In August 2017, sociologist of science and technology Joanna Latimer wrote an online essay that reflected on the ethical implications of an encounter with a particular animal, which had resulted in violence. Staying in a small hotel in Crete for a conference, Latimer went for an evening walk, passing through scenic countryside. On reaching an industrial area, she turned back to the hotel but was attacked by a dog guarding some nearby sheds. Latimer viscerally describes the moment of the attack, detailing how the dog tore and ripped her leg, her hand, and the arm she raised to prevent the animal from reaching her throat. At a critical juncture in the attack, however, Latimer describes how:

Everything slowed down – and I said to myself “Joanna, you know about dogs”; and I said “Shsh, shsh” to the dog at the same time as I went very still and quiet. The dog sensed the change, and looked up at me, and I took my chance, pushed away along the ground, away from the limit of the dog’s chain’s reach.

Conceptualising the significance of this moment, Latimer suggests that it marked a passing of thresholds: from being entangled with the dog in a way that rendered her vulnerable to attack, to their bodies becoming re-entangled in a slightly different manner that created a moment of calm. This shift ultimately enabled Latimer to disentangle herself from the encounter entirely, likely saving her life. These very different entanglements with an animal also carry different ethical implications, with no option entirely free of violence. While initially violence was directed toward Latimer’s own body, ultimately, she points out, it was the dog who was rendered vulnerable (with their owner pressured to euthanize them).

Latimer’s reflections speak in complicated ways to a body of cultural theory that has found ethical potential in entanglements between humans and animals. Entanglement here means something more than simply being in relationships with animals. Instead it refers to the mutually transformative dimension of these relationships. Influential thinkers such as Donna Haraway have elucidated this line of argument by turning to dogs. For Haraway, what it means to be both canine and human has fundamentally changed through long patterns of co-evolution (as has
occurred, for instance, in processes of domestication). In books such as The Companion Species Manifesto, moreover, she describes transformative entanglements with dogs that occur on a more everyday basis, ranging from physical exchanges (as when saliva and microbes are passed between bodies through overly-enthusiastic acts of face-licking) to emotional shifts that occur as humans and animals co-habit and become attuned to one another’s needs.

The ethical value of such entanglements is beautifully articulated by Lori Gruen in this issue. As Gruen argues, an ethics of entanglement offers scope to “move us toward more conscientious ethical reflection and engagement”, overcoming the limitations of rights-based frameworks that have conventionally dominated discussions of animal ethics. These arguments speak to work that has been published over the past two decades by thinkers such as Karen Barad and Vinciane Despret, in addition to Haraway, who have likewise argued for the value of an ethics of entanglement as opposed to rights-based models of ethics. The work of each of these theorists is full of vivid descriptions of instances where bodily entanglements with animals have fostered new forms of understanding, care, and ethical responsibility that improve these relationships (echoing Gruen’s arguments).

Latimer’s description of her own, violent, encounter with an animal builds directly on entanglement ethics and engages sympathetically with this body of thought. At the same time, her essay (and indeed Latimer’s work more broadly) offers complications. What Latimer highlights is that in some instances finding space to create distance between human and animal bodies is just as ethically significant as entanglement; her essay, I suggest, opens three different lines of question in this regard. Firstly, Latimer’s experiences foreground that relations with other animals are not always desirable, and that sometimes the survival of particular creatures requires disentangling from other species. Secondly, and relatedly, she elucidates that even more convivial bodily entanglements can result in violence or even death. Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, Latimer underlines that decisions about which entangled relationships should be pushed for are always political, entailing decisions about whose needs, desires, and ways of being should be prioritised over others. Below I discuss the ethical implications of each of these issues, drawing on three – very different – examples from work I have engaged in (individually and with colleagues).

