. Or is it more accurate to say that I used to be a philosopher, before

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I fell in love with dogs? Certainly, the way I speak of dogs illustrates the sort of marginal (non-) philosopher I have become.

It has taken me nearly twenty years to abandon the ethereal realms of Plato and Descartes and begin to relax into pragmatism's full-bodied embrace. It is surely no accident that I adopted William James and Olive—a plucky mutt whose Bassett chassis is splotted with Springer Spaniel—at about the same time. The dog's world is the antithesis of the philosophical heights first revealed to me in college. That was an airy fantasyland, full of exotic birds, soaring overhead to discern general principles and diluted universality. By contrast, the pragmatist's wet nose caresses the ground, pokes into the particularities, keeping the priorities of stomach and hearth ever in view.

To become a philosopher who loves dogs, and so takes them seriously, is to invite the dissolution of taken for granted dichotomies of knowledge, sense and cognition. It is to accept the violation of boundary between the physical and conceptual. Here, truth and falsity are not opposites so much as different flavors. A dog sees with her nose and reads with her tongue. She claims no objective distance, no knowing that is not internal, no thinking that is not already psycho-physical. She ingests with every sense organ and maps that information into her body. The dog is a scavenger not only of what might be eaten, but also of every facet of experience that could be coaxed of just a little more juice. The quest for truth is transformed into a commitment to the fullness of reality.

Truth, after all, is not the point. This vibrant journey of sweat and sapidity reflects the integrity of experience in and of itself. Whether it is to be marked as *true* or *false*, or *justified* or *unjustified*, is as beside the point as the puny sign marking the

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source of the Niagara Falls. In this doggy, pragmatist iteration, humans do not serve truth, bow to it, or kiss its ring. Rather, truth is our plaything, our tool, to be filled like a cook pot, or trusted like a well-worn hammer. Truth is a red balloon we follow with our gaze as it slips out of view. It is a lead pipe that can serve as crow bar, window prop or baseball bat. There is no knowing what it is in advance, or in essentialist or absolutist terms, but this no longer matters to us, for we have moved into the shadows beyond the Enlightenment. As one pragmatist puts it, following Rorty, “We should no longer rely on and believe in foundations, we should no longer worship anything, . . . and we should finally realize that our self, our language, and our community are governed by contingency” (Schulenberg 2007, 7).

My own journey away from enlightenment-steeped, analytically-tinged academic philosophy has been a glorious devolution into dogness, a game of wrestling with dualisms: mind and body, thinking and feeling, high and low culture. It’s been a trajectory marked by fumbblings with lofty theory and sticky immersions in the ignoble swamps of pop psychology. I watch brittle concepts crash to earth and harvest them as firewood as I renovate my life into a classroom where I permit myself to indulge my fascination for the dog eating the philosophy book as well as the contents of the book itself. The dog ate my homework? Indeed. And for the pragmatist, it is no wonder we resort to ingestion analogies when we are at our most philosophical. We want to chew on it a while. Drink it in. And after that, it is sometimes still hard to swallow. What does it say of us that our language both hides and proclaims the passionately embodied nature of such epistemological urges?

The simultaneous disguising and disclosure of the bodily maps neatly onto a similarly paradoxical orientation toward

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non-human animals, whom we both adore and despise. And, by extension, the ambivalence about the body is not just coincidental with vacillations about love as a worthy subject, but adheres to it. We cannot quite decide if love is a highfalutin spiritual hovering in the clouds or a sweaty, heaving bodily one. Because love straddles those boundaries so teeteringly, it defies many academic and intellectual categories, those gaping boxes prepared to swallow only what will be neatly contained. This ambivalence is noticeable even in some of the contemporary philosophies that have bravely faced the bogeyman, as has Alan Soble in *The Philosophy of Sex and Love*. As I describe below, despite his eclectic approach, he handles love mostly at arm's length; the better to add "logical rigor to the discussion of love" (Soble 1998, ix), though he also labors to reach over philosophy to touch the bodies waiting on the other side.

