

My Pet Needs Philosophy: Ambiguity, Capabilities and the Welfare of Domestic Dogs

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Abstract

Domestic dogs are reliant on their human owners for survival. In light of this dependence, can a dog exercise free will? Within contemporary animal studies, the question of whether or not pet ownership is morally sound is often debated. Within this debate, however, an animal's individual preferences are often ignored thus erasing an animal's potential to exercise free will. In *Frontiers of Justice* (2006), Martha Nussbaum addresses this issue by extending the ethics of capabilities she has developed for humans to domestic animals. Nussbaum argues in order for the domestication of animals to be morally sound, animals must be enabled to fulfill various capabilities that will improve their quality of life. While Nussbaum contributes to the promotion of domestic animals' well being, an animal's status as an individual goes largely undiscussed. This paper will critique Nussbaum's ethics of capabilities in light of Beauvoir's text *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948), Beauvoir's discussion of imminence and transcendence, as well as Beauvoir's conception of morality. I will focus my attention of domestic dogs and will argue that privileging a dog's species and breed-based capabilities over the animal's individual preferences actually limits the capabilities Nussbaum is attempting to extend. I will also explain that a dog's capabilities can be better met by following a regiment of small adjustments to and close observation of, the capabilities a dog is enabled to exhibit. Through this methodology a dog's preferences and choices can be respected without privileging one facet of a dog's identity over another.

Introduction

Domestic dogs are reliant on their human owners for food, water and to facilitate meaningful interaction. In light of this dependence, is it possible for a companion animal to exercise free will? Can a dog be a sovereign individual? Within contemporary animal studies, the question of whether or not pet ownership is morally sound is often debated. In *Frontiers of Justice* (2006), Martha Nussbaum addresses this issue by extending the ethics of capabilities she has developed for humans to

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domestic animals. Nussbaum argues that domestic and captive animals must be treated according to their species and breed based capabilities, rather than function as a source of unconditional love for their owners. While Nussbaum's ethics grounded in group norms and behaviours, she pays little attention to the possibility that an animal could choose to exhibit behaviours that fall outside of these parameters. When studying Nussbaum's ethics of capabilities along side of Simone deBeauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948, 2003), it is clear that ignoring a set of animal behaviours limits the potential for that animal to exercise individual choice, thus negatively impacting an animal's welfare. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948, 2003), Beauvoir discusses transcendence, the moral existence of the ambiguous subject as well as the interconnectedness of one subject's freedom with that of another. While Beauvoir's existential philosophy was written to address the concept of human ethics and freedom, like Nussbaum's work, Beauvoir's ethics can be usefully extended to apply to human relationships with animals. In this paper, I will critique Nussbaum's ethics of capabilities in light of Beauvoir's ethics of ambiguity, Beauvoir's discussion of imminence and transcendence, as well as her conception of morality. I will argue that when a pet owner privileges a dog's species and breed-based capabilities over the animal's individual preferences they actually limit the capabilities Nussbaum is attempting to extend to dogs. Finally, I will also argue that rather than adhering to species and breed norms, dog owners can better fulfill their pets' capabilities by following a regiment of small adjustments to the behaviours a dog is enabled to exhibit paired with close observation of a dog's responses. Through this methodology, unlike strict adherence to species and breed norms, a dog's capabilities, preferences and choices can be respected without privileging one facet of a dog's identity over another.

Animal rights activists and philosophers debate the question of whether humans have moral obligations or responsibilities towards their companion animals. According to Immanuel Kant, a person "does not fail in his duty to the dog, for the dog cannot judge" (qtd. in Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 2006, p. 330). Konrad Lorenz illustrates a paradigm shift within contemporary animal studies and writes that "[t]he fidelity of a dog is a precious gift demanding no less binding moral responsibilities than the friendship of a human being" (1970, 2008, p.543). While Lorenz addresses the responsibility of owning a pet, the very notion of animal ownership foregrounds

