

[Transcript] The Ezra Klein Show / How 'Being Animal' Could Help Us Be Better Humans

From New York Times Opinion, this is the Ezra Klein Show.

So a quiet theme of the show, a quiet theme I think of just being alive at this moment in time, is the troubled relationship between human beings and everything that is not us. I mean also of course between human beings and other human beings, but between human beings and the animal world, which we are both a part of and somehow not, or at least like to believe we're not, between human beings and animals, some of which we love and we do anything for their survival, like our dogs and our cats and some of which we raise for food in the cruelest conditions imaginable and many of which we just don't think about at all and end up affected by our actions but never part of our calculus. But then of course there's also this emergent relationship between human beings and the kinds of intelligences or simulacra of intelligences that we're creating. I'm thinking specifically here of artificial intelligence and the way it has occasioned a lot of anxiety then about what we are and what our worth is if we can indeed create things more capable than us or smarter than us in narrow tasks and increasingly in general ones. So this question of how humanity relates to its own animal nature and then how that relationship or that denial of a relationship shows up in our technologies I think is pretty present and as much as it sounds like a fuzzy philosophical question I think it ends up being a very policy relevant one. Policy relevant in our policy towards animals, towards farm animals, towards the ecology, towards the environment and then of course towards AI and how AI will be created and permitted to present and what kind of training data it has, what we want from it and what we want and how we'll treat people who are harmed by it. All this was in my head as I started reading Melanie Challenger's book, *How to be Animal*, a new history of what it means to be human. She is an environmental philosopher and historian and a beautifully poetic writer and she's also the author of *On Extinction*, how he became estranged from nature. So she's been thinking about these issues for some time and I think it's a good moment to think alongside her. As always my email is reclinedshow@nytimes.com.

Melanie Challenger, welcome to the show. Thank you very much for having me Ezra.

So you write that the world is now dominated by an animal that doesn't think it's an animal and the future is being imagined by an animal that doesn't want to be an animal. This matters. Why does it matter? I mean look at what we're facing right now. We're facing a pandemic, we're facing the fallout from that, we're facing multiple environmental crises and I think we look at the reasons for that in very obvious ways. We look at the politics, we look at the way society is organised but we don't reflect as often as we should do on either the psychological and the moral dimensions. For me a lot of the struggles that we face at the moment

derive from a particular way of framing our relationship to the world and to ourselves and I would argue that that originates in the fact that we have a fundamental struggle with being animal and with what follows from being animal and that's the starting point for my thesis. There was an interesting point you made midway through the book. You wrote that many of the tensions we experience derive from the dissonance inherent in being a predator with a rich moral faculty and then you posed a thought experiment. How different might it have been if our kind of intelligence had spun out of herbivores? What if a moral system had emerged among the beavers in Canada? Tell me a bit about both sides of that. What do you mean when you say there's a lot of dissonance in the morality of a predator species and what might you imagine which seems like a wonderful foundation for a sci-fi book? If human civilization and intelligence

sprung out in a species that did not eat meat. In many ways all of the book is a thought experiment that derives from starting again with what does it mean if we really examine the fact that we're animals. Now something that's really obvious but that we don't think about enough is that we are a predatory animal. So human beings, yes we're omnivorous but we are predators so we have hunted and we continue in some communities to hunt animals and to eat them we continue to consume them.

