

Dog Moms Are Not Moms: Reader Discussion Guide

From Publicity, Autumn Sun Press. You can agree with the book, argue with it, or do both.

ABOUT THE BOOK

This is a short work (about 44,000 words) of moral philosophy and public policy. It argues that calling pet care "motherhood" blurs a real distinction. On the book's account, motherhood forms a human moral agent, while pet ownership is the guardianship of a nonhuman dependent. The book defends a "moral agency principle" and answers the "marginal cases" objection. It then lists the costs pet culture places on others, describes the industry that profits from it ("Big Pet"), and separates working dogs from companion ("lazy") dogs. It closes with policy ideas ranging from cultural argument up to an animal tax. The author owns, and likes, a dog. The book says plainly that it opposes cruelty to animals, that it does not want parenthood to be compulsory, and that adoptive mothers are real mothers.

QUESTIONS

1. **The language question.** Chapter 1 says "dog mom" can express affection but can't establish identity. Do you use family words for animals? Are they a harmless analogy or a real claim? What, if anything, is lost when the same title covers both relationships (see "The Recognition Economy")?
2. **The Crate Test and five differences.** The book compares leaving a dog crated for three hours with leaving a toddler alone. It then names five differences: the object of care, the aim, authority, the terms of exit, and the relationship's place in social succession. Which of these persuades you most, and which least? Does any of them fail?
3. **Moral agency and the hard case.** The book ties human priority to moral agency. It then has to deal with infants, people with profound disabilities, and people with dementia. Is its answer satisfying? That answer combines agency, membership in the human kind, and relationships, and Chapter 3 tests it against Peter Singer and care ethics. Is there a stronger objection the book missed?

4. **Animals still count.** The book calls animals "moral patients" whose suffering matters, and it rejects cruelty. Does its tiered framework protect animals enough? How does "The Cow and the Dog" change the way you see the gap between how we treat pets and how we treat farm animals?
5. **Costs to others.** Chapter 4 lists costs that non-owners carry: bites, shelters, disputes over emotional support animals, effects on the environment and wildlife. Which of these have you seen yourself? Where does the book's evidence feel strongest, and where weakest? Does it give the benefits of pets enough weight?
6. **Big Pet and the caregiving diversion.** Is the "pet parent" identity mostly something the market built, something culture drifted into, or a response to loneliness, housing costs, and delayed family life? The book discusses the "strongest non-substitution explanation" in Chapter 6. Does it give that view a fair hearing?
7. **Working dogs and "lazy" dogs.** Is the "social-benefit test" (trained, verifiable work that benefits people beyond companionship) a fair line? How did the deliberately provocative word "lazy" affect your reading?
8. **The policy ladder.** Chapter 8 starts with persuasion and only later reaches measures like a German-style dog tax, permits, and breeding rules. Its section on race and class warns that these could fall hardest on some groups. Which proposals, if any, would you support? Which go too far? What would you put in their place?

To close: The conclusion asks readers to choose their "leash" in three spheres: the personal, the cultural, and the political. After reading, did your view change, harden, or just get sharper?

Honest opinions of any kind are welcome, critical ones included.