In a perverse way, bodily as they are, animals sometimes do represent love for humans, including how we may learn to enact the story of love. The child clings to her stuffed toy bear as someone she loves, but it is a love of consumption. She can stroke or destroy this animal proxy as she wishes, control it, dress it up, or fling it into the bushes. Is it so different from lap dogs, or even from how we discursively frame wild animals, bending them to our concepts, categories and narratives; for example, appropriating the lion for his majestic individualism? Does our overwriting of such beings reflect our frustration and failure at connecting to, controlling and escaping our own animal embodiment? How do our beliefs about animal love, about how we love them and how they love each other and us, give shape to our thoughts about human love?

And when it comes to experiencing animals' feelings, is it all just projection anyway? Are our accounts of animal and human

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love merely nested narratives based on presumption, layers of projection functioning like funhouse mirrors but grounded in very little? As one unabashed dog lover reflects:

“When a dog is rolling in fresh-cut grass, the pleasure on her face is unmistakable. No one could be wrong in saying that what she is feeling is akin to what any of us (though less often, perhaps) may feel. The words used to describe the emotion may be wrong, our vocabulary imprecise, the analogy imperfect, but there is also some deep similarity that escapes nobody” (Masson 1997, 1).

But when dogs behave differently from humans—recall their frenzied greeting, apparently out of proportion to our mere jaunt to the store—don’t we dismiss it as a kind of stupidity? “In other words, when dogs do not behave as we do, we assume it to be irrational behavior” (Masson 1997, 2). Is it coincidental that this is the same dismissal that women’s “inscrutable” emotional reactions have received for centuries? Aren’t the *stupid* emotions of dogs, women and people of color, including their supposed blind love for the men who abuse them, part of what proves their irrationality and, so, unfitness for philosophy?

Our relationship to animal love is confused, then, as convoluted as our on and off romance with our own fleshy selves, and it is a *gendered* and *raced* confusion. There is perhaps no story about somatophobia in Western thought that can’t be traced to the triptych enshrinement of maleness, whiteness, and humanness. To put it negatively, the discussion of dogs and love is simultaneously, always and already, a discussion of sexism, racism, and anthropocentrism. It is an association that helps

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explain the urgency of engaging with the question of animal love, especially for women. As Anna G. Jónasdóttir urges:

“Concerning love as one of the most vital, and difficult – not the least for women, matters to deal with in practical life and in theory, it should be particularly urgent for feminists to be (pro)active in this area and not only re-active to problems and solutions formulated by male/mainstream theorists” (2013, 25).

The somatophobia that defines women’s experience and their placement in intellectual history, and that of people of color, is coextensive with the roles they have been assigned in sex and love. Is it any wonder that some of us long for escape from these devastating stereotypes?

My first gesture towards philosophy was almost certainly a yearning away from suffering, an urge to step back, observe, categorize and control. I wanted to survey the world from someplace safe, an aerie from which ambiguity and complexity would be transformed into mere problems to be resolved. I had understood Aristotle’s definition of the human as rational animal to mean that we were no longer merely contingently animal, that we were, at most, barely animal. Read this way, it’s an escape act of the first order, a sleight of mind that allows one to believe that she is no longer a mere beast among beasts, or a thing among things. What *I* can see by way of my magical rationality must be object, *other* than me, even if the *other* is a body, especially if it is *my* body.

People of color and white women—never permitted full participation in this elevated pretense of elect subjectivity—have been compared to animals of various sorts and regarded as somehow more embodied, more mired in immanence, than

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white men. Recent racist speculations and judgments about Serena Williams—for example, comments about her evident physical power—are to the point. Such judgments reflect the relentless somatophobic associations that white supremacist, Eurocentric culture has drawn for centuries. Against this backdrop, Brittney Cooper explains William’s inspirational, embodied significance:

“That kind of body confidence from a dark-skinned, ‘thick’ Black woman, with a round posterior that all my homegirls and I, straight and gay alike, admire, is hard won. This world does not love Black girls or women, and it takes every opportunity to project its own ugliness onto our bodies” (2015).

Sometimes the stereotypes are quite specific. For example, calling a woman a dog means she’s not just an animal, but ugly, common, and uninteresting, a creature whose value is properly calculated only relative to man’s purpose and pleasure. All such denigrations—directed at those *others* who are stupid, smelly, bestial, and instinctual—elevate the *man of reason* by contrast and serve as a foil to construct the only love that ultimately matters. This is philosophical love—*philosophia*—the love of the idea of love, rather than love itself—or even the love of love itself—which can be both physically and psychologically messy. Such pure love is universal, abstract, and pure. It is also white, male, and human.

