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Animals in the Spiritual World

By Revd Brian Talbot

I was talking to a woman the other day, who told me that she preferred animals to people. As a generalisation and as a dog-owner, I can see some truth in it. A couple of months ago I was reading a book by Glynis Amy Allen called *Furry Spirits: The Beautiful Souls of our Animal Friends* (2021). Glynis is a retired nurse who is a spiritualist medium and sees deceased animals all the time. I was surprised to read that amongst spiritualists there are two different views on whether animals go to the spiritual world after death or whether they reincarnate. One belief is that “a spirit communicator uses the dog as a piece of evidence, rather than the dog surviving physical death”. (I am going to return to this thought at the end of the article.) Dogs, cats and other domestic animals have been seen by a small number of Near-Death Experiencers. In fact in his latest book, retired academic psychologist, Ken Ring, has six such accounts. Swedenborg observed people who believed that both people and animals live after death in the spiritual world.

In my traditional, conservative New-Church upbringing we were taught to believe that animals do have souls, that are different to human souls, but

they're recycled back onto this planet. They do not live independently after death. (If you are a film buff, you might have seen the two films *A Dog's Purpose* (2017) and *A Dog's Life* (2019) which are about dogs being reincarnated as other dogs.)

In fact Swedenborg in strong statements in his books *Secrets of Heaven* and *Apocalypse Explained*, * argues that it is people who reason "from utter falsities", or rely solely on what they see and hear with their "deluded intelligence" or "intellectual foolishness", who believe that animals are like humans and live after death in the spiritual world. He also argues that our love of self can prove anything to itself.

Swedenborg points out that malicious and sadistic people can behave worse than wild animals and yet we have freedom and reason or rationality, which animals only appear to have. Swedenborg teaches that we have a spiritual nature, consisting of two higher levels, which animals don't have. Some people believe that animals like humans do not survive death, which is refuted by Swedenborg. Unlike animals, we can be linked to the Divine through our love and faith.

Some Christians appeal to the third chapter of Ecclesiastes. As typical of the book it's ambiguous and not conclusive. "¹⁸ I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals. ¹⁹ For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. ²⁰ All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. ²¹ Who knows whether the human spirit goes upwards and the spirit of animals goes downwards to the earth?" In the prophet Isaiah (11:6-9 and 65:25) there is mention of all sorts of predatory animals living alongside domesticated animals on the Lord's holy mountain. How literally we take this depends on our presuppositions.

Animals are seen in the spiritual world. Since animals symbolise how we feel, I can imagine my dogs following me at different times in the after-life, but I don't currently believe they have any independent existence apart from as symbols of my love for them. I could be wrong. People can occasionally be seen as animals from a distance, gentle animals such as sheep, or vicious animals such as lions and tigers. Animals can sometimes appear as compound or composite ones, such as griffins, sphynxes, manticores, Pegasus the winged-horse, Buckbeak the hippogriff (for you Harry Potter fans!) and so on. Part-human and part-goat people like satyrs and priapi can be seen as well, although to themselves they appear completely human. Some people appear from a distance like corpses or skeletons or snakes or monsters. What is amazing is that animals can change to plants and vice versa, some fruits and seeds are of pure gold, silver or copper, and there are flowers formed of precious stones and crystals. Sometimes animals can be created by black magic or sorcery or phantasies.

In the Spiritual World people can create holograms. We dog-lovers or animal-lovers can project a three-dimensional, living hologram of one or all of our beloved pets. Swedenborg portrayed birds, insects, buildings, gardens, groves, palaces and meadows. Other spirits and angels projected woolly goats, a floating city, gardens, palaces, cottages, people in different outfits, flames and so on. All of these animals, buildings and scenes appear to be real.

As an aside, or an indication of how my mind works: What about hunter-gatherer societies such as Native American or Native Australian? They wouldn't need to hunt every 'day' or do their meals appear instantly, out of nowhere?

One thing that everybody will agree on is that there are animals in the spiritual world. Whether they are symbols of how we feel or indications of what type of people are seen in the distance, they can also be holograms of what we think and believe to help communicate with other people. I will have my dogs with me either way!

* The quote from *Apocalypse Explained* is contained in paragraphs 1196 – 1215. This was translated by Professor John Chadwick as *The Life in Animals and Plants* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1981)

Glynis Amy Allen (2021) *Furry Spirits: The beautiful Souls of our Animal Friends* (Local Legend) 116-117

Kenneth Ring (2023) *A Near-Death Researcher's Notebook: What I have learned about Dying, Death, and the Afterlife* (Tucson, AZ: Wheatmark) 84-86