

The Animals Are Resisting!

Alon K. Raab

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a review of

Animal Resistance in the Global Capitalist Era by Sara Colling. Michigan State University Press, 2021

Animal Revolution by Ron Broglio. University of Minnesota Press, 2022

In the spring of 2020, a pod of orcas began ramming fishing boats in the Strait of Gibraltar, sinking three boats and damaging over 250. Marine biologists speculated that the whales were retaliating for a head injury inflicted by a vessel's propeller on the pod's matriarch, White Gladis. She was teaching her mates how to smash into boats and dismantle rudders in attacks lasting up to forty-five minutes. During a cockfight in the village of Lothunur, in the state of Telangana, India, a rooster killed its owner by jumping at him and slashing him with the three-inch blade tied to its leg. In July 2012, shortly after a rope-and-branch trap killed an infant mountain gorilla, two young ones worked together to find and destroy traps in their Rwandan Volcanoes National Park forest.

These two recent books honor and celebrate these fighters against human exploitation and subjection, and suggest ways that humans might become allies of our kin in this fight for liberation.

Mainstream media rarely question uprooting an animal from its home and shipping it across oceans and lands to become a meal, pet or property, nor challenge factory farming or industrial fishing. Colling and Broglio oppose these practices and regard animals fighting back with respect, empathy and admiration, as comrades and teachers in the struggle for human liberation too.

Colling's *Animal Resistance in the Global Capitalist Era* begins with an historical overview of humans' evolving views of our fellow animals and how animal agency changed these attitudes. The book explores the why, how, and to what ends (and beginnings) do animals resist. It employs a social justice lens and an anti-capitalist, anti-domestication, anti-colonization framework, showing how the intertwined processes of control have shaped human-animal relationships and how they are interpreted and presented by humans, including allies.

Recognizing non-human beings' agency and rights is not new. Animals, birds, reptiles, fish and insects were regarded as kin, wise teachers, divine messengers and even gods and goddesses in many ancient myths. Exploitation of animals has long existed, but already in the 6th century BCE, human allies like India's Vardamana Mahavira, Jainism founder, made ahimsa ("no harm" to all sentient beings including animals) a guiding principle. The Greek philosopher Pythagoras, believing that all beings have souls and that we might reincarnate as any species, forbade eating animals and chose (along with his students) not to use animal products.

Colling's book is a welcome addition to the field of animal-human interactions. She describes the many instances of the often-sophisticated ways that animals resist human oppression and frequently break free. Her focus is on "the importance of listening to animals" voices, making our best efforts to read their actions, and respond in solidarity to their resistance struggles.

Colling, a Hornby Island, British Columbia activist and writer, does not presume to speak for the animals, but presents their actions almost from the resisters' standpoints, noting their social lives and moral behaviors as unique to their species and to each individual, as they initiate their own liberation.

She presents the singular lived realities of animals, their rich inner lives and the way they express feelings of revenge, cooperation, empathy and justice. Her examples substantiate biologists Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce's findings in *Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals*, that animals are moral and aware agents of social change.

Colling makes the case that animals resist in deliberate and sometimes coordinated efforts and dismisses the common assumption that only humans are capable of moral acts. The elephant who sets a group of captive antelope free, the magpie who grieves for her young, the rat who refuses to shock another to get a reward and a pod of dolphins that protected a swimmer in New Zealand waters from a great white shark, surrounding him and keeping the shark at bay, make a strong case for non-humans' rich moral universes.

Colling describes our relatives' changing fate in late-capitalist society in a universe of enormous, industrialized farming, hunting, fishing, slaughtering and suffering. She regards their lot as connected to what befalls humans and the planet and emphasizes that their liberation can and must happen alongside human liberation. For change to happen, she states, we must abolish the capitalist ideology and practices that turn animals and humans into property and commodities.

Colling emphasizes the importance of assisting animals with their dashes for freedom, that include protests, media campaigns, boycotting products etched in suffering, and supporting sanctuaries where liberated animals can heal and be safe. Sometimes an animal's revolt finds an echo in many humans' hearts, as with the chimpanzee, Sami, that escaped twice from his Belgrade zoo cell in February 1988. During his second break to freedom, Sami climbed to the top of a garage as the news media gave minute-by-minute updates. Among the 4,000 Belgrade citizens that gathered to watch, many cheered him and held up signs like "You are not alone. We are with you!" and "Do not give up!" reflecting perhaps their own desire for freedom from an oppressive political regime.

Ron Broglio's *Animal Revolution* begins with a manifesto whose opening line, "Animals of the world unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains," sets the tone. Broglio writes of trying to hand animals weapons—kitchen knives, a slightly rusted backyard chain, even a shotgun—tools for their revolution; for, as he writes, "Lord knows they need a revolution and have suffered enough abuse from the hands of humans."

Through examples of animals creatively resisting and sometimes disrupting business as usual, Broglio makes the case that they too are revolutionary subjects. He writes that, "Humans and animals are on shared Earth...We are animals, too...If we listen to parts of us that really call to being engaged with the Earth as animals, then we become more sympathetic to the world around us."

Broglio describes artistic works including Robert Bresson's film "Balthazar" where a suffering donkey assumes Christ-like attributes and South African novelist J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*, whose heroine compares citizens who ignore industries that torture and murder animals to neighbors of German concentration camps who chose to ignore the atrocities.

This analogy was first noted by journalist and concentration camp survivor Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz who, in his 1940 *Dachau Diaries*, noted that "I have suffered so much myself that I can feel other creatures' suffering by virtue of my own... I believe as long as man tortures and kills animals, he will torture and kill humans as well—and wars will be waged—for killing must be practiced and learned on a small scale."

Broglio, Director of the Humanities Institute at Arizona State University, ends his book by stressing that "to be an ally of the revolution means telling stories of animals as active as important players on the earth and in our own social worlds...There are untold incidents of animals in revolt every moment of every day. Find them, tell them, weave them into how you see yourself, how you see the world, and how the world sees you. Solidarity, comrades."

Novelist and activist Alice Walker wrote, "The animals of the world exist for their own reasons...They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for white, or women created for men." In the last decades, there has been great progress in the struggle for animal liberation, but still "for the animals, it is an eternal Treblinka," as the protagonist of Isaac Bashevis Singer's 1968 story *The Letter Writer* says.

Those of us fortunate to know and love animals realize that our fellow living beings have rich inner lives, shape their surroundings, enjoy complex social relationships, seek their own well-being and consciously choose courses of action, including ones that oppose humans' control and harm.

Colling and Broglio write with a deep love and concern for animals and the natural world and a desire for a different world, one where all beings live in safety and freedom. In their insistence that animals are active participants in their liberation and in calling humans to aid them, are important contributions in that struggle.

Mocha Dick, the sperm whale who sank whaleboats, the champion racehorse, Chautauqua, that went on strike and refused to run around the track anymore, and the Italian bear, Papillon, who escaped twice from electric-fenced imprisonment, show the way. May more animals, fish, and birds join them. May the rebels and renegades enjoy lives of autonomy, comfort, safety and freedom, for their own sake and for the sake of human liberation, too.

Alon K. Raab lives in Portland, Oregon. His "Revolt of the Bats" appeared in FE #343, Fall-Winter 1993. We never lose a writer.



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