the pet's subordinate position within human-animal relationships, and illustrates that this position is becoming increasingly problematic. Paul Shephard explains that, despite laws that condemn animal abuse, "the domestication of animals has never ensured their tender care. Although looked upon with affection, even modern pets are property that is bought, sold, 'put down' and neutered" (2008, p. 552). The responsibilities humans have towards their canines are also complicated through a domestic dog's position in the home as a loving companion. While many dog owners attempt to treat their pets with justice and care, many of these same dog owners inadvertently impede their pets' welfare by treating their pets like humans rather than as animals. In his article "I (love) My Dog," Keenan Ferguson explains that "the dog functions as an ersatz human in the sense of an object of care giving: a repository for affection, guardianship and love" (2004). This construction of domestic dogs is critiqued for a variety of reasons. Donna Harraway states that "[t]o regard a dog as a furry child, even metaphorically, demeans dogs and children- and sets up children to be bitten and dogs to be killed" (2003, p. 37). Expecting dogs to provide unconditional love for their human owners places pets in an impossible situation. No creature is capable of loving unconditionally, and demanding this love also assumes that a dog can communicate this affection in terms that humans can understand. In this case, not only are dogs expected to respond to mistreatment with affection, they are also required to transcend species and language boundaries to communicate this affection to their owners. Dogs will fail on both counts, and the underlying ideologies that allow pets to be given away because they don't "fit" into a family unit are ignored.

In *Animals, Property and the Law*, Gary Francione explains that mistreatment of animals is grounded in their status as property. For Francione, animals do not have "rights" in the traditional sense of the word, but rather are accorded the same "rights", or lack thereof, as property. Francione outlines that within the doctrine of legal welfarism, animal owners determine the welfare of animals. Consequently, how animals are treated is usually informed by what conduct will maximize the efficient use of animals as property (2003, p. 253). Within this framework, even the most beloved pet can be mistreated if it benefits human interests. Pet owners may claim that their dogs are "friends" or "family members", in reality however, many pets are subjected to neglectful or abusive treatment that suggests that pets are not actually valued members of a family unit but commodities that are bought, sold and often

disposed of. While it is important to acknowledge that animals continue to occupy the legal status of property, dog owners do not necessarily have to replicate these conditions in their homes. My discussion of animal's capabilities, transcendence and individuality departs from an understanding of the home as a place where pet owners do not see companion animals such as dogs as property, nor are they viewed as sources of unconditional love. If dogs genuinely occupy the role "friends" or "family members", they must be treated with love, respect and discipline like other members of these groups. Further, as family members, canines must also live productively in family units, and even though a dog may enjoy more rights than is afforded through his status as property, like other members of a family unit, a dog cannot simply do as he pleases. This does not mean that domestic dogs should be treated the same way as humans, but rather that dog owners must treat their pets as creatures who have rights that are evaluated alongside those of humans. These rights cannot be compromised for human gain, regardless of what may be condoned by the legal system outside of the home. In this case, understanding dogs as friends or members of the family is not simply lip-service, but rather denotes a commitment to an animal that accords him or her rights and freedoms, including allowing a dog to exercise free-will.

If the home can function as a place where dogs are imbued with rights, what are the responsibilities of the humans who live in family units to ensure that dogs' rights are not encroached upon? Nussbaum grounds her critique of the treatment of companion animals in an understanding of animals' needs, and explains that treating a dog like a human erases the dog's species-specific capabilities (2006, p. 340). For Nussbaum, the ethics of capabilities she develops for humans can function as a set of guidelines that will allow animals living under human control to live and flourish according to their species and breed specific capabilities. It is also important to note that domestic dogs cannot simply exercise their full capabilities through their own will or freedom. The application of Nussbaum's ethics of capabilities to animal subjects is problematized because dog ownership has become so widespread that the lives of dogs are intimately connected with those of humans. Consequently, dogs require intervention and support in order to live to the fullest of their capabilities from the same human owners who often erase their dogs' species specific needs by regarding their pets as human-like rather than as non-human animals (2006, p. 366). Nussbaum argues that regardless of this dependence, domestic animals must be treated as

“companions in need of prudent guardianship, but endowed with entitlements that are theirs, even if exercised through guardianship” (2006, p. 376). Further, while domestic animals may have “natural” tendencies that allow them to flourish in the wild, it is important to remember that domestic dogs may not be able flourish outside of human care because they have evolved over millennia with human beings (2006, p. 376). Many activists within animal liberation movements may champion for the freedom of domestic animals from human interference. While this is an important political movement from which valuable gains are made for animal rights, I locate this essay within the framework of animal welfare and discuss domestic dogs as they are currently located in the home with humans. Consequently, for purposes of this paper, I understand Nussbaum’s capabilities as those that are possible when a dog’s position in the domestic realm, within a community of humans, is taken into account.