So our farming conditions for instance are just a controlled form of predation. All that we've done there is taken the animals that we want to eat or whatever products we want to use from them and we have contained them but it's still predation and I don't think we think about that enough. How would the world look if we had a different kind of animality? So if our moral systems, our ideas, our beliefs about our world had come out from a different way of being, if we were a manatee, if we were one of the herbivores that we eat for instance, what kind of world would we have? What kind of modern structures and ideas and belief systems would come from that? I think that there are several things that we can speculate on and I'm going to pose this to people. If there is a science fiction writer out there take on this idea and let's see what they come up with but I would imagine we would have a different kind of way of dealing with resources and a different therefore a different kind of way of structuring the world. So consider the fact that we are a hierarchical primate so we really care about status for instance, you know losses of status, our disastrous for human beings particularly actually for males of the species and these affect us in all kinds of ways in our biology in our bodies but we don't think about them very often and yet we see them in the world, we see them in the way that the world is structured, we see them in who has power, we see them in the way that we perceive certain people as having more charisma or being people more valuable to listen to than others. We're deeply affected by being a hierarchical primate yet oftentimes we just completely ignore the fact that that is what's underpinning the reality that we take for granted. One thing that I always think can creep into this kind of conversation is an idealization of nature. I think when people say human beings are an animal that rejects its relationship to being an animal, rejects its relationship to nature, I think sometimes there's a sense that there's some kind of harmony out there for us to find but but nature is non-harmonious. You've got a very nice line in this in the book where you write, in one sense biology seems to come out of violence whether that is about energy or extreme heat, the solar system and the Earth's environments commit horrors on animals even as they allow for new diversity and change. So it's true the human animal is a predator but it is also terrified of predation, terrified of being destroyed by animals bigger than than we are but also by pathogens, also by floods, by heat, by exposure, by drought, by famine and so there's also this deep scarcity working within us not because we're distant from nature but because nature is pitiless at the deepest level and you write about this and I'm curious how you think that that inflects this relationship. So there's a lot to unpack there and that's really at the core of the book in some ways. Yes, lots of ghastly things happen in nature and they happen through necessity because there are forces of change, there's evolutionary process at work and there's often an arms race between species particularly predators of course and predators and prey but also just between the environment and the animal, the ability to get food, the ability to survive, you get communities of animals but then of course you get pathogens within those communities so there's this constant battle to make it through. What is beautiful about any living system is that it seeks to persist despite the barrage of constraints or difficulties that are

going to be faced and confronted but what I would say is the good comes out of the world and the beauty comes out of the world as well so yes we face pathogens or we face predators for instance but lots of organisms resolve that by communal living so they group together and when organisms start to group together in group living conditions they form alliances and that's the basis of our friendships, that's the basis of the intimacy, the willingness that the Samaritan has to help a stranger on the street. When you have people who are willing to exchange information and help one

another you get the birth of all kinds of ideas that develop from that, the concept of trust, the concept of helping another in that kind of way and you also get that in the body so if I was to have something awful happen to me and I was to have someone that just sat by me, put a hand on my leg, just talked to me, put a hand on my back and reassured me, my heart rate would come down, my respiratory rate would come down and I would start to feel better. There's so much beauty that is also made possible from the difficulties that we face in the living condition and so good comes out of it as much as trial does.

You have a wonderful way of illustrating, through actually looking at illustrations, how the relationship between humanity and animals have changed over time and you do that by tracking how cave drawings and other kinds of early art changed over time, could you talk through that? Oh sure, I'm pretty nuts about this, I absolutely, this came from a real fascination, like a real personal fascination rather than a cold intellectual one. I was really fascinated in cave art because I was trying to make sense of a particular kind of way that we visualise being an animal and the kind of mind that we have, the way that we think about animals and exploit images of animals. This was something that I was really trying to get at when I was trying to make sense of not only the things that we fear that follow from being an animal but what we fear about being an animal ourselves, what we confront in the image of being an animal. I was in Spain at Altamira which is a site of some extraordinary cave paintings and it is an extraordinary place, it's womblandish, you kind of enter into the dark cave and then it opens out into this chamber and you can't really grasp what you're seeing until you lie down but when you lie down on the cave floor you can see just this zoey trope of images of wild animals, beautifully exquisitely wrought. What you don't see is the shadows, you can see when you're in the cave that our early ancestors were exploiting shadows in order to make their art in certain kinds of ways. Now don't forget that caves were shelters for our early humans, they were places that we hid from predators that we kept ourselves safe as well as being places that we might come to worship. These are extraordinary sites that confront us with the kind of mind that we think we've left behind but actually is still alive in us and what is very interesting about cave art is two aspects of what it means about our kind of cognition. The first is that it is a living document for how our cultural idea shifted and also this sort of psychological way that we related to the living world shifted as we moved from hunter gathering to agriculture and the first of our kind of early civilizations.

