



Adam's Task: Calling Animals by Name

Vicki Hearne, Donald McCaig (Introduction)

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In it Vicki Hearne asserts that animals that interact with humans are more intelligent than we assume. In fact, they are capable of developing an understanding of “the good,” a moral code that influences their motives and actions. Hearne’s thorough studies led her to adopt a new system of animal training that contradicts modern animal behavioral research, but—as her examples show—is astonishingly effective. Hearne’s theories will make every trainer, animal psychologist, and animal-lover stop, think, and question.

Adam's Task: Calling Animals by Name Details

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From Reader Review Adam's Task: Calling Animals by Name for online ebook

Josh Rogers says

Chapter 3 is one if the most interesting and deep chapters on the philosophy of language I have ever read. Fantastic. Packed full like an overflowing suitcase of implications about how both humans and dogs become the best versions of themselves.

Paul says

Hearne was a marvelous poet, an amateur philosopher, and -- on the evidence of this book -- a superb animal trainer. It belongs on that short shelf of indispensable books about the nature of animals and the necessity for human straight talk and right thinking when working with them.

Sasha says

Hearne intertwines her knowledge of horse and dog training with philosophical insights into the nature of our relationships with animals. Some of her literary/philosophical references were over my head, and her writing style was a bit convoluted at times, but overall I enjoyed her perspective on animal consciousness, language, and morality. Hearne is an intelligent and thoughtful writer, a poet and academic who argues that anthropomorphism isn't necessarily a bad thing, remaining respectful and appreciative of animals without becoming saccharine.

Kali says

This is one of my favorite books of all time. Hearne's observations on the importance of coherence to the sanity of animals (and humans!) rang immediately true to me, as did the complexity of navigating between the academic, intellectual world and the pragmatic world of those who work, day-to-day, with companion animals. Some feel the book is "too philosophical," but it's a philosophy book, and Hearne was a leading Wittgenstein scholar, as well as being one of the country's most accomplished trainers of search-and-rescue dogs. I think she captures perfectly the dissonance between those worlds, the fundamental incoherence between them, which is also embodied in the reviews. Just as she couldn't talk to academics about animals, she couldn't talk to animal trainers about academic philosophy, and the complaints about "too much philosophy" seem to underline the truth of what she writes. To read Hearne fully, one needs to understand that the academic/practical split is unnecessary, and that it only serves to shore up the prejudices of those trapped in one camp or the other.

Aili says

This is an excellent book. It is about loving animals, but NOT in a cute-widdle-wooda-wooda way. More in the sense of recognizing them as living beings. File under animal (and human) cognition, psychology, and philosophy; and maaaaybe animal training after that (but while it gives some excellent advice, this is in no way a how-to manual).

In fact the only reason I didn't give this book 5 stars is that I have absolutely zero grounding in philosophy, and some of the academic discussion (Stanley Cavell? doesn't ring a bell) was really heavy going and I skimmed more than processed the ideas. But that's my failure as a reader, not Hearne's failure -- she's writing heavy stuff, and expects the reader to keep up.

Read if you love, well, thinking. And own, or might ever own, a doggie or a kitty.

Sally says

I didn't realize this book would be so heavy on philosophy. I guess I should have known better. The author is a professor of philosophy. She also trains dogs and horses. I would have liked more about animal behavior and less heavy philosophy.

Al Maki says

I became interested in the book when I came across a quote from her about whom dogs bite, an important question for me because our dog, who grew up feral, came to us without her bite response suppressed. Hearne was a trainer of working animals - horses and dogs - not pets, but animals with jobs. She was also a student of philosophy and linguistics and a poet. The book is about what light animal training can cast on philosophy and language and what they in turn may say about animal training. She argues that horses and dogs are conscious and intelligent beings who are capable of developing a working relationship with a human despite their cognitive and sensory apparatuses being quite different than ours. In fact she sees those differences as important opportunities. Since I share these ideas I found the book interesting: it draws on a wealth of personal knowledge and a lot of reading in animal training; on the philosophy side she has clearly given the matter a good deal of thought and study. And she's a capable writer.

Reading the book has made me rethink how to communicate with our own dog so it has value on the training side. However, without some background and interest in the philosophy of language, much of the book would appear meaningless and pointless.

Dogs bite people who are "contaminated with epistemology" which she describes elsewhere as "doubt about the sources and resources of meaningful resonances": some animals, some philosophy and some poetry, not your typical combination.

