

Abstract: Affect theory is a subfield that encourages us to think about how we interact with each other and the world along registers that are not reducible to language. This has suggested to some scholars that affect theory can also be used to better understand the experience of animals. This article explores a merger between affect theory, animal studies, and the lifeworld tradition of phenomenology. The upshot of this is a way of seeing how animals, like humans, have rich religious worlds that are shaped by pre-linguistic textures of affect. This perspective indicates that animals can be thrown into a state of trauma by being deprived of these lifeworlds. In light of this, the essay considers the ethical implications of the modern factory farm system, particularly the practice of mass confinement.

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You Don't Know What Pain Is:
Affect, the Lifeworld, and Animal Ethics

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*I can feel the changes,
I can feel a new life,
I always knew life can be dangerous.
I can say that I like a challenge
And you, to me, is pain-less.
You don't know what pain is.*

The title of this essay is borrowed from a song on Kendrick Lamar's 2012 rap album *good kid, m.A.A.d. city*.¹ It is a song I find myself coming back to again and again. Lamar's work is often discussed in the social sciences and has recently been the subject of some interesting commentary in the field of religion, but I think Lamar is also one of the most profound contemporary thinkers on the subject of this essay, which is pain. Lamar's song was on my mind often as I wrote a book on the relationship of religion to animality.² That book largely shied away from direct confrontation with ethical questions. In this essay, I attempt to address the relationship between animal religion and pain, using Lamar's philosophy of pain as a frame for thinking through the problem of pain, and animal pain in particular.

The title of the song, with a certain expletive removed, is "Don't Kill My Vibe." It sets up what I take to be one of the main themes of *good kid, m.A.A.d. city*: the way that lived pain is undetectable to someone who is not, in that moment, experiencing pain. The album as a whole can be decomposed into two interrelated cycles. One cycle is narrative. It is the story of Lamar and his friends as they drive around their neighborhood on a summer evening, looking for action, eventually getting into a gunfight with another group of kids, leaving one of them dead. Interspersed with this is a reflective, philosophical cycle. It is Lamar's commentary on the

¹ Lamar, Kendrick. *good kid, m.A.A.d. city*. Audio recording. (Interscope 2012)

² Schaefer, Donovan O. *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power*. (Durham, NC. & London: Duke University Press, 2015)

narrative and its political and spiritual implications. The first track of the album, “Sherane,” is the beginning of the *narrative* cycle that sets the stage for the story. But “Don’t Kill My Vibe,” the second track, is the beginning of the *reflective* cycle. Its position at the beginning of this cycle is critically important. Lamar uses this song to lay out the *intrinsic challenge* of trying to convey the *meaning* of his story. “I can say that I like a challenge and you to me is painless,” he raps. “*You don’t know what pain is*. How can I paint this picture/when the color blind [are] hanging with ya?”

What Lamar has hit on is what Elaine Scarry calls the fundamental “unsharability” of pain. “For the person whose pain it is,” Scarry writes, “it is ‘effortlessly’ grasped (...even with the most heroic effort it cannot *not* be grasped); while for the person outside the sufferer’s body, what is ‘effortless’ is *not* grasping it.”³ Carol Adams comments that for Scarry, “[t]he person in pain encounters pain that cannot be denied; the person outside of pain encounters pain that cannot be confirmed.”⁴ The distant second person, the *you* in Lamar’s lyric, is vital. When we’re talking about pain, “I” and “you” are a world apart.

But whereas Scarry stops short of theorizing psychological pain, believing that only physical pain is unsharable, Lamar goes further. Scarry is reasonably confident that artists and poets are capable of effectively broadcasting psychological pain. Lamar, I think, would disagree. Lamar’s perspective is that telling a sad story is not the same as sharing pain. In fact, telling a sad story often aestheticizes pain. “Look inside of my soul and you can find gold and maybe get rich,” he muses, grimly, anticipating his critiques of the rap industry later in the song. “This is not a rap on why I sling crack or move cocaine,” insists one of his alter egos later in the album. “This is cul-de-sac and plenty Cognac and major pain.” Lamar is wary of exactly the mechanism whereby tragedy is converted into flavor and consumed at a distance.

You don’t know what pain is. How can he tell you his pain? Especially when, from the outside, his life seems to be like a movie, crackling with excitement? How can he convey to you how much pain he’s in when his whole life is an adventure to escape pain—the pain of discrimination, of grief, of loss, of hopelessness, of remorse for one’s own sins? We, the listeners, are color-blind. There is something in front of us that we cannot see. Kendrick is asking us to see how pain can be invisible to us, how it can suffuse someone’s body without being intelligible to an observer—or even a listener. This does not mean that we do not “know” that the person is *in* pain. It means we don’t know what that pain *is*. “I’m looking right past you,” he raps, a few verses later. “*We live in the world on two different axles*.” These “different axles” are the central problem of the attempt to understand pain. Simply being told that someone is hurting is in no way a meaningful comprehension of what they are going through. And if we knew their pain like they did, our response—political and ethical—would be different.