Nussbaum begins her ethics of capabilities by explaining that every person or animal has basic entitlements. She then elaborates that “[f]ailure to secure these to citizens is a particularly grave violation of basic justice” (155). Nussbaum also explains that the relationships between humans and animals must to be regulated with justice and care (2006, p. 326). Nussbaum outlines a basic set of capabilities for animals as adequate opportunities for nutrition and physical activity; freedom from pain, squalor and cruelty; freedom to act in ways that are characteristic of the species; freedom from fear and opportunities for rewarding interaction with other creatures of the same species and of different species; a chance to enjoy the light and air in tranquillity (2006, p. 326).

Nussbaum goes on to explain that a captive or domestic animal must be treated according its breed and species specific capabilities, as well as according to the animal’s individual preferences (2006, p. 376). Within Nussbaum’s ethics, it is morally unsound to prevent an animal from benefiting from the aforementioned capabilities. Nussbaum explains that humans must also consider an animal’s individual preferences and choices in their evaluation of that animal’s capabilities (2006, p. 378). Although her methodology is subject to repeated scrutiny, Nussbaum defends her capabilities approach and states, “[t]here is no sure-fire recipe for doing this right; but we have to begin somewhere” (2006, p. 355). Although Nussbaum advocates for working towards a more ethical way to keep domestic animals, when

examining this ethics of capabilities in light of Beauvoir's existential philosophy, it is clear that Nussbaum may be impeding the pursuit of the capabilities for which she advocates. Nussbaum champions for enabling a dog's capabilities while respecting individual preferences; within her framework, however, a dog's identity as part of a breed is privileged over the animal's preferences and needs as an individual. As a result, a dog's capabilities and what is meaningful for the animal remain fixed according to the animal's species, breed or even the whims of an owner, rather than being flexible to cater to an animal's ever-changing needs or preferences that may stand outside of species norms.

Like Nussbaum, Simone deBeauvoir addresses the issue of human morality, and while Beauvoir does not discuss companion animals, her ethics can usefully be extended to human-animal relationships. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948, 2003), Beauvoir explains that a person is simultaneously "a sovereign and unique subject" as well as "an object for others...nothing more than an individual in the collectivity on which he depends" (1948, 2003 p. 7). In "Beauvoir's Idea of Ambiguity," Stacy Keltner asserts that for Beauvoir, "[a]mbiguity signals the tension between seemingly opposing experiences of the self as both a free subject and an object for others" (2006, p. 201). The tension between the self as a sovereign individual and the self as part of a collective creates what Beauvoir calls ambiguity. Beauvoir explains that individuals embody the contradiction of existing simultaneously as individuals and as part of a collective. As a result, according to Beauvoir, individuals are themselves, ambiguous (1948,2003 p. 130). Beauvoir believes that the ambiguous subject must continually transcend meaning, that is, re-evaluate meaning so that it is congruent with an individual's socio-historical context. When an individual is not able, or simply refuses to, renegotiate their ambiguity, they are living in immanence rather than actively transcending (Keltner, 2006, p. 211). For the purposes of this essay, and in my extension of Beauvoir's analysis of human ethics to domestic animals, the collectives or communities to which a dog belongs are those that are established and governed by humans, where dogs depend on human intervention for survival. As a result, a dog is simultaneously a member of a breed, a species, a member of a community that includes the humans, and a sovereign individual within these different groups.

