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# Introduction

## Animal Minds and Animal Ethics

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*Klaus Petrus & Markus Wild*

### 1. BIG ISSUES IN ANIMAL PHILOSOPHY

What may, in very general terms, be called “the animal issue” has drawn wide academic and public attention in the past thirty years. The issues at stake are our (Western) perception of animals, our interaction and involvement with animals, the differences between ourselves and other animals, our moral obligations towards animals, and the practical consequences that a moral standing of animals would have. After the turn of the twenty-first century, animal ethics is very much on the mind of philosophers, ethicists, professionals who use animals, politicians, lawmakers, pet-owners and the general public. A related phenomenon is the explosion of research into the cognitive abilities of animals, as seen in the inspiring work being done on the science of animal cognition and behaviour.

This development has not remained without a direct influence on philosophy, especially regarding not only the philosophy of mind but also moral philosophy. Clearly, the animal issue has engaged philosophers in two related but distinct ways. On the one hand, there has been a growing interest in the question of *animal minds*. Can we attribute mental states to non-human animals? If so, what kinds of mental states? What does the mental life of a non-human animal look like? On the other hand, there also been a growing interest in the question of *animal ethics*. Do we have direct moral obligations towards animals? Do animals have rights? Should states enact strong legal policies with regards to animals? Philosophers working on questions of animal ethics usually draw on research into animal cognition, and subscribe to strong positions regarding animal minds. Philosophers interested in the question of animal minds sometimes draw ethical

conclusions from the positions they argue for. In spite of such overlaps, these two areas of research have grown up separately. One reason for this separation stems from the institutional distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy. Philosophers working on ethical questions do not, as a rule, spend a lot of time in the theoretical department, whereas philosophers working on questions of consciousness and mentality are generally not the ones writing about moral issues.

Given this situation, the principal aim of this anthology is to draw links between the philosophy of animal minds and animal ethics. The editors encouraged philosophers working on the philosophy of mind to engage in ethical considerations resulting from their theoretical framework, and they invited philosophers working on animal ethics to elaborate on their views regarding animal minds. The main idea was to build bridges between the fields of animal ethics and the philosophy of animal minds and cognition. Additionally, they encouraged philosophers from both fields to inquire into a third topic, i.e. the question as to whether non-human animals can be considered not only as mindful agents but also as moral or at least as proto-moral—agents. Therefore, besides the contributions on animal ethics and animal minds, this volume includes essays on the topic of *moral behaviour in animals*.

Another observation about current developments in animal ethics and the philosophy of animal minds is the *diversification* of approaches and viewpoints. As some articles in this anthology will show, animal ethics has developed beyond the utility-versus-rights question that dominated the debate into the 1990s, while the philosophy of animal minds has moved out of the naturalistic camp where it was firmly rooted until that decade. In recent years, however, not only have animal ethics and the philosophy of animal minds exhibited a dramatic increase in diversity or breadth of perspectives, the same is also true of research into animal cognition and behaviour.

## **2. CONTENT OF THE VOLUME**

### **2.1 Part One: Animals, Science and the Moral Community**

The first part approaches the three big issues mind, ethics and morality—from the perspective of the animal-human-relationship. The most basic

relationship for the questions of animal minds and ethics is doubtless natural science. It is the amazing amount of work and progress made in the study of animal cognition that fuels debate on the animal issue. However, scientific relations are neither the only relations between humans and animals, nor even the most deeply rooted. In the course of history, a sense of natural and moral community has been articulated at different times and places. Recent work on animal ethics is merely the culmination of such developments. Of course, the far more salient and dominant aspect in the history of humans and animals is neither a sense of a natural and moral community nor scientific inquiry but utilization, exploitation, ownership, violence and outright extinction.

The four contributions in this part address the following questions: In his article, *Bernard Rollin* examines the interplay between science and ethics. His essay “Animal Mind: Science, Philosophy, and Ethics” illustrates how new findings on animal minds can lead to a gradual change in the attitude of science towards animals. He goes on to show what the impact of this could be on the ethical treatment of animals. Cognitive ethology as an interdisciplinary project is also central to *Colin Allen* and *Marc Bekoff*. Their essay on “Animal Minds, Cognitive Ethology, and Ethics” aims to show that an understanding of cognitive phenomena in animals is essential if such capacities are to form the foundation of scientifically informed ethical reasoning about animals. *Justin E.H. Smith*’s “A Form of War: Animals, Humans, and the Shifting Boundaries of Community” shows the long and complex genealogy of the modern conception of moral status, in which humans are supposed to have absolute moral commitment to all other humans while, at the same time, having no properly moral commitments but only indirect ones to the vast majority of other animals. In “Cognition and Community” *Gary Steiner* traces the common notion in Western philosophy that a being’s moral status is in some important sense a function of its cognitive abilities. The crux of this way of viewing the comparative moral status of human beings and animals is the idea that the capacities for reason and language are the key to full moral status.