This invisible pain is not just the pain of physical violence or psychic torment. It is also the pain of deprivation. “You are dying of thirst. You need water,” a character tells Lamar and his friends later in the story. “Holy water.” Lamar’s work is also about deprivation. It is about the invisible

³ Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 4.

⁴ Adams, Carol J. “Caring about Suffering: A Feminist Exploration.” In: Donovan, Josephine, and Carol J. Adams, ed. *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007: 198-227), p. 212.

things that support and sustain us, things that we do not know that we need and that we breezily put at risk. Lamar expressly understands these things—family, home, friendship—as religious. Our susceptibility to invisible pain is an effect, in part, of the invisible ring of hopes, attachments, needs, and fascinations that make up our worlds. Part of my argument here is that these attachments are affective. Affect theory, I suggest, helps us trace the thick but invisible attachments that bind us to our worlds. When those connections are crushed, we are left thirsty. Thirst, Lamar suggests, is part of the register of invisible pain.

Animal activism discourse tends to focus on animal mutilation and death because those are the most obviously gruesome and visually shocking aspects of the animal exploitation industries. Jewish studies scholar Aaron Gross in his *The Question of the Animal and Religion*, for instance, describes receiving undercover footage from a kosher slaughterhouse, showing “workers systematically cutting and partially removing the esophagi and tracheas of cattle.”⁵ Slaughterhouse expert Temple Grandin wrote of the video that “Removal of the trachea and other internal parts before the animal has become insensible would cause great suffering and pain. ... Several cattle were walking around with the trachea and other parts hanging out of them.”⁶ These images must be confronted, but this paper considers something else.

I want to raise the problem of invisible pain. I want to talk about the way that the horrors of industrial *slaughter* of animals are rivalled by the invisible horrors of mass *confinement* of animals in agriculture, in entertainment, and in laboratory testing. Not just the machines of pain, but the cages themselves. This is my argument: we need to learn a new set of strategies for mapping the pain of other bodies. Justice demands that we calibrate our ethical response not just to gruesome violence, but to invisible forms of pain—the pains of thirst. We don’t know what pain is. This attunement is a component in the cultivation of what Lori Gruen calls *engaged empathy*: “not only the process of empathizing, but critical attention to the broader conditions that undermine the well-being or flourishing of the objects of empathy... this requires moral agents to attend to things they might not have otherwise.”⁷

In order to draw these maps, I build on an idea explored in some earlier work, the notion of *animal religion*.⁸ I will elaborate this theory here in four sections. In the first section, I suggest that affect theory conveys us to a new understanding of religion, one that focuses on the non-linguistic dimensions of religion while still locating religion in fields of history, power, and materiality. Having brought to the surface the non-linguistic complexes of religion, the second section proposes a rethinking of the tradition of *phenomenology*—the correlation of religion to modes of experience that are anterior to language. The third section puts these elements together, suggesting that if we can think of religion as not exclusively linguistic, we can also acknowledge it as not exclusively human. The final section proposes that humans and other animals can be *tormented* by the deprivation of their religious lifeworlds. In total, my argument is that humans

⁵ Gross, Aaron S. *The Question of the Animal and Religion: Theoretical Stakes, Practical Implications*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷ Gruen, Lori. “Attending to Nature. Empathetic Engagement with the More than Human World.” *Ethics and the Environment*. Vol. 14, No. 2 (Fall 2009): 23-38, p. 30.

⁸ See Schaefer, *Religious Affects*; Schaefer, Donovan O. “Do Animals Have Religion? Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Religion and Embodiment.” *Anthrozoös: A Multidisciplinary Journal of the Interactions of People & Animals* 25, Supplement 1 (August 2012): 173-189.

build religions out of things in the world that fascinate them, and so too do animals. To map the textures of invisible pain, we must look not only at obvious images of pain—like a cow with her trachea hanging out of her neck—but invisible pain. Pain is not just an effect of a physical assault. It is also created by violently severing an animal from the world where they make their lives, their emotional ecosystems.

1: An Affect Theory of Religion

Affect theory is exceptionally useful in diagramming the depth dimensions of vibrant, animated human and animal lifeworlds. What the affective perspective offers is a window onto the way that bodies operate prior to and in excess of language. Language, from the affective perspective, comes to look like a single instrument in the vast symphony of embodied life. Although we in the humanities have a tendency to fixate on languages and texts as if they captured the lion's share of what it means to be a human being, the affect perspective sees language as a limited—sometimes even distortive—register of how embodied life unfolds.