Although Nussbaum asserts that a dog's individual preferences and choices must be considered, she situates an animal's individuality within the confines of both breed and species specific norms, thus privileging the collective over the individual rather than viewing each dog as ambiguous. Consequently, the dog's individuality is at risk of being erased, and its ambiguity is made an impossibility as the individual animal is reduced to a part of a collective who benefit from capabilities defined for them by their human masters. Because the capabilities promoted through Nussbaum's paternalism favour breed and species norms rather than weighing them equally with individual preference or choices, the capabilities promoted may not even be of use to an animal who falls outside of these trends. As a result, Nussbaum's erasure of a dog's ambiguity pulls a lynchpin that destabilizes the moral existence of both dogs and humans when examined in light of Beauvoir's philosophy. In "Transcendence and Immanence in Beauvoir's Ethics," Andrea Veltman explains that for Beauvoir, "transcendence refers less to the movements of an intentional conscious subjectivity and more to constructive activities that situate and engage the individual with other human freedoms" (2006, p. 114). Conversely, immanence refers to "the negative labour necessary...to perpetuate the status quo" (2006, p. 115). Veltman asserts that for Beauvoir, immanence designates futile chores marked by passivity and submission to biological fate, while transcendence is characterised by activities of creation, progress and discovery (2006, p. 119). Veltman goes on to explain that transcendence engages a subject with the world, working towards future projects while immanence is futile, consuming time and labour but accomplishing nothing. Within Beauvoir's philosophy, the ambiguous subject must continuously transcend their ambiguity, or renegotiate meaning as described above if they are to live meaningful existences in pursuit of life's projects (1948, 2003, p. 121). Because Nussbaum's framework makes a dog's ambiguity an impossibility, transcendence is also impossible.

Further, as Nussbaum's paternalistic ethics confine the dog's individuality to the narrow parameters of species based capabilities, the only meaning the dog will be able to create will be meaning that fits within the parameters established along these same guidelines and norms. As a result, the domestic dog is not actually transcending and negotiating what may be of individual importance, but remains immanent as the dog's actions do nothing but reaffirm the status quo, which is, in this case, the set of capabilities determined through species and breed specific capabilities.

Nussbaum's erasure of a dog's ambiguity and ability to transcend also has serious moral implications for a dog's human owners. Stacy Keltner explains that the central ethical claim in "The Ethics of Ambiguity" is that the condition of one individual's freedom lies in the freedom for all individuals (2006, p. 208). In her discussion of Beauvoir's ethical-spiritual way of life, Karen Vintages explains that Beauvoir's conception of freedom is couched in "willing oneself free", that is, working towards one's own freedom. Vintages asserts that for Beauvoir, to will oneself free denotes a commitment to freedom, and this commitment involves working for everyone's freedom, not simply your own (2006, p. 220). Consequently, to work for one's own freedom, one works for that of others, because, according to Beauvoir, people are all interconnected (1948, 2003, p. 24). Thus, if one individual is impeding the freedom of another, they themselves are not free. As a result, to prevent an animal from transcending its ambiguity, or in making that transcendence an impossibility through the erasure of an animal's ambiguity, that animal is not free. When that animal is not free, by extension, the human who erases that animal's ambiguity and limits its freedom is also not free.

Aligning the freedoms of humans with those of their pets may initially seem to conflate what it means to be free for each species (if freedom is even possible for either species). As previously discussed, the lives of dogs have become so entwined with those of humans that the repercussions of limiting the freedom of a pet cannot go undiscussed. In "The Companion Species Manifesto", Donna Haraway addresses human-dog relationships and explains that dogs and humans are bonded in what she calls "significant otherness" (2003, p. 16). Haraway states that "[h]uman life has changed significantly with dogs. Flexibility and opportunism are the name of the game for both species, who shape each other throughout the still ongoing story of co-evolution" (2003, p. 29). If humans and dogs are not only co-existing but also co-evolving, and the lives of humans and their dogs are inextricably connected, then the freedom (or lack thereof) of both dog and owner could also be connected. It seems deeply problematic that a commitment to freedom, and the moral repercussions of limiting that freedom, would not extend to animals that not only co-exist, but also co-evolve, with humans. Haraway draws on the philosophy of Vicki Hearne to discuss how humans and dogs are connected by an ethics that is more complex than simply

according an animal certain rights. Haraway explains that in relationship, dogs and humans construct 'rights' in each other, such as the right to demand respect, attention, and response... The question turns out not to be what are animal rights, if they existed preformed to be uncovered, but how may a human enter into a rights relationship with an animal? (2003, p. 53).

Haraway foregrounds the mutuality between humans and their companion animals. Central to a relationship of rights with an animal is the understanding that like a human, a dog has capabilities and freedoms that must not be compromised. Because humans and dogs are linked, as Nussbaum and Haraway believe, then perhaps the freedoms of human and dogs are also co-existing and co-evolving. When considered in light of Haraway's mutuality and relationship of rights, a human's freedom could be connected to the freedom and ambiguity, or lack thereof, enjoyed by their dog.

