



**UNIVERSITY OF
ILLINOIS PRESS**

Ferrater Mora Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics

ReviewReviewed Work(s): Animals in Tillich's Philosophical Theology by Smith

Review by: Jeremy D. Yunt

Source: *Journal of Animal Ethics*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring 2020), pp. 93-96

Published by: University of Illinois Press in partnership with the Ferrater Mora Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/janimaethics.10.1.0093>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



University of Illinois Press and Ferrater Mora Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Animal Ethics*

JSTOR

and animals foreshadows shifting attitudes and real-world change. Read together, Kurt Remele's investigation of Roman Catholic teaching on animals (pp. 142–49) and Margarita Carretero-González's passionate critique of Catholicism's complicity in bullfighting culture (pp. 286–94) strike me as (at the risk of some hyperbole) prophetic. As both make devastatingly clear, indifference to suffering is at odds with the Catholic Church's own teaching. There is in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Remele argues, "a deep ambivalence" regarding animals (p. 146), and for Carretero-González, consideration of "the prevalent Catholic attitudes toward bullfighting is enough to dishearten any animal liberationist brought up in the faith" (p. 291). At the same time, both remain cautiously optimistic (e.g., pp. 146–47; 291–92), and as they and others show, living religions are dynamic and capable of adapting to new situations and moral concerns, however slowly. These scholarly conversations about religious responses to animal suffering are in that sense open ended and (one hopes) a stimulus for continued debate, reform, and activism within communities of faith.

I think it fair to say this collection is broadly accessible to nonspecialists. More than half of the chapters examine subjects in which I have no academic formation or extensive personal contact, but this is not a hindrance as most contributors carefully keep such readers in view. As a religiously motivated animal advocate, I find much here that inspires, even in studies largely removed from my own worldview. It is encouraging to discover fellow religionists—ancient and modern—thinking so carefully and feeling so deeply about animals and human responsibilities toward them. I recommend this important contribution without reservation.

Animals in Tillich's Philosophical Theology. By Abbey-Anne Smith. (London, England: Palgrave Macmillan. Palgrave Macmillan Animal Ethics Series, 2017. pp. 257 + xv. Hardback. \$109.99. ISBN: 978-3-319-40855-2.)

JEREMY D. YUNT
Independent Scholar

Abbey-Anne Smith's new book, *Animals in Tillich's Philosophical Theology*, is a welcome addition to the burgeoning field of animal ethics. Since the book deals with both Tillich's theology and animal ethics, it really can be seen as two books in one. For the reader who craves a well-rounded presentation of Tillich's theology, Smith does an excellent job of laying out his basic theological (and some philosophical) concepts. Then, by applying these concepts to his treatment of animals in relationship to both human ethics and theology, she helps us see the strengths and weaknesses of Tillich's thought as it relates to our evolving views on animals in the modern world.

Since I published a related book on Tillich's relevance to ecophilosophy and environmental ethics in 2009—now updated and retitled as *Faithful to Nature: Paul Tillich and the Spiritual Roots of Environmental Ethics*—I am aware of, and in much agreement with, Smith's criticisms of Tillich. Though I approach Tillich primarily from the perspective of his philosophy, while Smith focuses more on his theology, we share similar goals regarding humanity's ethics toward animals: a basic acknowledgment of their intrinsic worth such that we no longer use them as unnecessary objects of a human diet, for entertainment (circuses, marine "parks," bullfights, rodeos, dog races), in unnecessary and cruel scientific research, or as objects of human vanity (furs, leather coats, shoes).

At the core of her book, Smith deftly addresses the nagging issue we both seemed to grapple with regarding Tillich's placement of animals in his thought; namely, how he can speak so precisely of humanity's sinful and rapacious use of nature and the moral "perfection" of animals and yet fail to apply these insights in specific ways to the development of an animal ethic. In light of his incessant condemnation of the human tendency to commodify nature, Tillich must have been aware of the depth of animal suffering—since they are the most sentient nonhuman beings in nature. So why he didn't speak about them in a more systematic way will remain somewhat of a mystery, especially since Tillich acknowledges the profound impact Albert Schweitzer's "reverence for life" had on the development of his own life philosophy. Though Tillich does sometimes mention nonhuman animals quite sympathetically, Smith correctly observes that he really only goes so far as to imply that we should see animals as beings and not things.