As Gruen describes, bodily entanglements between humans and animals can foster ethical responsibility in ways that have a profound effect on behaviour. What happens, however, when the animals in question are less easy to be entangled with? In an essay entitled “Flourishing with Awkward Creatures”, for instance, Franklin Ginn, Uli Beisel and Maan Barua explore the possibilities (and challenges) for flourishing with “animal others that disgust us, animals that we do not (like to) see or touch, and with whom we do not want to be together”. In my own work with Eleanor Hadley Kershaw, Richard Helliwell and Greg Hollin, we address this question in relation to three lifeforms that have thrived over recent years (to the discomfort of many humans and other animals forced to live with them): bed bugs, anti-microbial resistant (AMR) bacteria, and hookworms.

**BODILY ENTANGLEMENTS BETWEEN HUMANS AND ANIMALS CAN FOSTER ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY IN WAYS THAT HAVE A PROFOUND EFFECT ON BEHAVIOUR**

Entanglements with each of these lifeforms carry different stakes: bed bugs are annoying, but also
carry stigma that often falls along classed and racialized lines (having historically and often erroneously been connected to poverty, uncleanliness and and migration). With AMR the stakes are still higher, as it poses a threat to life and – though resistant microbes do not discriminate in the bodies they can affect – resistance is more difficult to contain in regions with poor health infrastructure.

The desirability of entanglement with hookworms is, in contrast, highly situated. In tropical and sub-tropical regions the parasites often remain pathological. However, in the Western Europe and North America it is the loss of such parasites that has been pathologised. Overly clean living conditions have been associated with a range of autoimmune diseases, resulting in a growing use of helminthic therapies – where hookworms are deliberately introduced into human bodies – to treat diseases including asthma, coeliac disease, and multiple sclerosis. These examples illustrate that in some instances creating distance or even excluding particular relationships between humans and other species can be necessary. Preventing certain entanglements might be especially important in contexts where the burden of who has the capacity to deal with “awkward creatures” falls unevenly and reinforces classed and racialized inequalities.

Hookworms, bed bugs and AMR, however, also show that decisions about when, how, and whether to create distance with particular creatures are not easy. The contemporary flourishing of these lifeforms is often connected with failed historical attempts to eliminate them, as with AMR and bed bugs that have become resistant to drugs and chemicals. Elimination attempts can also have disastrous ecological implications; the chemical of choice for eliminating bed bugs in the mid-20th century, for instance, was DDT (the consequences of which have been well-documented, most famously in Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*). And, as we have seen, excluding certain lifeforms from human lives can also have unexpected side-effects, as with the connections being drawn between a lack of entanglement with parasites and autoimmune diseases.

Understanding when it is necessary to disentangle from other species, how to disentangle without causing further ecological and social damage, and, importantly, extending the agency to make such choices to those affected the most, is something that requires sustained ethical consideration. More fundamentally, questions need to be asked about what sort of ethical framework can be used to foster care for the more-than-human world when direct entanglements are dangerous or even impossible.

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It is not, however, just a matter of addressing questions about how to navigate relationships with species that are damaging to humans. In all-too-many contexts it is humans themselves who are doing the damage. One of the most striking aspects of Latimer’s essay is that – despite the act of calming the dog
saving her own life – she does not use this rationale to frame her actions as entirely innocent. Instead, she emphasises that shifting her relationship with the dog from violence to something more convivial had very negative consequences for the animal.

**DECISIONS ABOUT WHEN, HOW, AND WHETHER TO CREATE DISTANCE WITH PARTICULAR CREATURES ARE NOT EASY**

In my collaborative work with Greg Hollin we have, similarly, traced less innocent dimensions of human-animal entanglements, focusing on an example where entanglements between humans and animals have been instrumentalised more systematically: laboratory beagles. The project emerged after the two of us had a discussion during which I mentioned that I felt uncomfortable with some of the arguments being made by influential thinkers such as Haraway (whose work I had otherwise found so valuable). In her 2008 book *When Species Meet*, Haraway argues that ethical responsibility and care can emerge in animal laboratories if space is created for close, bodily entanglements between researchers, technicians and animals. Through these bodily relations, she suggests that it is possible to develop a felt understanding of whether animals are happy, distressed, or signifying resistance, which could encourage people to alter the environment to improve their conditions.