In her discussion of freedom and transcendence, Beauvoir explains that "[t]here are beings whose life slips by in an infantile world because, having been kept in a state of servitude and ignorance, they have no means of breaking the ceiling which is stretched over their heads" (1948, 2003 p. 37). Similarly, in his discussion of the mistreatment of domestic animals, Paul Shephard explains that dogs are kept in this state of servitude, and explains that

What is wrong at the heart of keeping pets is that they are deficient animals in whom we have invested the momentum of two million years of love of the Others. They are monsters of the order invented by Frankenstein except that they are engineered to conform to our wishes, biological slaves who cringe and fawn or perform or whatever we wish (2008, p. 553).

While domestic dogs discussed by Shephard and the dis-empowered humans addressed by Beauvoir are distinct and must not be conflated, there are similarities between Beauvoir's description of the oppressed and Shephard's discussion of dogs. In both instances, the autonomy and freedom of the individual is compromised; a human is prevented from exercising free will and a dog is only permitted to display behaviours that reinforce the notion that it loves his or her owner unconditionally. Nussbaum advocates for a form of paternalism that creates opportunities for a dog to live according to its capabilities. Within this paternalism however, she does not fully

account for the communication barriers that inevitably characterise interspecies relationships which also complicate her paternalistic ethics. Consequently, the ethics of capabilities described by Nussbaum leaves dogs at risk of not being able to break through Beauvoir's proverbial ceiling, performing capabilities that are ultimately to the benefit of a dog's human owners rather than to the animal itself.

Once we have acknowledged that humans must honour a dog's status as a sovereign individual and as a part of a collective, how can dog owners go about treating their dogs in a way that does not privilege either their individuality or their connection to a larger group? How can this be done when communication between humans and dogs often reinforces the hierarchies that demand that a dog fulfil human desires? One solution may lie in the careful monitoring of companion animals, as discussed by Miriam Stamp Dawkins. In "Evolution and Animal Welfare" Dawkins explains that "many of the so-called symptoms of poor welfare are in fact evolutionary adaptations" (1998). Dawkins argues that some patterns of "natural" behaviour are simply not necessary for animals once they are captive, and allowing an animal to partake in such behaviours may not necessarily improve an animal's welfare. Further, some behaviours that may seem dysfunctional to the outside observer may be an evolutionary response to captivity and when subjected to further study, these "dysfunctional" behaviours may actually improve the animal's welfare (1998). Dawkins explains that, for example, if an animal chases its prey for a long distance before feeding, there is no way to know if the animal will be motivated to repeat this same act in captivity. Dawkins argues that unless animals are continuously and carefully observed we will never know which capabilities to promote among captive animals, and which the animal is no longer motivated to pursue (1998). Further, Dawkins asserts that animal owners must continually make slight changes to the behaviours their animals are allowed to exhibit and observe the animal's responses to these changes in order to decipher which behaviours are important to a specific animal (1998). While Dawkins is discussing zoo animals in this instance, her methodology can be extended to dogs. A dog owner can observe which behaviours their pet chooses to pursue by continually monitoring and making slight changes to the behaviours a dog is enabled to exhibit. When a dog shows no interest in a specific behaviour then the owner can enable a different capability. This practice would allow a dog to negotiate their own capabilities through human mediation rather than live

within the parameters of potentially irrelevant species or breed-based capabilities imposed by humans. Dawkins also asserts that this process must be continuous; what is important for an animal at one phase of their life may be of no importance at a later time (1998). As a result, a dog's human owner can never stop observing, changing and reassessing their pet's behaviour if they are going to continually enable relevant behaviours. Further, within this process a dog may exhibit behaviours that are inappropriate for life within a family unit. In this instance, a dog must be granted room to make mistakes, and rather than be given away or put down, a dog's position as "friend" or "family" member must be continually reaffirmed.

