

Abstracts keynote lectures Minding Animals Conference 2012

Keynote session 1: The human – animal relationship

Paul Schnabel, The socialisation of animals

Public attitudes to animals are changing rapidly in the Netherlands. The founding of a 'Party for the Animals' which campaigns successfully in Parliament for more attention for animal welfare, adds a political dimension to that change. The number of vegetarians in Dutch society is increasing and more and more value is being attached to livestock farming methods, which demonstrably show more concern for animal welfare, including for animals intended for slaughter. That concern has always been present with regard to domestic pets, but even here, the social status of these animals has been raised to that of a fully-fledged family member.

Describing these changes is not difficult, but explaining them is. Since the time of Charles Darwin, human beings have become increasingly aware that they are part of the animal kingdom. Moreover, more and more animals are found to possess qualities that have always been regarded as typically human. Freud imbued human beings with a different, more biologically determined perception of them selves. Human beings allow animals into their world and change their own world to a world of living beings, to which the same ethical rules apply to a certain extent.

In practice, the distance between human beings and animals other than domestic pets has widened. Using animals for human consumption is in many respects still inevitable, but we are less willing than ever to be confronted with the unpleasant consequences of this. The heated debate surrounding ritual slaughter shows that religious practices are also not immune to changing views.

Harriet Ritvo, The animal past in the animal present

In many ways, the current state of the relationship between humans and other animals seems distinctively modern. At the most general level, it reflects twenty-first century globalization, environmental pollution, and increasing human population numbers. But neither humans nor animals exist exclusively on this level. The examination of specific cases reveals enormous variation, some of which results from variations in human cultures, economies, and societies, and some from the differences among animal kinds. (Indeed, the attempt to generalize at the level of "the animal" almost inevitably brings the term itself into question.) Fine-grained analysis additionally demonstrates the extent to which contemporary relationships are conditioned by a history that stretches back for millennia. For example, the BSE crisis of the 1980s and 1990s concerned a disease that was itself apparently new, that was spread through feed concocted according to novel industrial formulas, and that was disseminated to the meat-eating public through highly centralized transportation networks. To understand and control it required the application of cutting-edge science. Yet the trajectory of the crisis, as well as the public and political responses to it, revealed the persistent influence of factors that have traditionally shaped similar episodes, including fear, greed, and the inclination to characterize other groups, whether human or animal, as contaminated. Of course the rearing of livestock for food is among the oldest ways in which humans have interacted with other animals. But such flourishing modern practices as pet keeping and the protection of endangered species have similarly complicated relationships to the long past.

Keynote session 2: Animals and sustainability

Raj Panjwani, Wildlife protection: a view from India

The developing economy of India is imposing immense pressure on its fragmented wildlife habitat. Infrastructure development, agriculture and grazing have the greatest impact on wildlife habitat. The Indo-Gangetic plain, which runs parallel to the south of the Himalayas, was once a forest area teeming with wildlife. This huge plain has since been decimated for the establishment of agricultural fields, villages and towns. The Lion and the Tiger may be symbols of power or revered as deities. The fact is that lions have completely vanished, except for a small isolated population in the state of Gujarat. The tiger is now a critically endangered species, with a few thousand struggling to survive within its limited pockets of habitat. Similar has been the fate of the Cheetah, Rhino and the Elephant.

Parliament endeavoured to contain this relentless onslaught by enacting legislations restricting the establishment of certain activities in these areas. However, the lack of political willpower to implement these laws has placed the burden on the Courts in India to fulfil the objectives of such laws. The Judiciary with its inherent limitations was never intended to deal with this conflict, nor is it nor is appropriately equipped. Nevertheless, the Indian judiciary has taken this mantle upon itself, which in turn has led to some criticism, occasionally justified, by the conservationists. While the Judiciary is thus endeavouring to protect wildlife habitat, parliament, for obvious political compulsions, passes acts that are conflicting with each other and that work against those efforts to protect wildlife.

The future in this conflict is tilted heavily against wildlife, unless India keeps inviolate the miniscule 0.15 million sq. km of wildlife habitat, puts in place scientific protected area management practices and vigorously pursues and punishes, poachers and encroachers.