So you find that the first original cave paintings were primarily of wild animals and they were reverential but as we started, as human civilization started shifting into domesticating their food sources and hunted more for cultural significance really rather than necessarily for necessity or to supplement the trials and errors of transitioning to farming. What you find is that there are less and less and less images of wild animals and when you do see animals in the latter, the kind of real neolithic shift, you find that it is now

the animals surrounded by humans who are in a position of domination. So it's this wonderful catalog, the cave paintings of which there aren't a huge amount but they still give us this tantalizing glimpse of a psychological and cultural shift from one of closeness to and reverence for the rest of the living world towards one of domination. So that's something that's very interesting.

You have an interesting critique in the book, not of the dominant or widespread religious systems but of what gets called secular humanism and your critique particularly revolves around how secular humanism creates a structure of worth between humans and animals and how it at least purports to do so rationally. Can you talk through that a bit?

Something that we haven't got into yet is the idea of dualism. So we've talked a lot about the kind of problems that flow from being an animal. So the moral dilemmas that emerge and also the practical difficulties that we face but one of the solutions here that has cropped up throughout human history in different kinds of ways is to separate something about human beings out from their physical being and say well it's this separate part of us, this non-animal part of us that matters. In many ways that is one of the ideas that came out of original attempts that theologians hundreds of years ago attempted to do when they were trying to make sense of what is it that's special about human beings and what is it that will survive beyond what we can see happening which is the decay of the body into nothingness.

There's this spiritual part of us, there's this soul that survives and it's the soul that gives our life meaning, it's the soul that makes human beings special and it's the soul thereby that justifies what we do in the world. Now once you get the emergence of secular humanism there's this real need to retain that separation, that moral separation between us and the rest of the living world because we want to continue exploiting other animals for example or we might simply want the psychological relief and the moral relief of seeing ourselves as this superior form of life and the solution comes in with secular humanism to sort of transport the soul which is a whole body dualism into just a bit of us, into the idea of our minds, into the idea of our superior cognition, our rationality, our free will and that kind of little trick that little move starts happening during the enlightenment as the kind of seeds of humanism are being sown

and we have the emergence of an empirical scientific worldview which put those thinkers sometimes in tension with this kind of religious dualism but the solution came in having this mental dualism, this idea that no it's because we are these rational Asians that's what makes us separate, that's what only we possess. Now we're living in an interesting time now of course because we have learned much more about the intelligence and sentience and cognitive skills of other living beings particularly primates but also broadly mammals across birds and increasingly cephalopods that are challenging these ideas that it's only human beings who have this absolutely unique form of cognition so just as Darwin has imposed a problem for the old religious dualism and this sort of satisfying solution to being animal that provided now we find that modern science ironically is provoking challenges to the alternative secular solution to being animal which was kind of cognitive dualism. I'm glad we got into the question of dualism because it gets at one of my favorite lines of the book. You write, we are animals as we embrace and as our bloodied newborns slide from the bodies of women but not when we make vows. We are animals as we

bite into the flesh of our meal but not in the workplace. We are animals on the operating table but not when we speak of justice and that felt true to me and it made me wonder if really the

whole thing we're talking about here isn't simply a mind-body distinction right? We are animals when