But of course I am exaggerating, painting with far too wide a brush as I indulge my cranky musings. Capable philosophers, including feminist ones, have resuscitated the likes of Plato, Descartes, and Kant, delivering them from wholesale critiques that oversimplify their approaches to emotions and embodi-

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ment. It is a caricature to present them as mechanistic rationalists stomping out every flower of feeling on their quest for enlightenment. So, for example, Denis Kambouchner complicates the reading of Descartes, reminding us that he ultimately depicts “love as a chief and prime element of affective life” and that “love is found in a notable spot: right after wonder, and before hatred, desire, joy and sadness” (2007, 24). Similarly, Susan James has successfully labored to add nuance to our appreciation of philosophers who had been crudely treated by feminists and other critics in the recent past (2000).

Still, one must acknowledge that the rehabilitation of such champions of dualism goes only so far, for the rationalistic, paradigmatically philosophical handling of love is indeed a conceptual one; even among those who took it quite seriously, as did the “first philosopher of love,” Plato. So, if we are inclined to scold those second-wave feminists for being too hard on the philosophical superheroes, it is healthy to keep in mind that “philosophers are indeed in love with ideas, ideas (how and wherever we may wish to locate their origins) [they] are what draws one to philosophy, are what philosophers engage with, are what philosophers teach to students and debate with each other, and are what philosophers allow themselves to be consumed by” (Cristaudo 2012, 19).

Whatever abstract functions and roles have been assigned to emotions and embodiment in these philosophers’ ontological and epistemological economies, far too often prejudices about *others* have served as the scrim against which to bring their facsimiles of feeling to life. Still on the subject of Plato, for example, Spelman reminds us that in *Theaetetus*:

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“The implication is clear: if any old opinion were to count as real knowledge, then we’d have to say that women, children, and maybe even animals have knowledge. But surely they don’t have knowledge! And why not? For one thing, because they don’t recognize the difference between the material, changing world of appearance, and the invisible, eternal world of Reality” (Spelman 1982, 116).

None of which is to say that there haven’t been male thinkers on the borders all along, punching at the bricks of the towering, logocentric edifice, some less misogynistic than others. And certainly, writers and thinkers in other disciplines—philosophers in exile, very often—have also been exploring topics regarded as alternative or abject in their messy particularity. All along there have been theoretical sideshows to philosophy’s main stage. But even subjects that feel edgy, abject or subaltern can ultimately serve to help justify the preeminence of the main course.

The general cultural focus on sex, for example, which, happily, has helped to open space for exploring sex in scholarly circles, may simultaneously mark love as even more taboo and out of reach. As a bodily expression, sex is situated squarely on the outskirts of the intellectually acceptable. But its designation as the dark underbelly only makes it more appealing, precisely because of its abject, forbidden character. It evokes prurient curiosity more than respect. And this very rendition of sex as subaltern, through the contrast it provides, helps to firm up the more rarified conceptions of, say, heterosexual, marital love.

The ambivalent and connected valuations of sex and love are reflected even in thoughtfully philosophical contemporary

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accounts of sex and love such as Soble's. That he assiduously assigns sex and love to two separate parts of the book is to the point. That sex is sometimes treated in starkly gritty terms—his first remarks about oral sex are not for the faint of heart—is also to the point (1998, xxxi). The heady, self-conscious analysis surrounding most of his discussion of both sex and love makes such animalistic moments stand out as voyeuristic or even pornographic. It is as if the distance Soble-the-philosopher keeps from the body makes his forays into the nasty side of sex more titillating. It comes as no surprise that Soble uses the subject of sex, and feminist philosopher Alison Jaggar, as his example as he schools his readers in the rigors of his discipline. As Soble primly notes:

“Analytic philosophy is, when done well, known for its clarity, precision, and carefulness. Sometimes it is not done altogether as it should be. It will be helpful, in becoming acquainted with the methods of conceptual philosophy of sex, to examine an example of a well-meaning attempt at analysis that goes astray – committing the mortal sin of equivocation” (1998, 5).