Elizabeth Knight says

Her essay "What's Wrong with Animal Rights" is worth the price of the book. Unraveling and exploring the complex relationships we have with animals, Hearne starts with language...and all the assumptions behind the language we use when we talk about animals.

Although I take issue with her METHODS...this book changed my life as a trainer and as a thinker. What does it mean to trust? Must we mean what we say? What does it mean to commit...? It's dense, but highly

readable and full of a unusual and compassionate light.

Karen says

I despised the writing in this book. I was tempted to stop many times when the inane, incomprehensible, philosophical babbling got too much but then there would be an actual animal training story that would catch my interest and I would labor on. Hearne had some interesting things to say but would always write it in the most academic and confusing way possible. She also constantly throws in random literary references in a way that made me feel like she was “showing off” rather than actually trying to make her message clearer or more compelling.

I wanted to show an example of what I mean so I flipped the book open to a random page and found a sample paragraph:

In the case of dictatorships, Auden might want to remind us that there is also this consideration: “Of a community it may be said that its love is more or less good.” Perfect love doesn’t exist; perhaps our sense of uneasiness in the presence of what we call fanaticism may be expressed, not only, as Wallace Stevens had it, by talking about the “logical lunatic,” the “lunatic of one idea / In a world of ideas,” but also by saying that fanatics don’t seem to have noticed that the world really is fallen, and that acknowledgment of this is as essential to our lives as that acknowledgment of human separation is to the prevention of tragedies in human love. Political tragedy, perhaps, comes about through failing to acknowledge imperfections in our apprehension of the sacred, what Cavell calls “the separation from God.” (pg 66)

Hearne’s philosophy of training is somewhat controversial but it’s hard to argue with the results she describes. She believes in respect rather than kindness and has a revulsion for owners who say things like “what a good doggy”. She talks a lot about “corrections” which sound harsh to me, such as pinching a dog’s ears or pushing its head into a hole filled with water. However she does clearly love working with animals and she wants them to reach their potential. It made me think about whether the same logic applies to people. It all left me kind of confused and vaguely uncomfortable.

Overall it’s a good thing I got this for free or I would want my money back.

Jamey says

The only writer on animals I know of who combines (a) decades of experience training horses and dogs, with (b) a robust acquaintance with Wittgenstein. And she can write, too.

Boria Sax says

Difference without superiority is a difficult thing for many people to conceive of, but that is how Hearne sees our relations with animals. As a species, we are alienated, and animal training is a way to connect with other creatures, and the precise moves they execute are a measure of our success. It is a bold thesis, one about which she is understandably defensive, but which she argues well. The writing style idiosyncratically combines noble rhetoric with choppy rhythms, and it takes a while to get used to. But Hearne is elucidating

philosophical nuances that can challenge the limits of language, and so she has developed an idiom that is all her own.

Ruth Ann says

The writing is a little dense at times but the Hearne's ideas about animals were entirely worth the effort. I love animals, and realizing that they could be the subject of a philosopher's work was thrilling to me.

Jennifer says

I enjoyed Hearne's anecdotes on training, although I think if you are a horse or a dog "person" you'll enjoy it more. I don't agree with all she says, (especially while reading this next to Cary Wolfe's *Animal Rites*) but she is a thoughtful writer, and her accounts of crazy horses and crazy dogs hit home for me.

Stephanie says

I really struggled with rating this book -- settling on a 2.5* rounded up because my reaction to this book vacillated so wildly. The writing veers from beautifully evocative to philosophical rambling that borders on incoherence. I can appreciate the linguistic nuance Hearne tries to pin down about animal comprehension and motivation, but a lot of her methodologies made me recoil. For every *eureka!* flash of insight I found, there was something like the section in which she concludes that dog fighting might not be as cruel as it seems because some dogs love to fight. Sorry, no go.

So: as many bad parts as there are good. Or as many good parts as there are bad.

Trina says

Vicki Hearne tells stories about "domesticated" animals, and why they are loyal to us. Horses, dogs and other creatures are fulfilling the contract they know they have with humans, They hold up their part of that agreement nobly and generously even in spite of the failings of humans whose lives they share. I've loved this book for years because it made me aware of the great hearts of the horses, dogs, cats, birds and cattle I've known. Animals have made me a better person.