we are feeling, when we're running, when we're bleeding, when we're eating, when we're defecating and we're not when we're podcasting. Right now we're high order beings dancing about in the world of ideas and so is that the story here that in maybe one of the byproducts of consciousness is just a separation not even from animals but actually from bodies. It isn't just that when I am podcasting I don't feel like I'm an animal. When I'm podcasting I don't feel like I'm synthesizing protein inside myself. There is a deep separation when you are more and more in your mind. Absolutely. I think a lot of what I was looking at as I began to really unpick the idea of human exceptionalism through time is the fact that it is really strange for us to have this very, very hyper aware state that we are in. Human beings are exceptional and unique in being aware of our awareness so in having that particular kind of subjective consciousness and what that does is several things. It gives us this sensation and I think I say this either in the book or I've said this when I've spoken to people that it produces this sensation that we can all relate to that we are somehow carrying ourselves around in our body. So it actually generates a kind of that particular reflective part of our consciousness which is I should add a very animal thing. It comes from our particular kind of sociality. It solves problems in the world. It's not some sort of magic dust in our head. It's come from the fact that we need to reflect on ourselves that we're deeply highly social as a primate. We need to be able to keep track on our own identity and also to see into the minds of others to keep a track on them and maneuver and manage the complexities of human interaction in the world, social interaction. That's basically what it's doing for us but it's left us with this extraordinary legacy.

One of the core legacies is that we feel like what we really are in our core is some sort of thinking bit of us that's just being carried around on these legs or on wheels if we're disabled whatever we might be. We're somehow the body is just the carrier of this true part of what we are and we can see that sensation has been written as a just so story of what human beings are from the beginning of time, from the beginning of our recorded history through to now.

And it is something that you say okay we're not animals as we podcast but actually you know my heart rate goes up a little bit, I feel a little bit nervous, I'm worried about not saying the wrong thing. That will probably mean I've got cortisol levels that are peaking right now so everything about this whole podcasting is going to be really really animal and that's derived from the fact that we are these social animals where our social interactions and our status within society has a high premium so that's why we get so nervous and our mouths get dry and we worry about what we're doing that all comes from being animal

and yet the fact that we can think about it and contemplate it creates this strange disruption between what is still a completely animal phenomenon and the way that we actually then relate to it and think about it and it does come from that kind of weird aspect of our cognition that that's where I think it derives from.

I apologize for the heart rate acceleration.

No, it's a human normal thing, don't worry.

So this gets I think to one of the cruxes of the book which is what is the consequence of all this?

Fine, maybe it's weird to be a human being, maybe we have a weird relationship with our animal selves, maybe we have a weird relationship with our own bodies.

But you write, what we risk is a runaway process where our fear of being animal causes us to hammer

out a more frightening world. Not frightening in the sense that the world is nastier or more violent but in a paradoxical reliance on technologies that aggravate the existential fears beneath us and that felt to me and this goes through the sort of back half of the book like a place where this was all coming to roost that if we have a divided relationship to ourselves and we are building technologies that exacerbate that division, those technologies may have many more consequences for us than we currently realize.

So tell me a bit about that and the role of the path of technological development as you see it.

Sure, so the easiest way of doing this and one doesn't want to be too reductive

but if we look at the core kind of industrial revolutions, the first and second industrial revolutions were really about harnessing energy and manufacture. So how can we harness energy to manufacture more goods to make the world work for us and that then generated huge amounts of opportunities to resolve some of the core problems that we face as animals. So how do we get the food

that we want, how do we build the structures that we want and control the difficult natural forces that are around us and build a world that feels more comfortable for us. So that

that was what was going on in those first industrial revolutions and as they say they still come from being animal but they're much more to do with how you can have a safe environment and have access to the right amount of food, get as much food as you can, the plow and so forth.

But then when we start to look at the fourth industrial revolution now it's still deeply rooted in being an animal but it's much more related to trying to control our own actual biology itself. So we start to look at genetic technologies, synthetic biology, AI, these are all actually exploiting the physical stuff of a living being and what I try to argue is that if we are fearful of being animal if in fact this is something that we find frightening and we haven't got into this yet but this is a really crux part of it which is that the fact that we are animal creates these difficulties, these things that we face from pathogens to dangers in the world to our mortality but for human beings this means that we try to separate ourselves from being animal

that we respond to this both literally in the world and also psychologically and that tends to kind of ratchet up right, the more that we try to escape being animal the more we want to escape being animal and the worse that separation becomes, it doesn't resolve the anxiety, it heightens it.