Jaggar doesn't just get it wrong in Soble's eyes; her argument about sex is such a howler that it's fit to serve as a cautionary tale about the proper practice of the analytic method. The sexually/philosophically ignorant feminist serves to highlight Soble's frank and skillful handling of this earthy, complex, taboo subject.

Perhaps this feminist philosopher can so naturally serve as a foil to Soble's razor sharp conceptual parsing because the norms of Western white masculinity encourage boys to learn to love wisdom by turning away from sex, women, and even their

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own emotions. It isn't, of course, as if their feelings are thought to disappear, but that they are pushed into a handy closet down the hall. One learns to corral the horses of one's passion. For the rational animal, feelings like love are spun into meta-feelings, as Plato's *Symposium* is about the idea of love rather than love itself. By the time the philosopher has subjected love to analysis, love will no longer *be* the phenomenon that might have seduced his interest in the first place.

Do our academic disciplines too cut us into pieces along the same lines as the dualistic philosophers we now caricature? Are we further cleaved into mind/body, professional/personal, rational/emotional by our dedication to the facades we believe we must maintain to continue to be tolerated in our traditional fields? Certainly, I did not always thrive in the in-between. I once reveled in the attention of my philosophy professors, bearded white men with the power to confirm my intelligence and exceptionality. They helped me believe that I was, or could be, so much more than a mere animal/woman. They *loved me*, in a way, and I loved being associated with them, so far from insipidity and vulnerability, the rickety swing set of my mother's life. Our mothers' lives.

For to abandon the sharp edges of philosophy is to some degree to choose a woman's life, a womanly life, whether one is, in fact, a woman or man. Her life imbued with, steeped in, percolated from, the mundane even as it props up the celebrated, the arcane, the profound. As Adrienne Rich wrote: "I have a very clear, keen memory of myself the day after I was married: I was sweeping a floor . . . This is an age-old action, this is what women have always done" (1986, 25). To be a woman is to be there, amidst the detritus and droppings of everyday life; it is to feel oneself *most* oneself among the preconditions

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and leftovers of embodiment, the dirty dishes, the laundry, the shitty diapers, the garden soil.

To fully acknowledge, let alone to embrace, this bodily side of life is to renounce one's claim to the philosophical lineage as it has been defined. There is no way around it, though one may try to make compromises. I have gotten by as a sort-of, half-assed philosopher who writes about animals, or, in another oblique gesture of avoidance, a philosopher who writes about philosophers who write about animals. It is liberating to feel almost done with that. And to have the renunciation arise not from principle—it is not as if I am *against* philosophy—but from lack of desire, as the dog abandons the bone, eventually, from apathy or exhaustion, or because a squirrel has darted across the yard. Could the promise of truth or tenure or sainthood really be more compelling than a chatty squirrel just out of reach? And would I want to leave my dogs there, rejected, longing for me outside these campus walls?

I do not know if it is right to call it love, what I feel for my dogs, but then I do not know if it is right to denote as love what I feel for my partner or my sister or my dead mother. This intimate distance we have with dogs is an evocative enigma. As Masson writes:

“The closeness between dogs and people is taken for granted and, at the same time, seen as something immensely mysterious. Naturally I feel close to my dogs, but who are these dogs? . . . Just who are these beings lying here, so close to me, and yet also so remote? They are easily grasped, and they are unfathomable” (Masson, 1997).

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It feels like love and it feels radical. To love a dog, or anyone, not just as an object or property, or as a cherished plaything, but as a being, to love the beingness of this other.

As Masson writes of his dog:

“There were just the two of us sitting in the living room, and it was very quiet. I looked over at Sasha and noticed that she was looking at me. Suddenly I was overwhelmed with the thought: There is another being in this room, another consciousness. There is somebody here besides me” (1997).

And don't we all share creaturely being with these animals, though it may feel important for us to pretend otherwise? So much conspires to persuade us of how unlike we are, but true dog love calls it into question, threatening this order of things. Nib, the 18-pounder, meditates with me each morning, her dense weight pinning me to the earth, her ragged breath metronomic, as present as my own silent ins and outs. From the rooted body we form, we rise together as spirit, like smoke, to the heavens, our morning breath lifting us toward enlightenment until the needs for tea and kibble shatter the illusion.