Smith does give her insight into why Tillich seems to have largely left animals out of his philosophy and theology. Like most theologians and ethicists of his time, he remained in the grip of anthropocentrism, giving almost exclusive theological significance to humans. Tillich's high ontological valuation of humanity rested on the fact that we have an advanced rationality, as well as a sense of history—meaning we possess the intellectual capabilities to purposively transform the world we see and comprehend. For Tillich, these characteristics seemingly make only humans ultimately significant to God, or the Ground of Being. And for Smith this is a problem, because it means Tillich "sees the world from a humanocentric perspective, rather than a theocentric one, and this leads him back to a hierarchical vantage point with humans placed

firmly at the top of the order" (p. 155). She answers this limitation of his by proposing that, instead, we should base "our sense of worth on our faithfulness to the instructions of our Creator to protect and value the rest of the created order, rather than to base our worth (and that of every other species) on ontological attributes, and specifically, intellectual capacity" (p. 155).

Tillich's persistent focus on humanity would seem to limit his relevance to environmental and animal ethics. But, as Smith admits, it's a bit more complex than this: "At first glance, Tillich's highly abstract *Systematic Theology* does not seem to provide a great deal of material for developing a practical ethical stance on any contemporary issue. This first impression, however, is misleading" (p. 174). There's no denying that Tillich's writing is often quite abstract and human centered. That said, he still stands out among the theologians of his time as one of few who was deeply concerned about humanity's relationship to the natural world. And Smith shows us this by pointing to his sermons, the place we find Tillich expressing a much more personal, even poetic, sensibility about the plight of animals at the hands of a humanity estranged from itself, nature, and God. Here, Tillich seems more at ease in expressing his deep sympathy for the nonhuman animals on whom we inflict so much suffering. With that in mind, Smith rightly encourages the reader interested in animal ethics to turn to his sermons for Tillich's deepest and clearest sentiments on the subject.

But it is in his *Systematic Theology* where Tillich spends the most time developing a doctrine of life relevant to our views on animals. This is most apparent in his unique *Lebensphilosophie*, which he calls the "multidimensional unity of life." It is here that Smith brings some serious challenges to Tillich's relevance to animal ethics.

Among other purposes, Tillich uses his life philosophy to debunk the antiscience theories of theological supernaturalism, thereby emphasizing our biological and evolutionary ties to the rest of all other forms of life. He does this by describing the structure of life and existence metaphorically in terms of intersecting “dimensions,” rather than through the metaphor “level,” which he thought created a hierarchy with humans at the top. But Smith challenges the efficacy of such a move. Again, while Tillich thought he was overcoming the division of reality into an anthropocentric hierarchy, Smith argues that his criteria for judging a being’s worth ultimately comes down to whether or not the being participates in the dimensions of existence Tillich sees as significant to God—history and spirit. For Tillich, animals are largely confined to the inorganic, organic, and, in some cases, psychological dimensions.

While Tillich is absolutely correct that humans have an ontological stature uniquely different than other animals, Smith is apt to point out how this uniqueness should not be used to exploit and dominate other beings. Rather, our uniqueness should place upon us a moral imperative to care for the created order—particularly sentient nonhuman animals—regardless of whether they can speak or have advanced cognitive abilities. In fact, this imperative is why we take extra care of children and intellectually disabled human adults, a point advocates for animal rights often use to highlight the inherent speciesist bias in our ethics. Framed as a question: If intellectual ability is foundational to our ethics—which Smith points out as significant to Tillich’s own ethics—then why give moral priority and special care to these cognitively stunted human groups, when we deny such care to more cognitively advanced species such as dolphins, gorillas, and elephants?