One of the first things one notices in studying affect is that the term itself is used in different ways by different thinkers. Most notably, there is a divide between those authors, such as Patricia Clough, Brian Massumi, and Erin Manning, who see affect as a special thing that is radically separate from emotion,⁹ and those who see it as something that is thickly, if fluidly, entangled with emotion.¹⁰ I will focus here on the *latter* understanding of affect theory, what queer of color theorist Sara Ahmed calls *feminist cultural studies of affect*.¹¹

Affect theory in this mode is about what makes bodies move, think, act, and desire. In other words, affect theory is a theory of power, but a theory that sidesteps what I label the “linguistic fallacy.” The linguistic fallacy is a hidden presupposition sitting close to the heart of many projects in the humanities. It essentially says that in order to make things happen in the human world, a *thought* must be involved. Every action is a little computer program, a scrap of code dispatched by a sovereign *I* to tell our bodies what to do. We know, experience, and respond because something in our heads tells us how to respond. The psychologist Silvan Tomkins, whose work was inducted into affect theory by queer theorist Eve Sedgwick, was a critic of this view. “There must indeed be a cause or determinant of the affective response when it is activated,” Tomkins wrote, “and the determinant *might* be a reason, but it need not be. Further,

⁹ Clough, Patricia Ticineto. “Introduction.” In: Clough, Patricia Ticineto and Jean Halley, ed. *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. (Durham, NC. & London: Duke University Press, 2007: 1-33); Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. (Durham, NC., & London: Duke University Press, 2002); Massumi, Brian. *What Animals Teach Us about Politics*. (Durham, NC. & London: Duke University Press, 2014); Manning, Erin. *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); Manning, Erin. *Always More than One: Individuation's Dance*. (Durham, NC. & London: Duke University Press, 2013)

¹⁰ Ahmed, Sara. “Collective Feelings, Or, The Impressions Left by Others.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 2004. Vol. 21(2): 25-42; Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. (New York: Routledge, 2004); Ahmed, Sara. *The Promise of Happiness*. (Durham, NC. & London: Duke University Press, 2010); Cvetkovich, Ann. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. (Durham, NC. & London: Duke University Press, 2012); Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. (Durham, NC. & London: Duke University Press, 2003). See Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, Chapter 1 for an examination of these two different varieties of affect theory and their relative strengths and limitations.

¹¹ Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, p. 13.

the reverse dependence, in which affect determines cognition, is no less common.”¹² Instead of a top-down self that thinks through the world and speaks its response into existence, Tomkins sees us as knots of pulsing affective forces, responding to the world in complex, para- or pre-cognitive fashion.

Affect theory, then, crosses out the liberal subject, suggesting that it is the affects themselves, coursing between our bodies and our worlds, that construct cognition. “[W]hat is the cognitive appraisal,” Tomkins asks, “when one is anxious but does not know about what; when one is depressed or elated but about nothing in particular?”¹³ For Tomkins, the *pre-linguistic body* is the bedrock of affects, and therefore the wellspring of the panorama of thought itself. Rather than seeing the ego as sovereign, we must affirm the sovereignty of affects. Their suppression is not liberation, but stasis. “Without affect amplification,” Tomkins writes, “nothing else matters, and with its amplification anything can matter.”¹⁴ Whatever freedom is, it emerges in the slipstream of these overlapping compulsions. Affects pull us along a complex watercourse of thoughts, actions, and desires. “Affect,” he contends, “is the bottom line for thought as well as perception and behaviour.”¹⁵

Contemporary affect theorists have developed this understanding significantly in the last several years. For anthropologist Kathleen Stewart, the subtle affective tissues of embodied life are what structure the overlapping flows of our everyday experience. On the opening page of her book *Ordinary Affects*, she writes that her method is “to provoke attention to the forces that come into view as habit or shock, resonance or impact.”¹⁶ Rather than seeing our navigational paths through the world as orchestrated by our sovereign reason, she does ethnography by attending to the complex channels of affect.¹⁷ Affects are not only the extraordinary spikes of feeling, the nameable sensations that occasionally wander into our field of experience. They make up a thick matrix of sensuous forces that pattern our political, social, and aesthetic worlds. “Power,” Stewart maintains, “is a thing of the senses.”

For someone like Stewart, religion is itself a convergence of affective, pre-linguistic forms. Affect theory delivers us to a model of religion that exceeds the linguistic. This is not done in order to transcend power and history, as other models of religion as affect such as those of William James, Rudolf Otto, or Mircea Eliade would have it.¹⁸ Instead, the affective perspective reroutes us to the profoundly complicated affective *histories* of our bodies. The locations of

¹² Tomkins, Silvan S. *Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S. Tomkins*. Virginia Demos, ed. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 44.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁶ Stewart, Kathleen. *Ordinary Affects*. (Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 1.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁸ James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. Centenary Edition. Carrette, Jeremy and Eugene Taylor, ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*. John W. Harvey, trans. (New York: Pelican Books, 1959); Eliade, Mircea. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. Rosemary Sheed, trans. (Lincoln, NE, & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996)

religion are not libraries, sets of scriptures, beliefs, or propositions, but what Eve Sedgwick calls “queer little gods”—the affective power sources embedded in our bodies.¹⁹

