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**Affect Theory and the Role it Plays on Our Domestication of Animals**

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English 067: Environmental Ethics in Beast Fables

### Abstract

Humans have time and time again proved themselves to be authoritative creatures whether through risk-taking or ambition we have shown the world that we are a force to be reckoned with. We have continued to make decisions that inevitably create positive and negative consequences for ourselves, one of them notably being animal domestication. As we have evolved and changed, so has our relationship with animals. In *Animals and Human Society: Changing Perspectives* (1994) by Aubrey Manning and James Serpell as it was stated “The nature of our relationships with them and how they have been regarded has depended on how we human beings see ourselves and our place in the pattern of existence” (Manning & Serpell, 1994, p.xi). By re-examining of our relationship with animals and their development over time, we gain an apprehension about our issues with them and why the act of domestication must be resolved. In the beginning, we see that we began as hunters and gatherers only to progress into working members of modern society. By looking at our timeline, we can further prove that we no longer feared these creatures around us, but instead found ways to use them to our advantage. Our thoughts and feelings have changed as well as we have become a dominant force over them. We can further support this statement by taking into consideration, affect theory. Affect theory allows us to take social forces in our environment that precipitate the body and to examine how we respond in specific ways. In implementing this theory into our emotions and actions we can gain a comprehensive picture of humans and our relationship with the domestication of animals. Thus, allowing us to utilize new ways of thinking and our perception of the actions taken place in these situations.

### **Background**

In 2015, the documentary *Blackfish* gave audiences a deep dive into our modern practices of animal domestication through the lens of Sea World. We see our continuous connection with animals in the form of entertainment and through animal training. As *Blackfish* brings to life a visual perspective never seen before, it pulls at the audience's heartstrings to produce a work that pushes us to create change. In being shown the consequences of animal domestication that affected people and the animals themselves, we must think critically of our actions and correct our wrongdoing. Yet, in looking back in time, with *The Case of Animals versus Man*, which was originally published in the 10th-century C.E, it is a fable through our lens that explains our early relationship with animals, and how like the present, we use them for our selfish benefit. This concept is similar to the documentary *Blackfish* as we are condemning our actions by personifying the animals to give them a voice. It is remarked, "Their aim is to discredit the claim that man's innate superiority makes humans the owners of nature and gives them a perfect right to treat all creatures as they please." (Goodman, 2012, p. 2) In taking a look at *Blackfish* we must reflect on our relationship with animals, and through the use of affect theory assess how our emotions relate to our activity so we can allow ourselves to find understanding in the consequences of domestication. When we tie affect theory to our domestication of animals, we are pushed to reflect on our decisions outside of our own conscious to understand the outside forces that ultimately gravitate our movement and means.

### **Analysis**

Upon closer examination, in the documentary, there is a scene that effectively speaks out about the negative consequences of domestication and its effect on our attitudes. This scene focuses primarily on the baby orcas being separated from their mothers while being hunted. The

baby orcas were primary targets because they were cheaper to ship. It also exposes a gruesome visual of practices that occurred to the babies who did not survive, which focuses on the divers who performed these immoral tasks. One diver explains how in looking back he feels emotional and guilty for being the one to separate these families. He can remember the babies' cries when they were captured and sent away. We tie in domestication with affect theory through our organization of thoughts and ideas. We begin to feel empathy for the animals. In feeling empathy, it makes one wonder if we are so selfish that the only way, we are pushed to take action is through putting ourselves in an animal's situation. Viewing the unethical practices in the hunting of orcas, as an audience we can further understand the dark side of animal entertainment specifically in Sea World. To think about the harm our actions have on the animals and their environment.

Looking at our impact on animals, we must bring to attention habitat degradation. As conservationists have an understanding that in some part domestication can be beneficial to animals since they are guaranteed to be preserved in a habitat (although altered from their natural one). It has created a double-edged sword as humans have continued to destroy nature for our selfish benefit, thus causing animals to need to be preservation to be saved from being threatened or extinction. Nevertheless, zoos have become a focal point in the argument of animal domestication as we should become better at providing more sustainable habitats for the animals to live. An article by TIME magazine titled, *The Future of Zoos: Challenges Force Zoos to Change in Big Ways* goes in-depth about the history of zoos and why they should be changed to fit our modern world (Worland, 2017). Times have changed; it is only fitting that we adapt our treatment of animals to suit our new ways of thinking.

In the 2017 article David Hancock, a director for the Woodland Park Zoo noted that “These people aren’t designing for the animals,” he recalls thinking. “They create exhibits in which they can put animals on show.” Animal domestication was never meant to benefit animals in the first place, it was created as a way for humans to find entertainment. As the article continues, we perceive that zoos uphold an illusion for their visitors to feel that the animals are being protected. When in reality their environment does not accommodate their needs. Because of this, we need to transform zoos and become more creative in their landscape and design. Yet this pertains to be difficult due to the bond workers have developed with the animals. They believe they are continuing to do the right thing in keeping the animals safe. It also goes hand in hand with the message in *Blackfish* in that we need to change the way we treat animals in our world, as we are only causing further harm to them and nature. affect theory applies to this blind reasoning. Workers are moved by their relationships with the animals, resulting in the difficulty of understanding the change that needs to take place. We have fundamentally normalized that allows us to take advantage of such amazing creatures.

### **Conclusion**

Through our instilled connection with animals, it is evident that we must alter our ways and get in touch with our feelings and experiences around us to understand our iniquity. Working with animals whether through SeaWorld or in a zoo, we created an unbreakable kinship that allows us to understand and learn from them. By incorporating affect theory to this issue, it allows us to be conscientious, and with that, we must take our newfound knowledge and use it to aid the animals in living a better life. Just as how our relationship with animals has evolved through human history, it is now time that we change again for the sake of morality.

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