The reason I mentioned feeling discomfort at this argument – aside from any personal differences in ideological viewpoint – can be elucidated by turning to the longer history of dogs’ use as experimental animals. One of the reasons that beagles became the laboratory breed of choice was because of their capacity to enter into convivial relationships with humans. In the first large-scale beagle colony at the University of California Davis (1951-1986), funded by the Manhattan Project, a large amount of space was created for people to spend time with beagles, learn about their needs, and be affected by the dogs emotionally. Insights gained from these encounters were used to re-shape the research environment; everything from cage design, to how long carers spent with animals, and even the type of gravel used, was changed in response to what appeared to make the beagles happier and more contented.

On the one hand, therefore, the Davis colony seems to reflect Haraway’s argument that responsibility and care emerging through bodily entanglements with animals can generate relationships that are more beneficial to the animals themselves. What should not be forgotten, however, is the overarching context: here, improving these relationships is also what enabled the animals to be instrumentalised more easily. The happier the beagle, the less likely they were to disrupt the aims of the experiment. Eventually it got to the point that researchers didn’t even need leads when they were weighing and measuring beagles for radiation experiments. Over time, by using bodily entanglements with beagles to gain insight into the dogs’ requirements, behaviours that could disrupt experimental work were gradually eliminated while personality traits that made beagles amenable to laboratory research were enhanced.

As Hollin and I argued, these processes have implications beyond simply suggesting that entanglements between humans and animals can – in some instances – be instrumentalised. Here, the historical exclusion of certain disruptive relationships between beagles and humans had long-term ramifications, by shaping and potentially limiting the transformative effects that could emerge from subsequent human-animal entanglements. This case, therefore, poses questions about whether an ethics of entanglement could have limitations in contexts where relationships between humans and animals have already been instrumentalised.

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So far I have pointed to two instances of less positive entanglements between humans and animals: in the first instance entanglements are potentially harmful to humans, while in the second they hold negative implications for animals. Both cases suggest that certain entanglements might undermine other possibilities, especially if they lead to violence for one (or both) of the parties involved. In some instances,
then, particular entanglements might need to be excluded, avoided, or even contested, in order to allow other realities to come into being. The act of excluding one set of entangled relations in favour of another, however, is always political, an assertion that resonates with the third issue posed by Latimer’s work. It is this politics of exclusion that is the focus of my recent book _What Comes After Entanglement?_

Exclusion has played an important role for certain thinkers associated with this body of theory, albeit one overshadowed by an emphasis on entanglement and coming together. Barad’s influential work, for instance, argues that as certain courses of action are deployed or as particular relations and ways of being emerge in the world, this necessarily comes at the expense of other realities. Exclusion, moreover, should not just be seen as something that happens, the flip-side of a dynamic, evolving world where some relations are always emerging at the expense of others. What I argue in my book is that exclusion needs to be seen as something that demands political and ethical attention.

**THE ACT OF EXCLUDING ONE SET OF ENTANGLED RELATIONS IN FAVOUR OF ANOTHER, HOWEVER, IS ALWAYS POLITICAL**

A small body of work concerned with entanglements between humans and non-humans has elucidated some of these stakes: From the visceral description of interactions between humans and dogs in Latimer’s work, to Thom van Dooren’s discussion of how particular environmental relations have forced entire species of birds onto the “dull edge of extinction”, or from Rosemary Collard’s research about the global wildlife trade, to Franklin Ginn’s focus on human-plant-slug relationships (see Jonathon Turnbull and Adam Searle’s column in the new materialisms in the previous issue of this journal). Van Dooren’s work, for instance, elucidates the urgency of intervening in problems such as plastic waste in the first chapter of _Flight Ways_, where he describes fledgling albatrosses slowly starving as their stomachs fill with plastic instead of fish. Here it is a lack of intervention – or, put differently, a failure to exclude certain relationships between humans and animals – that is likely to unravel whole ways of life, not only of albatrosses but other species whose lives are knotted together with the birds.