Is it presumptuous to draw this tenuous connection between my dog and enlightenment? What if I mean to refer not to the white-hot blast enlightenment of the phoenix, but the subdued, grunting, gradual awakening of the aging mutt?

Perhaps it's enough to say, then, that I am giving up knowing as a philosopher in favor of knowing as a creature among creatures. But am I seeking *knowledge* in my daily humbling as I watch their tails rise like semaphores in the breeze, their brows furrow at the puzzle of scent or sound? Do I glean *philosophi-*

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cal insights? “A dog can never tell you what she knows from the smells of the world, but you know, watching her, that you know almost nothing,” writes Oliver (2013, 27). We can refer to this poet’s curiosity as *epistemological*—does it sound better that way?—but can this be accurate if one’s ultimate goal is impressionistically disclosive rather than discursively delineated? *It*, whatever it is, does not seem to respond to our arbitrary names in any case.

I confess that I learned to speak of ethics without ever mentioning compassion or love except as a contrast to reason. And that was me reciting Kant’s categorical imperative to slack-jawed freshman who were lost as it is only possible to be in a Minnesota winter. They came for nourishment and, aspiring philosopher that I was, I gave them arguments. Would my students have been better or worse off if I had served them pizza and beer instead of this brand of ethics? For what if the philosophical enterprise isn’t simply produced by a mind vaguely linked to a body but is itself a flowering of, or maybe an excretion of, our particular embodiment? Is this the direction James points to when he says that the philosopher recognizes rationality “as he recognizes everything else, by certain subjective marks with which it affects him.... The transition from a state of puzzle and perplexity to rational comprehension is full of lively relief and pleasure” (1879, 317). It is an intellectual longing and satisfaction all right, but it is rooted in the body.

Is a being generally predisposed to satisfaction, say, a properly adored dog, unfit for knowledge seeking as the philosopher conceives of it? Surely the caricature of the scientist or philosopher includes a restless quality that we are supposed to admire. He is driven to seek, *must* know, will not be satisfied until he learns the truth. The philosopher-hero is fundamentally itchy.

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And so, when Mill says it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a happy pig, we, like the pig, must dumbly concur (1861, 260).

For pigs or dogs the hunger is for food or stroking, or play or rest, an asking that can be answered. For the philosopher, we are meant to understand, there is an interiority, the fundamental character of which is a healthy desire, a robust sense of lack. The philosopher wrestles and wrests. He sculpts, fleshes out, unpacks, elucidates, deduces. He is relentless in his analytic quest. His mental activities are the manly, heroic adventures of Lewis and Clark, or George Washington. Not only is the philosopher never satisfied, he is righteously proud of never being satisfied, the devil's advocate who never tires. After all, doesn't intellectual complacency suggest that one is either stupid or not paying attention?

And so the dog emerges guilelessly from a primordial soup of creaturely plenitude, wearing an easy satisfaction with the here and now, hungry only for the comforts and challenges of play and love and food and shaft of sunlight. No wonder women are regarded as dogs, given that women have been thought to share the dog's intellectual passivity, unless they—I mean *we*, of course—are conniving, cat-like, to manipulate men. The male mind seeks out, pokes and prods—recall Bacon's raping scientist—while the woman or Black man (or entire continent of Africa) is regarded as lolling, passive. *Satisfied*, is a reproach leveled at one who settles vapid and cow-like, accepting chain-link limits on the mind and spirit.

The restless raptor's radar picks out the rabbit against the dappled backdrop of sun, air current and shadow while the dog blithely shares the rodent's mammal plane. For the dog, there

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is no climbing out of this furry stratum to survey the situation, no *deus ex machina* to transport the dog from its grounded obscurity. But is the view from the mountaintop *truer* than the one from the ground? Is it more beautiful? From which point of view do such judgments become meaningful? What fuller truth could there be than what is here in this wet-fur-slobber, pricking-whisker proximity? Higher truth? Higher than what? They may assess me from such altitudes and imagine they measure me entirely, but from there they cannot even catch my scent.