What might follow from the fact that our new technologies are all about the fact that we're animal, they confront us with being animal all the time, they are about our physical being, if that's what we find threatening I'm not convinced we're going to be well placed until we accept that and talk about that to actually steer these kinds of technologies.

Well some of the technologies you're talking about in the book are very speculative you know cryogenic freezing and people get in their heads frozen and this and that but one of them isn't and it's been more of a preoccupation of mine and the show's for a bit which is AI. Since you published the book and now AI or generative artificial intelligence as it gets called has become much more present in people's lives, something we can explore and work with and it often strikes me that a lot of the anxiety people feel when they interface with these programs has to do with this question of how we judge our worth separate from our animal-ness. There's a lot in our animal-ness that AI we know has no relationship to, it can't listen to music, it can't birth a

child, it can't feel a lot of what we can feel the sort of embodied nature of our intelligence that it doesn't have but if you build your worth as a human being off of creative cognitive processes which we often do because we measure people through their value to the economy and you have now systems that can write an essay as well as a human being or come up with the answers to scientific questions as well as a human being or whatever it might be and some of them we don't have yet but we will soon. Then you end up in very dangerous metaphysical territory as a species and I'm not the first to observe this, Megan O'Geeblen and others have made this point but that the ways in which AI is shaking our sense of self seems precisely related to how narrow and distant from our sensations and our bodies our sense of worth had become. There's a beautiful provocation there, isn't there? So if we go back to this idea that separating ourselves from being animal in many different ways has solved the moral problem that we might face, so why do we justify factory farming for instance? How do we justify the extent to which we utilize and exploit the living world? How do we justify the kind of systems that are leading to climate change? We often fall back on this idea where human beings are the only ones with moral worth and we have our moral worth which is grounded in our particular capacities, the fact that we are incredibly intelligent, that we are rational, that we live in a cultural world, that we're symbolic thinkers and so forth. So we have ordered our whole system of justification around our intelligence. Now one can speculate on what's going to happen when we find that we are confronted by a non-animal system but that has superior capacities, superior forms of rationality than us because you know human beings are not in fact brilliantly rational, we're very biased, we're biased even just if we've had a sandwich that day let alone you know what our politics happen to be. Our memories are imperfect, they're more to do with tracking who we are and not necessarily to do with remembering events perfectly. So human beings are, because we're animals, we're flawed in our intelligence. Yes, we are highly intelligent and interesting abstract thinkers and cultural thinkers for sure but we're still animals, it's still an animal intelligence, it's flawed, it does a good job, it never does a perfect job because evolution doesn't work that way, it does a good job but there are always kind of you know there are payoffs. But what if we end up with this synthetic intelligence that we've generated that can outthink us, outsmart us, is more rational and is more reasonable? Will we then need to flip into a new system of justification that actually leans back into our animality, that it is our capacity for sensation, that it is our capacity for emotion, for love, maybe even our ability to be wild and irrational, that is what is beautiful and meaningful, that's possible, that that could be the kind of psychological move that we make but then where will that leave our relationship to the rest of the living world that we've justified exploiting because they aren't like that, you know, because they're animals and we're these kind of pseudo machines, so it's an extremely interesting time. Given that you wrote a book that I think in many ways was revolving around these questions, how have you experienced this period? I'm sure you've played to some of these systems, I'm sure you've been following a lot of this conversation. I mean, you say this will be an interesting time, but how has it actually changed your thinking? I'm deeply concerned about two things that I think don't get enough time. I'll have to backtrack a wee bit. So within the fact that we face threats as animals and that we are these highly social primates that build alliances in