2: Animal Phenomenology

Put another way, the branch of affect theory described here is an extension of the philosophical tradition of *phenomenology*. Phenomenology can be defined in a number of different ways. My preferred definition sees it as emphasizing the state of being *embedded in a world* as the source of knowledge and experience, rather than detached, rational reflection. This orientation is found even in the way that phenomenologists use the word “world” itself. The philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes that phenomenology is “a philosophy for which the world is always ‘already there’ before reflection begins—as ‘an inalienable presence.’”²⁰ Rather than a self that can engage or disengage at will, for Merleau-Ponty, the body is “a subject destined to the world.”²¹ Phenomenology could be defined, then, as the antithesis of the philosophy of Rene Descartes. In Descartes’ philosophy, we begin in a state of disconnection from the world and only through an act of will do we choose to go forth and know. In phenomenology, we are always already plugged into the world, like a circuit, in motion, in process—“thrown,” in the language of Martin Heidegger.²²

For affect theorist Sara Ahmed, this correlation between affect and the history of phenomenology is explicit. She calls affect theory the study of “queer phenomenology,” a phenomenology that spotlights our intimacy with the world. She wants to sustain the phenomenological emphasis “on the lived experience of inhabiting a body, or what Edmund Husserl calls the ‘living body (*Leib*).’”²³ She is particularly fascinated by what landscape architects call “desire lines,” the “unofficial paths, those marks left on the ground that show everyday comings and goings, where people deviate from the paths they are supposed to follow.”²⁴ Desire lines index the *compulsory force* linking bodies to worlds, the way that embodied orientations overwhelm the lawbooks of “social construction” and forge new relationships with things in the world. Lauren Berlant’s notion of “cruel optimism” follows a symmetrical route. She describes the way that intransigent attachments fasten us to features of our world that may well be psychically, physically, or materially destructive for us.²⁵ Although her framing is negative, she offers a fundamentally phenomenological insight: that we do not choose our relationships with our worlds, but are fully embedded within them.

Rather than focusing on affect theorists to think this through, however, I want to go to another source. This source is one of the background figures of phenomenology, an early 20th-century ethologist named Jakob von Uexküll, who, in the words of philosopher Kari Weil, “takes over

¹⁹ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *The Weather in Proust*. Jonathan Goldberg, ed. (Durham, NC., & London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 43.

²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Smith, Colin, trans. (New York: Routledge, 1962), p. vii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

²² Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Macquarrie, John and Edward Robinson, trans. (Malden, MA, Oxford, and Victoria, Australia: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1962)

²³ Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. (Durham, NC. & London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

²⁵ Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. (Durham, NC. & London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 1.

where Kant had his failure of nerve.”²⁶ Von Uexküll’s concern was overturning what he saw as the Cartesianism of his field. In von Uexküll’s era, some zoologists still subscribed to the lingering presupposition (which is still with us, somehow) that animals are no more than automata, clockwork contraptions clicking through the world without feeling, thinking, or experiencing.

For von Uexküll, humans and animals are more alike than different. What connects us is not our shared ability to think, however, but the way in which we experience the world. Rather than seeing organisms as detached from their worlds, every animal body is plugged into what von Uexküll called an *Umwelt*—a “self-world” or “lifeworld.”²⁷ Animals (which, of course, for zoologists like von Uexküll, includes humans) are “fitted into unique worlds with equal completeness.”²⁸ This complete fit between each organism and its world is governed by powerful relationships with specific features of the world, what von Uexküll calls “beacons.” Imagine a beacon as ray of light emitted by something in the world that demands attention, fascinates, guides a body home. Beacons tether bodies to worlds. They funnel beauty, excitement, joy, meaning, and hope to us. The *Umwelt* of an organism is a constellation of beacons, a set of richly meaningful fascinations.

Crucially, these beacons are configured *differently* for different bodies. Different lifeworlds correspond to different horizons of meaning-making attached to different organisms. “The first task of *Umwelt* research,” von Uexküll proposes, “is to identify each animal’s perceptual cues among all the stimuli in its environment and to build up the animal’s *specific* world with them.”²⁹ This configuration of cues is in part an effect of a particular evolutionary trajectory. As evolutionary artifacts, we are coalescences of phylogenetic histories that have converged to draw the genetic blueprint of every organism. These histories build organisms, with more-or-less set ways of interacting with the world. Layered on top of this blueprint is the learning profile of each individual organism. Every phenotype (from the tick to the astronomer—two of von Uexküll’s favorite examples) is reconfigured, with varying degrees of plasticity, by its experiences.³⁰

What this means is that every body will have a durable but flexible experiential architecture. Merleau-Ponty argues that the kind of body we have is also the groundplan for the ways that we encounter the world. “The thing, and the world, are given to me along with the parts of my body ... in a living connection comparable, or rather identical, with that existing between the parts of my body itself.”³¹ Our world is a function of the bodies we have. That includes all the memories, experiences, and scars that we absorb into our bodies. “As the spider spins its threads,” von Uexküll writes, “every subject spins his relations to certain characters of the things around him, and weaves them into a firm web which carries his existence”³²

²⁶ Weil, Kari. *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 31.