Smith considers that Tillich’s limited knowledge of animal consciousness and emotionality might be to blame for the restricted theological placement of animals in his system. And she introduces the reader to the relatively new academic discipline of cognitive ethology to highlight this limitation. Only making its appearance in the 1970s (after Tillich’s death), cognitive ethology is already giving us greater insight into the emotional, social/moral, and intellectual lives of animals. For example, we can observe the elaborate behavior of certain animals, such as elephants, when confronted with the death of one of their members; the behavior seems to indicate a more complex emotional, one might even say “spiritual,” response to mortality than we previously assumed. Though the research is difficult and ongoing, such observations may lead us to posit that some animals do, in fact, participate in a larger understanding of existence than we currently give them credit for. Thus, regarding Tillich’s system, Smith is right to point out how such new knowledge seems to undermine his belief that animals do not have as much ontological complexity as he assumed. Tillich was keenly aware that every system of thought, including his own, is susceptible to new, challenging insights that might call some of it into question. Smith shows us how current findings in cognitive ethology may just be one of these significant challenges to his system.

For all her questioning of Tillich’s relevance for animal ethics, Smith eventually concludes that two particular theological doctrines of his can help advance a strong animal ethic: eschatological pantheism (Universal Salvation) and the Fall. She states that “the concept of Universal Salvation, along with the notion that the ‘Fall’ effects the whole of creation, is very positive with respect to nonhuman animals in particular and creation in general . . .” (p. 138).

In short, since Tillich sees all of creation as participating in the universal estrangement characterizing existence (though he somewhat ambiguously also says that animals are “morally perfect”), he shows us that animals share in the ultimate fate of all life, including the fate of humanity. Tillich says exactly this in his most forceful support for the idea that animals, humans, and the rest of nature are bound together in the multidimensional unity of life: “For there is no salvation of man [*sic*] if there is no salvation of nature, for man is in nature and nature is in man” (p. 230).

Smith’s book is a highly informative and original work that contributes in significant ways to both Tillich scholarship and the important field of animal ethics. It’s a must-read for those who care about the fate of humanity as well as the elimination of cruel, needless suffering of animals at the hands of humans.

Animal Labor and Colonial Warfare. By James L. Hevia. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018. 328 + xiv pp. with black and white illustrations. Paper. \$30.00. ISBN: 978-0-226-56228-5.)

KENDRA COULTER
Brock University, Canada

Historian James L. Hevia provides an extensive and detailed look at how animals were used as part of the British colonial project, with a particular focus on south Asia and Afghanistan in the mid to late 19th and early 20th century. The animals considered are those that were employed by the British military: camels, donkeys, mules, and, to a lesser degree, horses.

In keeping with historical scholarly practice, the story is told primarily through the careful piecing together of archival sources. When seeking to uncover the role of ani-

mals, historians may revisit previously interpreted sources but use a more-than-human lens, or seek out distinct materials given less attention in the writing of anthropocentric history. The growing interest in environmental and animal histories, combined with the diligent work of historians, is helping us better understand humans’ past, animals’ earlier roles, and the multispecies nature of all of world history.

This book has a sweeping topical reach. There is extensive explanation of the evolving nature of British military strategy and infrastructure in these regions. Hevia offers an intriguing outline of the development of veterinary science and knowledge dissemination. Careful attention is also given to the two primary processes through which animals were acquired. The first is military impressment, the taking of local people’s animals, a process not unique to this time period or place. The second is breeding, including through transnational trade and importation. There is also some consideration of the people employed to work with and care for the animals directly. At its core, the book is about human (mis)management of pack animals in the context of military and colonial relations.

Hevia begins with two different sets of questions, one provided in the preface, the other in the book’s introduction. The questions posed in the introduction concentrate primarily on how historical human actors relate and conceptualize the animals toiling for the military, and Hevia provides some answers, as they pertain to the specifics of the British imperial project.

The questions asked in the preface raise more substantive issues with the contradictions and complexities of not only using but remembering animals’ roles in military and colonial campaigns, and how these dynamics are entangled with understandings of service, contribution, and sacrifice. Given