the world that are competitive and positive, right? So we have this particular kind of social cognition, human beings, that places a huge premium on intelligence, on being able to judge what another person is thinking and judge their actions and manage to sort of maneuver the social space that we're in. What we find with human beings is that we are mind readers. We're constantly trying to judge intelligences and this is massively affected by whether we're in the group or out the group, right? So in group, out group tensions. There are different complex processes here. It's not unsuttle, but there's a wealth of evidence that you tend to attribute more mind, more intelligence, more agency and not just that, but more emotion and more secondary emotions to those who are within your group and those who are out of your group, so our competitors potentially and especially those that you might want to exploit in some kind of way, you attribute less intelligence to less secondary emotions and in the worst and most kind of ghastrly of cases, we can even completely dehumanize and objectify people if we want to exploit or be aggressive towards them. So there's this constant interplay of tensions that are based around whether we attribute mind or not to others. What is that going to do in an industrial revolution that is all about intelligence? Let's say we get AI that is actually getting smarter faster than we're realizing it. If we tend to kind of objectify the machines or the intelligence of others, how likely are we to be good at mind reading a synthetic mind that we've generated? How good are we likely to be at judging? That's something that I greatly worry about, but I also worry that with kind of deep fake and AI, the way it could be exploited, we'll exploit those in-group, out-group tensions that I've described and are likely to amplify them. That's something that I'm greatly concerned about. Well, there's also this way in which it boomerangs back on us. I mean, we're not going to be good at reading AI minds. We're not good at it now. We have built a thing to fool ourselves first and foremost, right? We could have tuned this in any way we wanted. We tuned it to seem like us to us. It's, again, a widely made observation now, but the underlying power of the GPT programs that OpenAI put out has been around for a very long time. They only exploded when they put this wrapper around their GPT programs, now called Chat GPT, that made it easy to converse with it in a very human-seeming way. The more we fooled ourselves by making it seem like us to us, even though it is anything but like us, the more we liked it. Something you talk about in the book that comes up a lot is a way where an embodied intelligence, you have a lovely section on these experiments that I always think are fascinating about people for whom the hemispheres of their brains were separated, and one part of the brain will sense a threat, and the other part of the brain will create story about that. But when they're separated and it can't communicate, you often have people reacting to a threat, but the other part of the brain is coming up with stories without enough information, and the stories are ridiculous. You end up in this funny way where a core part of what we are is the body, but we have dismissed that and increasing our metaphors of what we are and how we think and what makes us more than animal are thinner and thinner because in trying to explain computers to ourselves, we have explained ourselves as computers. And one of the things I worry about is that I think that a lot of human dignity is standing on a very narrow precipice, and we have plenty of belief systems and reasons to have a thicker sense of what makes a human being or any kind of life special, but I'm not sure we've done enough to confront how much damage

we've done to that thinking over the past couple of centuries. Absolutely, and it's very interesting to go back to the archive of John von Neumann, Alan Turing, the thinkers who were beginning the computer age. I mean, they weren't at the absolute start of it, but there's a huge amount of writings that we got from that time as it was really kicking off where you do see this computer metaphor really bed down. We were still having the fallout from the horrors that followed from the slave trade that these were people that had been reduced just to their bodies, if you like, that women were not seen as rational, so they were just seen as these sort of embodied irrational creatures who couldn't be trusted with their emotions, couldn't be trusted to vote and so forth, and that, you know, the slaves were reduced to only the labor that they could provide and none of the full faculties of their humanity. Meanwhile, we have the emergence at the same kind of time of this idea that what is superior about us or what is valuable about a select number of us within society is this computer-like intelligence, and we should be reflecting on that history as we face a world that is now placing a huge premium on only a very particular kind of cognition. AI is only a certain kind of intelligence. It's not even all of the forms. Yes, okay, some of the systems are trying to aim towards general intelligence, but they're not really anywhere near human general intelligence at the moment. That is the kind of singularity that people are talking about. We don't have anything like that. We just have a very particular stripped down, very logical form of intelligence, of computation that AI is good at, and the worry is that we're still living by that metaphor. But as you say, in fact, intelligence, human intelligence is beautiful for its complexity, not just human intelligence, but animal intelligence more broadly. The intelligence of your immune system is remarkable, the ability of your immune system to know the difference between what's not you and body. None of that's a kind of rational calculating intelligence, but it is intelligent, and it is beautiful. The ability of a mother's body to sync with their child when they're breastfeeding, that's intelligence, but it's not the kind of intelligence that we're placing a premium on now.