²⁷ von Uexküll, Jakob. “A Stroll through the Worlds of Animals and Men: A Picture Book of Invisible Worlds.” In: Schiller, Claire H., ed. *Instinctive Behavior: The Development of a Modern Concept*. (New York: International Universities Press, 1957: 5-80), p. 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13, emphasis added.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 237.

³² von Uexküll, *Stroll through the Worlds*, p. 14.

Jacques Derrida describes animals as a “heterogeneous multiplicity.” He objects to the idea that there is only one “animal.” This means he rejects that “the animal” is the binary opposite of “the human,” an undifferentiated huddled mass across the shore. But he also rejects the idea that animals are merely different from us (and each other) by degrees. He insists that each animal is its own kind. There is no “the animal,” but an irreducible plurality of *animals*.³³ This, I would suggest, is the case not just for the physical attributes of different animals, but for their experiential profiles. The heterogeneous multiplicity of animal bodies equals the multiplicity of lifeworlds.

When viewed in this way, affect theory and phenomenology mesh neatly. Stewart writes that attention to affect allows “A little world [to come] into view.”³⁴ Bodies are entangled not just in physical worlds but in emotional ecosystems. In her essay “Worlding Refrains,” she describes how the intransigent lines of force that are affects twist together to produce complex landscapes of meaning-making that enfold bodies: “Nascent forms quicken, rinding up like the skin of an orange,” she writes. “Pre-personal intensities lodge in bodies. Events, relations, and impacts accumulate as the capacities to affect and to be affected. Public feelings world up as lived circuits of action and reaction.”³⁵ Affect theory is phenomenological, and vice versa, in the way that both map the contours of our differentiated experiential circuitry. Affects are religious precisely because they bind us, like nerves, to our worlds.

3: Animal Religion

This emotional ecology is the foundation for one of the concepts developed in recent research, the notion of “animal religion.”³⁶ This work starts from religion theorist Jonathan Z. Smith’s insistence that the definition of religion is fluid rather than freestanding. “[W]hile there is a staggering amount of data, of phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religious,” Smith insists, “there is no data for religion. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar’s study. It is created for the scholar’s analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization.”³⁷ Smith is speaking in hyperbole, but the thrust of his argument is sound: the notion that religion is something that exists apart from the historically and politically enmeshed attempts to define it, is wrong. Religion has been defined in hundreds of different ways, for as many or more purposes.

Moreover, the attempt to define religion as being primarily a function of a cognitive-linguistic matrix of propositions—statements of belief—is itself historically enmeshed. Scholars such as Talal Asad, Peter Harrison, and Smith himself have aligned the emergence of this particular definition with the Protestant Reformation, the advent of a new locus of “real religion” in scripture and faith.³⁸ This definition has shaped not only street-level, commonsense

³³ Derrida, Jacques. *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. David Wills, trans. (New York: Fordham, 2008), p. 31.

³⁴ Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, p. 57.

³⁵ Stewart, Kathleen. “Worlding Refrains.” In: Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth, ed. (*The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham, NC, & London: Duke University Press, 2010: 339-353), p. 339.

³⁶ Schaefer, “Do Animals Have Religion?”; Schaefer, *Religious Affects*.

³⁷ Smith, Jonathan Z. *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. xi.

³⁸ Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. (Baltimore, MD. & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Harrison, Peter. *The Territories of Science and Religion*.

understandings of religion as belief in supernatural begins, but the architecture of religious studies itself. As Vasudha Narayanan has written, religious studies “is a text-dominated academy... where we privilege the word.”³⁹ Narayanan has called for a “decolonization of method” in the study of religion that steps beyond the emphasis on texts and beliefs and looks at “lived experience, the experiences of space and time—through performing arts, art, and architecture—and food.”⁴⁰ Similarly, in his 2011 book *More than Belief*, anthropologist of globalization Manuel Vásquez wrote “I have found that the dominant ‘canon’ in religious studies is for the most part unhelpful. Emerging from Protestant Biblical hermeneutics, religious studies has tended to focus on the great sacred texts, or the theologies of the Niebuhrs, Barths, and Tillichs of the world, or the symbolic systems of various self-contained, territorialized cultures.”⁴¹ He continues: “This understanding of religion offers few resources to explore the constant movement, contestation, and hybridity involved in what has been called popular religion—religion as it is lived in the streets, workplaces, and schools, for example, by poor Latino immigrants as they settle in small towns in North Carolina or Nebraska.”⁴² Vásquez calls this the “suffocating textualism” of certain versions of religious studies.

For critical animal studies theorist Kari Weil, this swerve against the primacy of the linguistic in religious studies is mirrored by the broader turn to animals across the humanities. She writes:

“If the linguistic turn insisted that ... we have no access to unmediated experience or knowledge, but only to representations that are themselves fraught with linguistic and ideological baggage, the turn to animals can be seen as responding to a desire for a way out of this ‘prison-house of language.’ It responds to a desire to know that there are beings or objects with ways of knowing and being that resist our flawed systems of language and who may know us and themselves in ways we can never discern.”⁴³

The postmodern approach that emphasized the tight interlock between language, meaning, and power obliterated the possibility of meaning-ful animal worlds.