## 2.2 Part Two: Animal Autonomy and Its Moral Significance

The second part addresses the question of the relationship between animal mentality and animal ethics. Most of the contributors—with the no-

table exception of Evelyn Pluhar—attack the issue from the perspective of the philosophy of mind. They argue for the core idea that animals are not just convenient subjects for the attribution of mental states and capacities, such as thought, consciousness, agency, mindreading, or empathy but that they possess a mind of their own—an autonomous kind of mind that is not exclusively at the mercy of our interpretative practice. All contributors explicitly address the challenge of moving from animal mental autonomy to animal ethics and animal morals.

*Hans-Johann Glock*, blending arguments from his numerous articles on animal minds, primarily addresses the first question. In his essay “Mental Concepts and Animal Ethics” he argues that sensation, interests, beliefs and desires, intentional agency and reasoning are applicable to animals for good reasons. Moreover, Glock argues that these mental notions are plausibly connected to various kinds of moral status. Therefore, his contribution relates to the guiding question of animal ethics. The third essay in this section tackles the question concerning mindreading. “The Question of Belief Attribution in Great Apes: Its Moral Significance and Epistemic Problems” by *Robert Lurz*, a leading scholar in the philosophy of animal minds, aims to resolve the longstanding puzzle of how to test belief attribution in apes, and argues that a fundamentally new experimental false-belief test is required—one capable of distinguishing genuine belief-attributing subjects from their perceptual-state attributing and behaviour-reading counterparts. Drawing on her work on the theory of mind in non-human animals, *Kristin Andrews* considers the theory of mind as one capacity that is sometimes thought to be a necessary condition for moral agency. While there is no evidence that great apes have anything like the philosopher’s representational concept of belief, there is evidence that great apes have other cognitive capacities that can perform the functions sometimes seen as requirements for moral agency. It is also argued that recognizing social norms drives the development of meta-cognitive social abilities such as theory of mind. So we should not expect that theory of mind is a necessary condition for moral agency, or so she argues in “Ape Autonomy? Studies in Natural Moral Psychology”. In her contribution, “The Non-human Roots of Human Morality,” moral philosopher *Evelyn Pluhar* reviews recent empirical findings from cognitive ethology and developmental psychology, and claims that the sentimental roots of a full-blown human morality are present in non-human animals. These roots comprise forms of altruism that transcend kinship and reciprocity as

well as forms of empathy that transcend emotional contagion. It is further claimed that non-human animals have a sense of self-awareness and an understanding of agency crucial for pre-moral concern for others. Morality in the demanding sense, however, is the prerequisite of human beings taking a universal point of view.

### 2.3 Part Three: The Diversity of Animal Ethics

In recent years, the standard utilitarian and deontological approaches to animal ethics have been broadened and amended by alternative moral points of view—the feminist care tradition, virtue ethics, or the capability approach spring to mind. There is, however, more to it, as two pressing questions guide the current debate. Firstly, the very idea of tying moral obligations to mental capacities is criticized by many champions of animal ethics. Why should we look for fancy mental capacities instead of simple sentience? Of course, moral status is still tied to individual animal mentality but an animal does not need to be much of a thinker in order to have a full moral standing. Secondly, the moral individualism of the more traditional forms of animal ethics is challenged. The distinguishing feature of approaches in ethics that count as moral individualism is the claim that a creature calls for specific forms of treatment only insofar as it has individual capacities such as the capacity for suffering or the capacity to direct its own life. However, our moral intuitions do not imply that a human being's moral standing is weakened in the case of "radically cognitively impaired human beings." So, what are the pros and cons of the mental capacity approach, on the one hand, and of the individualistic approach to animal ethics on the other?

In "Animal Rights: A Non-Consequentialist Approach" *Uriah Kriegel* holds an alternative ethical framework—combining Kantian and virtue-ethical elements—against the mainstream consequentialism in discussions of animal rights. The virtuous agent is the one who has the stable disposition to treat all conscious animals as ends instead of mere means. Kriegel is a prominent voice in the contemporary philosophy of consciousness. From this theoretical background, he argues for a principled account of animal consciousness, thereby building a bridge between animal minds (addressing the second question of animal consciousness) and animal ethics. *Gary L. Francione*, is very critical of the idea of adjusting moral standing to mental capacity. In his view, animals do not need any specific

cognitive capacities in order to be granted moral status. Instead, he claims that sentience alone is necessary and sufficient for full membership in the moral community. Accordingly, sentient beings should be treated as persons. In contrast, *Lisa Bortolotti*, *Constantine Sandis* and *Alessandro Blasimme* go into the developments in cognitive ethology and comparative psychology. However, these authors argue that the psychological approach, favoured by Peter Singer, Tom Regan and others, is not exclusive in shaping human attitudes towards non-humans, but that an ethics of care (“vulnerability approach”) does so, too. In her article, *Elisa Aaltola* expands on the concept of personhood. Her criticism focuses on the idea that personhood is restricted to human beings because of their mental capacities. In contrast, Aaltola favours an interactive and non-individualistic approach to personhood, according to which it is a dynamic concept that exists outside language, “in the realm of immediacy.” Questions of the practical implications of our insights into animal minds are discussed by *Alice Crary* using the example of eating and experimenting on animals. She describes a tenable version of the ethical view of animals that can inform reflection on these issues by addressing some of the very concrete ways in which they arise in the US today.

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