My book is concerned with the messy practicalities of dealing with this ethics of entanglement and exclusion in (activist) practice. One of the cases I look at, for instance, is vegan politics. In turning to veganism I was not suggesting that it should be treated in an uncritical and unreflexive way; as important work within vegan scholarship by thinkers such as A. Breeze Harper and Richard White illustrates, certain strands of popular veganism have unthinkingly reproduced other social inequalities. As Harper puts it in her 2010 article in the _Journal of Critical Animal Studies_, uncritical use of labels such as “cruelty free” are misnomers when violence and inequality exists at every level in globalized food systems. What White terms consumer “lifestyle veganism”, moreover, can do little to redress these inequalities and sometimes perpetuates them (especially if veganism just becomes a new market that can be captured by fast food chains selling plant-based foods). While acknowledging these tensions, what I do seek to unpick in the book are external criticisms levelled at veganism, which tend to homogenise and even mischaracterise vegan politics, for example by framing vegan ethics as intrinsically problematic due to shutting down particular ways of relating to animals. Haraway, for instance, portrays veganism as a denial that no way of living avoids killing and, more recently, Elspeth Probyn has argued that it marks an active “opting out of the structural complexities of food provisioning, production, and consumption”.

In my work I tried to complicate such narratives by elucidating how veganism has, in practice, functioned instead as an opting-in to the complexity of eating. In contexts where decisions to exclude certain relations – here certain ways of organising food production – might be important in challenging inequalities, avoiding harm, or even a matter of life and death, finding ways to assume responsibility for the world that is brought into being through a given course of action is critically important. As I discuss in my book, certain instances of vegan food activism (such as the transnational Food Not Bombs movement and free food give-aways in the
context of fast food activism in the UK), have sought to highlight and contest existing ways of producing, distributing, and disposing of food in specific contexts.

**FINDING WAYS TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WORLD THAT IS BROUGHT INTO BEING THROUGH A GIVEN COURSE OF ACTION IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT**

These groups draw criticisms of animal agriculture together with critiques of food poverty, inequality and food waste. A guiding principle is that it is important to highlight exclusions and inequalities – for both human and non-human animals – that already exist in certain food systems. These existing exclusions are so normative that they are difficult to detect without alternative approaches that seek to contest them and, in doing so, prevent these norms from simply being treated as “the way things are”. Food Not Bombs, for instance, share food made from vegetarian ingredients that is due to be discarded as waste with homeless people in public space. By occupying the city in this way, the group draw attention to food waste and food poverty, as well as animal ethics. In addition, these actions contest both the corporatisation of public space (by distributing food for free) and the criminalisation of homelessness (by combating no-loitering laws). Here the desire to re-work or challenge particular aspects of food systems plays an important role in politicising existing exclusions that often go under the radar, creating space to ask whether particular ways of doing things could be done “otherwise”.

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What I have tried to outline above, then, is that despite the important work that has been accomplished for entanglement ethics, there are some issues associated with this approach that need to be thought through. Namely, that it is important for an ethics that centres entanglements with animals to also reflect upon questions about which relationships with animals might need to be carefully re-negotiated, contested or even excluded. The “ethics of exclusion” that I discuss in my book is not suggesting that excluding particular relationships between humans and animals is necessarily a “good” thing that should be championed. As evident from the above examples, exclusions can obviously have problematic ramifications. I do, however, reiterate the point that every course of action carries an attendant exclusion: as brought home starkly in Latimer’s example. What is important, therefore, is paying close attention to who or what is being excluded in the process of other entangled relations coming into being, due to the high political and ethical stakes attached to any form of exclusion.