What Vásquez calls “materialist phenomenology” is attentive to how religion emerges out of a dynamic relationship between the biological and the cultural.⁴⁴ This sets the stage for thinking about animal religion. I have elsewhere used this approach to investigate the waterfall dance described by Jane Goodall in her book *Reason for Hope*. Goodall documents watching groups of chimpanzees stamp and “dance” in the spray at the base of a massive waterfall in the Gombe valley. Other primatologists have reported that chimpanzees respond in similar ways to heavy

(Chicago, IL. & London: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Smith, Jonathan Z. *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*. (Chicago, IL. & London: University of Chicago Press, 2004)

³⁹ Narayanan, Vasudha. “Embodied Cosmologies: Sights of Piety, Sites of Power.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* September 2003, Vol. 71, No. 3: 495-520, p. 499.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 516.

⁴¹ Vásquez, Manuel A. *More than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

⁴³ Weil, *Why Animal Studies Now?*, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁴ Vásquez, *More than Belief*, p. 84.

rains, windstorms, wildfires, and possibly even earthquakes.⁴⁵ I have argued elsewhere that chimpanzees, like humans, probably are equipped with some version of what biologist E.O. Wilson calls “biophilia.”⁴⁶ They, like us, probably have a predisposition to respond to certain elements of the natural world with intense emotions.⁴⁷

In an interview with Goodall, Kimberley Patton contends that the sociobiological claim that religion is reducible to a functional architecture is precisely backwards: “ritual action,” she suggests, “is a natural response to living in a world of mystery and beauty and divinity. It is a response that is shared by animals with human beings.”⁴⁸ The animal religions, just like the human religion, are about affective responses to beacons in the world. But is this real religion? At the end of the day, the precise term we use may not matter; what we are following is the *depth* dimension of animal *worlds*. As long as we insist on making language the essential medium of religion, we miss the intricacy of these emotional ecosystems. Affect theory and materialist phenomenology help to relocate the foundations of human and animal lifeworlds in feeling rather than in thought. They allow us to fill in the pages of what von Uexküll calls the “picture book of invisible worlds.”

For Patton, this location of specific embodied religious worlds *in their singularity* is precisely what makes animal religion so vividly *meaningful*. In her essay “He Who Sits in the Heavens Laughs’: Recovering Animal Theology in the Abrahamic Traditions,” Patton points out that the notion of animals as having religion is well-established in classical religious traditions. She recites a verse from Surah 24 of the Qur’an: “[Do you not see] that it is Allah Whose praises all beings in the heavens and on earth do celebrate, and the birds (of the air) with wings outspread? Each one knows its own (mode of) prayer and praise.”⁴⁹ In support of this, Patton cites Thomas Hopko’s notion of “the rabbithood of God.” Hopko, Patton writes,

“was directing our attention to the way in which a rabbit reveals something *unique* about who God is, some dimension of His being that is, in a word, rabbity. For no apparent reason other than joy, rabbits leap high into the air, twist their furry bodies, and kick out their feet in abandon. There is an aspect of God's Self that at creation expressed itself as a rabbit, and nothing can better reveal that particular aspect of the divine nature than a real, living rabbit.”⁵⁰

This approach expresses the conjunction between the phenomenological and affective approaches. It helps us to glimpse the richness of animal experience. The multiplicity of bodies,

⁴⁵ Pruetz, Jill D., and Thomas C. LaDuke. “Brief Communication: Reaction to Fire by Savanna Chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes verus*) at Fongoli, Senegal: Conceptualization of 'Fire Behavior' and the Case for a Chimpanzee Model.” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 141 (2010): 646-650; Harrod, James B. “The Case for Chimpanzee Religion.” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* 8.1 (2014): 8-45, p. 27.

⁴⁶ Wilson, Edward O. *Biophilia: The Human Bond with Other Species*. (Cambridge, MA., & London, England: Harvard University Press, 1984)

⁴⁷ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, Ch. 7.

⁴⁸ Goodall, Jane, Kimberley Patton, and Paul Waldau. “The Dance of Awe.” In: Waldau, Paul, and Kimberley Patton, eds. *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006: 651-656), p. 654.

⁴⁹ Patton, Kimberley C. “He who sits in the heavens laughs’: Recovering Animal Theology in the Abrahamic Traditions.” *Harvard Theological Review* 93.4 (2000): 401-34, p. 417.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 427.

the multiplicity of experience, and the multiplicity of lifeworlds interlock to generate the diverse landscape of animal religions.

4: Pain. Solitary Confinement

“Our own body,” Merleau-Ponty writes, “is in the world as the heart is in the organism.”⁵¹ By graduating beyond the notion that animals are automata, by giving them back experience, by giving them *worlds*, we also open a new avenue to understanding animal pain—not to mention the many forms of human pain we cause and sweep out of sight. Scarry’s work focuses primarily on violent physical torture. But the most commonly used form of torture in the United States is not “violent” at all: it is solitary confinement. We have numbed ourselves to the vital necessity of all the relationships, fascinations, desires, sensations, affects, and hopes that make up our emotional ecosystems. In the process, we have become insensate to the regimes of pain that arise when we amputate bodies from the lifeworlds that sustain them.