Part of the process of enabling dogs to transcend their ambiguity is re-evaluating what humans have understood to be productive animal behaviours. Dawkins explains that animal welfare is often assessed based on the presence of displacement and vacuum activities. Displacement activities are characterised as "odd or irrelevant behaviour that appears to have nothing to do with conflict" (1998). Vacuum activities are the behaviours an animal performs in the absence of any stimuli that might compel an animal to display these behaviours, for example, a caged chicken going through the motions of covering itself with dust (1998). Dawkins explains that both behaviours are thought to be evidence of high levels of frustration or conflict in a particular animal, and are thus used as markers of poor welfare (1998). Dawkins argues, however, that this interpretation of behaviour may be misguided, as "the performance of a vacuum activity may itself be an adequate substitute for the real thing" (1998). In light of Dawkins' analysis, unconventional behaviours may be evolutionary adaptations to living in captivity, and may actually contribute to an animal's welfare rather than act as an indicator of distress. As a result, Dawkins explains that an animal's own choices function as "an indispensable part of welfare assessment" (1998). , Dawkins believes that the behaviours an animal exhibits may stand outside of breed and species norms. (1998). When applied to domestic dogs, Dawkins' methodology allows a dog to create meaning based on their current preferences and conditions, or, in Beauvoir's terms, transcend its ambiguity. Dawkins illustrates that vacuum or displacement activities (such as a dog circling a spot on the floor before he or she lays down to rest) are not necessarily indicative of frustration, and a dog owner must take this into account when enabling and evaluating capabilities. This is not to say that a dog's species and breed can go ignored when establishing capabilities, but

that these cannot be used as determining factors. As a result, by using an approach based on mutuality and close observation, while considering but not strictly enforcing species and breed norms, a dog may live with the freedom to exist as a sovereign individual and as a group member while continuously renegotiating meaning.

It is important to note that this solution, as well as the application of existential philosophy to domestic dogs, has difficulties that must be acknowledged. As each animal differs in breeding and temperament, the hallmarks of an animal's transcendence cannot be enumerated into a comprehensive list. Rather, in transcending his or her ambiguity, a dog will have the opportunity to live beyond the expectations of unconditional love for its owner, and choose which behaviours to display, whatever these may be. In her article "Feminism and the Treatment of Animals: From Care to Dialogue," Josephene Donovan explains that central to the mistreatment of animals is the ideology that not only justifies this cruelty, but allows humans to benefit from it. Donovan argues that an effective methodology to fight animal cruelty must not only work to end acts of injustice against animals, but must also dismantle the "ideological rationalisations that legitimate animal exploitation and cruelty" (2006). Donovan asserts that a dialogical ethic of care must be established, and within this ethic education is central to the dismantling of the aforementioned ideologies (2006). The application of Beauvoir's Ethics of Ambiguity to Nussbaum's Ethics of Capabilities is an example of such a dialogic; this process is continuous, and requires both human and animal to engage in a conversation that will lead to a dog's ever-changing needs and preferences being met. A human who interacts with a companion animal must not only continually evaluate their pet's preferences and behaviours, but must also monitor their own to ensure that the relationship between humans and dogs in a household is characterised by mutuality. Further, the ideological rationalisations that allow animals to be treated cruelly can be subverted within the homes where domestic dogs are located. While regarding family pets as living creatures and individuals who are more than simply property may not initially dismantle the legal framework that permits wide scale abuse of animals, it is a start in the process to accord animals a more expansive list of rights.

Enabling dogs to transcend their ambiguity is not an easy task. Simone deBeauvoir explains that "it is incumbent upon ethics not to follow the path of least resistance"

(1948, p. 142). In the case of animal welfare, an ethical path is long and difficult to follow. Dawkins' method of experimentation is "painstaking, and in some ways [a] tedious task, as the same questions will have to be asked about different species and about different behaviours within the same species" (1998). Adhering to these principles would require that a dog owner commit a considerable amount of time to continually observe their dog and make slight changes to their pets' daily routine, rather than adhere to standards of what a dog, or a species of dog, may prefer. Pet owners must be continually engaged in a dialogical ethic of care to ensure that a dog can exercise its capabilities and act upon its preferences while occupying the status and rights of an individual within a familial unit. Nussbaum's guidelines must not be disregarded, but rather, can be used as a point of reference to establish a dog's place within a collective, while the observation and gradual changes proposed by Dawkins would solidify a dog's status as a sovereign individual. This, in turn, would serve to re-inscribe the animal's ambiguity and allow the dog to make choices and reaffirm meaning and transcend that ambiguity. Although this solution leaves a dog's preferences to be mediated through a human lens, this process is done from within a space where a dog is understood as more than simply property. While a human and companion animal are at risk of misunderstanding one another throughout this process, the application of Beauvoir's Ethics of Ambiguity to current practices of raising domestic dogs is a step in the direction of improving a dog's wellbeing.

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