I rebel against this cartoon philosophy I have drawn, but in my floundering I sometimes latch onto this word *pragmatist*, though it is still a name for philosophers of a sort, still a serious title. Why? Is it to reassure myself that I could still count amid the world of white men and their ideas? Musing animal that I am, drawn inexorably into this web of wondering, what if I refuse philosophy altogether or it refuses me? Am I even capable of leaving it behind? What should I call myself as I gorge on esoteric language I know will leave me bloated and regretful? I say that I theorize now as a shameless lover of dogs, but isn't that just another denial and pretense? And why is it never enough to simply state that I am a woman, impelled by desire and lassitude and a curiosity that does not, as it turns out, begin and end with either my nose or my intellect?

What can love studies mean in this battered, beleaguered context? Is it merely the culmination of outsider scholars from across the spectrum who could find no respect or traction for their impulses toward love in their first disciplinary families? Is love studies, then, another queer academic movement in its insistence that what is closest to our hearts no longer be furthest from our dissertations? As Ferguson reminds us, “. . .

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there has been a huge gap between, on the one hand, how most people think (or ‘what people know’) about love, that it is one of the most valuable ‘things’ in human life, and on the other hand, the rejection, ridiculing, or at best marginalization of love as a topic for serious studies in much of academia” (2013, 1). Can it be that this is not an accident? That precisely how one announces oneself as a *serious academic*—code for philosopher since many of us are, after all, doctors of *philosophy*—is through the renunciation of love, especially the crass love of mere animals and other bodies?

Of course, love hasn’t been entirely neglected in the academy. But it is rare that love has been treated attentively, lovingly, in a way that respects the integrity of what it is, *as* what it is. As Jónasdóttir explains, love has rarely been considered as a force in its own right, but rather as an epiphenomenon of other, more fundamental, aspects of reality. For example, it has been explored as “merely a sublimated sexual energy (libido)” or “an ideological phenomenon of the cultural superstructure (helping maintain the bourgeois hegemony)” (2013, 19, emphasis in original). Love has received attention, but on the way to something else, on a journey to some other more serious, respectable concern.

Is it an accident that James turned to the dog to reflect and describe his pragmatist musings? He understood that something fundamental was reflected in this form of close attention to these nearby, elusive creatures. James always loved dogs and because of love he could properly *see* them. And perhaps partly because, as a privileged white man, he was not overly driven to prove himself as a philosopher—he is known as the father of psychology after all, and born as much from literature and medicine as from philosophy—; he could indulge such senti-

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mental concerns. Certainly, James took seriously the notion of sympathy and his exercises of loving attention to dogs are also (at least) attempts to occupy their point of view. It's not so differently from how a poet may listen to dogs: "The dog would remind us of the pleasures of the body with its graceful physicality, and the acuity and rapture of the senses, and the beauty of forest and ocean and rain and our own breath. There is not a dog that romps and runs but we learn from him" (Oliver 2013, 118-1119).

That we can learn from our encounters with dogs in ways that are dramatic and trivial is surely indisputable. In this vein, we have milked them for scientific purposes; in heinous acts of objectification we have even nailed them to boards and dissected them live to satisfy curiosities both passing and profound. From them we can learn about the limitations of our understandings of what it is to know, to be, and to feel. That dogs are useful to us is not in question. But what would it be like to inhabit a richer conception of dog love that does not reduce the dog to mere prop for human realization and catharsis? To enter into relational exchange with the dog in a way that goes beyond exploitation and appropriation?

To love dogs in the language of a poet or outsider scholar can be almost as silly as to *be* a dog at her most flounderingly foolish. And yet we cannot resist these gullible, often goofy creatures, be we philosophers, neonatal nurses or backhoe operators. We invite dogs into our worlds and fall into theirs, engaging in an unequal dance that teeters on the edge of the perverse. As Masson sees it, "To a certain extent, we are the jailers of dogs, since any freedom they achieve must be acquired by wheedling it out of us. This is one good reason they learn to read us so well. Survival dictates that dogs learn about

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us and learn to play us to some extent” (1997). It is a queer kind of love indeed, as revelatory of our shames and hungers as of our aspirations and ambitions. What else could it be given the position we have assigned to ourselves between the angels and beasts? We float up only to discover that we ache for the rubbing of earthly embodiment. We lampoon the dog, belittle him, abuse him, only to find that we long for his rude, wet-nosed attentions. We carry pictures of our dogs into faculty meetings, physics conferences, and high courts, but mostly they remain hidden in our smartphones, together with our menstrual calendars and grocery lists.

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