Feminist philosopher Lisa Guenther’s version of phenomenology is crucial for this understanding. In her 2013 book *Solitary Confinement*, she applies the work of Merleau-Ponty and von Uexküll to the practice of forced solitary confinement. She starts with first-person accounts of what it is like to experience solitary confinement, which is often described as a “living death.”⁵² But living death doesn’t mean “a hiatus from living.” It does not mean wasted time. It means torment. It means constantly gasping for breath. It means dying of thirst. Just as waterboarding is a technique of torture that seems relatively benign from the outside but actually produces astonishing pain by triggering the “suffocation alarm” embedded in the mammalian brain, solitary confinement is a horrific weapon that leaves no visible scars.

Guenther argues that “[s]olitary confinement works by turning the prisoner’s *constitutive relationality* against herself, turning her own capacities to feel, perceive, and relate to others in a meaningful world, into instruments of her own undoing. This self-betrayal,” she continues, “is only possible for a being who is complicated, whose subjectivity is not merely a point but already a hinge, a self-relation that cannot be sustained in absolute solitude, but only in relation to others.”⁵³ The critical phenomenological perspective, then, explores how the bonds between bodies and their worlds, though invisible, are so strong that by twisting or severing them, we can produce extraordinary pain. We are so intimately threaded into our worlds that to be cut off from them is a super-highway to suffering.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 235.

⁵² Guenther, Lisa. *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives*. (Minneapolis, MN.: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p. xii.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

⁵⁴ I would want to expand on Guenther’s perspective, though. Guenther focuses primarily on relationships with other humans as an avenue of deprivation. “The prisoner in a supermax unit may have everything that an individual human being needs in order to survive,” she writes, and “he [may] even have access to ‘extras’ such as television or CCTV video conferencing with visitors. And yet there is something about the absence of regular bodily contact with others, the absence of even the *possibility* of touching or being touched, that threatens to unhinge the subject.” (p. xiii) I do not think this is wrong, but it overlooks the richer spectrum of ways that bodies are phenomenologically plugged into their worlds. The most violent solitary confinement chambers are not just about cutting prisoners off from other prisoners; they also cut them off from posters, TV, books, and the mundane changes of scenery that shape carceral life. This erasure of the last vestiges of the prisoners’ impoverished worlds is also part of the traumatic force of solitary confinement.

This perspective is vital to understand humans and other animals. In the 1970s, the psychologist Harry Harlow conducted a series of experiments on rhesus macaques. In her book *Opening Skinner's Box: Great Psychological Experiments of the Twentieth Century*, Lauren Slater describes how Harlow

“built a black isolation chamber in which an animal was hung upside down for up to two years, unable to move or see the world, fed through a grid at the bottom of the V-shaped device. This Harlow called ‘the well of despair.’ Indeed, it was successful in creating a primate model of mental illness. The animals, once removed, after months or years, were shattered and psychotic. Nothing Harlow did could bring them back. There appeared to be no cure. No way to contact, to comfort.”⁵⁵

Much as solitary confinement in humans can inflict lasting trauma and depression, the deprivation of animal worlds produces labyrinths of invisible pain.

In my interpretation, affect theory is about drawing maps of our textured relationships with worlds outside of the medium of language. These non-linguistic connections, as much or more than the structures of belief, language, and thought, are the raw material out of which religions emerge. Colors, shapes, textures, faces, friendships, communities, loves, food, motion, images, places, spaces, structures—these embodied fascinations are the substance of our emotional ecosystems, and therefore of human and animal religion. J.Z. Smith writes that one of the likely etymologies of the word “religion” comes from the Latin **leig*, “to bind.” Jacques Derrida expands on this, suggesting that religion, as *re-ligare*, can be thought of as a link, cognate with “obligation, ligament, and hence to obligation, to debt, etc.”⁵⁶ Religion is about the things that bind us: the affectively thick, thrumming bonds of our lifeworlds.

The politics of affect comes into view when we recognize that the deprivation of these ingredients—a killer whale’s ability to swim for hours each day, the affection between a dairy cow and her calf, the space a battery hen needs to stretch out her wings or that a breeding sow needs to move around—yields pain. As much as physical torture, the psychological torment of confinement, of isolation, of thirst is part of the invisible pain that we allow ourselves to forget. The breaking of an animal’s living bonds with its world, the extinguishing of its religious fascinations, leaves in its wake desperate, pained bodies.