You quote a beautiful poem from Galway Cannell, written in 1980, that says, sometimes it is necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness. I take that as a big project of the book. As we come to a close here, how have you come to think about your own loveliness or the loveliness of those around you, and how does it change your experience of them or the world in which you and them live? It is frightening being an animal. We all are frightened by the fact that we're going to die. That's at the core of it. None of us want to get hurt. None of us want to be humiliated or to be in pain or suffer or diseased. Of course, none of us want to be hungry or to starve. All of these deeply animal threats are real, and they frighten us, but there's also so much about the real, lived, embodied beauty of the animal world and the animal condition that we can cherish. A lot of that stems from our alliances. These alliances start with one another. They generally, in fact, in mammals like us tend to start between the mother and the child, but they're also there between lovers of any kind. Any kind of lover will sink their brainwaves with one another. They'll have oxytocin spikes. When you look at your dog today, you turn around to your dog and you stroke their back. That's a really classic mimicking of the licking that a mother will do from the top of the head of a mammal through to the right way down the spine. It will make the animal feel better. It's the same if you do it to your cat. It's the same if you do it to your horse. It's the same if you do it to your child. It causes this flow of warm, positive sensations of togetherness, of trust, of alliance. We're capable of this. I think what is really beautiful about human beings is that we do have something that is very, very unique about us as

animals. That's that we can build alliances with any other species. That's really quite an extraordinary way of taking initially a useful capability that's evolved. The ability to build loving, supportive, safe relationships, to save us from the kind of difficulties of life with our family, with our friends, with our community. We've been able to generalize that. That is really an extraordinary way of being able to generalize love, being able to generalize passion, generalize kindness. As I worked on this book, I have to be honest that a lot of what I was looking at were really quite difficult subject matters, really difficult ideas about what comes from being animal, but I reached the end of it with a real sense of joy. I reached the end of it with a real appreciation for the whole body of a human being and the extraordinary qualities that we have to be able to walk through the earth and care about anything that we happen to see around us. That is a really, really exceptional thing to have come out of our animal nature. I guess that was my take home from the book.

I think it's a lovely place to end. It's always our final question. What are three books you would recommend to the audience?

Well, this was really tough because, like most writers, I both read too much and I also have the ambition to read more than I'm ever going to read. But I got two books by very different female philosophers, actually, that I've recently read and enjoyed. The first one is Gillian Rose's book, *Love's Work*. It takes the idea of love, but from within her experience of approaching death. I don't know. It's just one of those taught, poetic, philosophical books that it might not reach large audiences, but it's all the more rich for that.

The second book is by Australian philosopher, Danielle Selmaja, and it's called *Summertime, Reflections on a Vanishing Future*. It's a really beautiful, timely reflection on the way that the environmental crisis impacts the lives of other species. So in particular, she tells the story of two pigs that live with her and how they get caught up in the bushfires of 2019 and 2020. And it's incredibly moving, but it's also, it's a provocation for us to, I guess, to recognise and care about the other animals that are going to be impacted by climate change. And yeah, finally, I actually started out my career as a poet, and I still do kind of write, but rather quietly now. But I really love to read it. So I've been reading *Lighthouse* by Terence Hayes. And his poems, I guess they kind of spin together high art and formal technical innovation. But I think what I really get from them is this kind of political punch that kicks in, and it takes the wind out of me. He drops it into the poems unexpectedly and beautifully at just the right moment. And yeah, they're really satisfying and rich. So yeah, that's my three.

Melanie Challenger, thank you very much.

It's been a pleasure. Thank you.

This episode of the Ezra Klein Show was produced by Andy Galvin. Fact-checking by Michelle Harris, mixing by Jeff Gelb. The show's production team includes Emma Falgau, Jeff Gelb, Rache Karma, and Kristin Lin. Original music by Isaac Jones, audience strategy by Shannon

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