Conclusion

“[W]hen one speaks about ‘one’s own physical pain’ and about ‘another person’s physical pain,’” Scarry writes, “one might almost appear to be speaking about two wholly distinct orders of events.”⁵⁷ Scarry goes on to argue that the political problem of pain is the way that it unmakes the world for the subject. Lamar’s perspective illuminates something more profound: the politics of the pained and the politics of the pain-free are radically different. The pain-free are liable to tell the pained to “tough it out” and to accuse those who respond to the pain of other bodies as

⁵⁵ Slater, Lauren. *Opening Skinner's Box: Great Psychological Experiments of the Twentieth Century*. (New York: Norton & Co.: 2005), pp. 150-151.

⁵⁶ Derrida, Jacques. *Acts of Religion*. Ed. Gil Anidjar. (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 73-74.

⁵⁷ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 4.

having “bleeding hearts.” Political faultlines are, I would argue, very often composed around the invisibility of one body or group’s pain to someone else. We live in the world on two different axes: those who know pain now, and those who have forgotten. This is the case with racialized police brutality, mass incarceration, humiliation, deportation, and poverty as much as it is with confined nonhuman animals.

“Don’t Kill My Vibe” operates on another level. It is not only about the invisibility of the real pain of others. It is about the way that we want to refuse the pain of other bodies. The bubble of comfort and ease that most people of privilege live in has an immune system, and when that comfort is threatened, it produces an autonomic response that pushes back on the incursion of another’s pain. We change the subject, or we get angry, or we launch a campaign of denials. *Don’t kill my vibe* is the immune response, the refusal to open ourselves to the real pain of other bodies. There is extremely important work to be done unpacking the implications of Lamar’s work for race and class relations, particularly in the US—the way that postures of privilege repudiate the pain of other bodies. I want to use Lamar’s understanding of pain to talk about something different but intimately related, which is the pain of nonhuman animals, and more specifically, the invisible pain, the pain that is hardest to know.

In Toronto, a group of activists calling themselves Toronto Pig Save have begun a campaign of visiting freight trucks carrying live pigs to slaughter at a particularly long stop light. They give the animals water before they are taken to their deaths. Last year, several activists were arrested in a water-delivery incident that was captured on video. I have watched the video clip of the arrest several times. Two things strike me about it. One is that the pigs are thirsty. They are incredibly thirsty. They press forward to the activist’s water bottle and slurp it up desperately. Several are foaming at the mouth. Thirsty sounds like a trivial thing. It sounds like a problem a child would have. But it isn’t. Dying of thirst is staggeringly painful. It rips you apart, invisibly. You don’t know what that pain is. Even if you have experienced it, you do not know what it is like to be a living body going through it in this moment.

The second thing that struck me about the video is how hard the truck driver resists the activist’s seemingly harmless action of giving the animals water. The driver gets out of his cab. He approaches the activist with his phone camera running, cursing her—“*they’re not humans you dumb frickin’ bitch*”—accusing her of committing a crime and threatening to call the police. He is angry. Why is he not indifferent? If he genuinely does not care about the animals and if the activist is not interfering with his work (since he has ample time to get out of his vehicle) what is the difference? My argument would be that by locating the animals in their world—a world that is subject to deprivation and pain, a world that is *bound* to their bodies—the activist is showing that animals are not the feelingless creatures that we pretend they are. She is casting light on their invisible worlds, their invisible pain. It is painful and uncomfortable for someone who is materially invested in the animal exploitation industry—who needs it to provide and care for his family—to be confronted with even the possibility that he is complicit with an evil act, so he tries to pre-empt it from gaining traction. Precisely because he feels the pressure of the violent ideology that sustains *our* world beginning to collapse, he refuses to allow the activists to give the animals even a sliver of comfort and relief before their deaths. Don’t kill my vibe.

As Aaron Gross writes, “The categories we use to study religion, starting with ‘religion’ itself, are made intelligible against the background of (and on the backs of) animals.”⁵⁸ It is through the creation of discourses of human exceptionalism that we make animal religion invisible. I have argued that this also makes animal pain invisible. The pigs are thirsty. But in being cut out of their emotional ecosystems, in being severed from their lifeworlds, what else have the pigs lost? What other pains do they feel for losing their children, their mothers, their friends, air, light, grass, the sky, their freedom to move around, their worlds? What invisible tortures are produced by the stripping away of all their hopes, all of the light in their worlds, leaving them with nothing?

We live in the world on two different axes. There are bodies that know pain and bodies that are color-blind. The ethics and the politics of addressing pain must be an ethics of attunement. We need to tune in to the pain of others and build our response around those channels. This does not mean the blanket avoidance of pain, which is impossible. It means a refusal to be cavalier about delivering pain to other bodies. Ultimately, the question of what religion is or is not, who has it and who does not, is secondary—though I do not think it is an accident that so often it is religion that helps humans who have been sentenced to wells of despair when, or if, they are given a chance to heal. The incandescent world that religion creates is something that bodies need to live again after they have been buried. They are dying of thirst. Observing this helps us better understand what gets called religion in its human and animal forms, and to trace the emotional ecosystems that bind us to our worlds. It helps us cast light on invisible pain.

⁵⁸ Gross, *The Question of the Animal*, p. 9.