Dale Jamieson, The messes animals make

In a 1947 paper B.A.G. Fuller pointed out that “animals make a mess in metaphysics.” Philosophical systems are typically constructed without regard to animals, and so “they are such metaphysical misfits (...) that the only way of keeping the system in order and man master of it is to shoo them out of the house altogether and stop one’s ears against their scratching at the door.” (p. 83). So we get the incredible and unlivable views of Descartes and Malebranche, and from most of the philosophical tradition, an eerie silence.

Animals make messes not only in metaphysics but also in other areas of philosophy including philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, ethics, and legal philosophy. When animals cannot be ignored they are tortured in order to fit into pre-existing categories. Rather than being acknowledged for what they are, they are typically discussed in terms of their similarities and differences to humans. Some argue that humans and animals are similar, pointing out that chimps share 97% of their genetic material with humans, asserting that apes can learn language or have a theory of mind, or that rats have empathy. Others claim that animals and humans are dissimilar. They point out that no animals but homo sapiens have ever created anything like New York City with all of its cultural wonders. And as bad as the airlines have become, it would be impossible to survive even a single flight managed and populated by chimpanzees.

The problem, as Nelson Goodman pointed out long ago, is that similarity is cheap, and so these disputes are irresolvable on empirical grounds alone. There are an infinite number of similarities and differences between any two things. The important question is not how many similarities there are between two things, but in what respects two things are similar and how much should we care about these respects. The answer to these questions adverts to our interests and purposes, and so is entwined with our values, presuppositions, and the conceptual framework within which the question is being asked.

For too long investigators have been focused on Human Exceptionalism - some to assert it, and others to deny it. What should be rejected is not Human Exceptionalism, but the very idea of Exceptionalism itself. Natural systems express life in a vast array of forms. There is no single (or single class) of exemplars. When things are seen from this perspective the messes disappear. All living things are intrinsic to the natural order in the same way and to the same extent. Taking up this view might require us to confront some truths that are even more inconvenient than that we should give up eating hamburgers and donate the money to PETA. It might force us to rethink who we are.

Keynote session 3: Animal ethics

Julia Driver, Hume and our duties to animals

David Hume was one of the foremost philosophers of the Enlightenment, deeply interested in developing an understanding of human psychology as part of understanding human nature. As part of this project, Hume investigated similarities and differences between human beings and other animals. He believed that animal reason resembled human reason in many important ways - for example, animals seemed able to reason from cause to effect on the basis of observation, just as humans do. Further, animals appear to resemble human beings in emotional respects as well. Hume observes that they possess sympathy with each other, just as human beings do. Of course, there are differences as well, among those differences one which is important to moral agency - the capacity to approve or disapprove of the mental states of others, as well as one's own mental states.

Animals do not qualify as full-fledged moral agents on his view since they seem to lack this capacity; however, this does not mean that animals are not moral patients. Moral agents are able to act morally; moral patients can be acted on morally. Thus, we may well have duties towards animals. Hume further makes a distinction between appraisability and accountability: moral accountability goes with moral agency, but appraisability may not, thus animals, on his view, can possess a kind of virtue, they can possess good qualities 'of the mind', even if they cannot reflect on, and endorse or fail to endorse, those very qualities.

However, Hume's very narrow view of the duties of justice has led some people to regard his views as dismissive of animals. I believe his views have been misunderstood, and will attempt to argue that he does believe that we have duties of beneficence or humanity towards animals. Hume believed that duties of justice covered only property norms, and since animals did not own property there were no duties of justice with respect to our treatment of animals. Whatever one may think about this claim, however, it has not implications regarding duties of humanity. Animals are the appropriate subjects of compassionate treatment, for example. Further, Hume's own discussion of artificial virtues, such as justice, leaves open the possibility that further interaction between humans and animals may lead to additional duties that human beings bear with respect to animals. Artificial virtues are, roughly, those virtues that are expressed often via conventions. Justice is a paradigm example.

The rules of property acquisition and transfer are largely conventional; though there is no doubt that having some convention in place is very useful for society. It is just that these conventions - while useful overall - may actually be displeasing in particular cases, such as when a destitute person must pay back a loan to a very wealthy person who does not actually need the money. Hume did not consider the issue of convention in our interactions with animals, but it may be that his overall view would be amenable to accommodating this possibility. This paper explores both Hume's own views, and how the Humean perspective can be enlarged to include an expanded understanding of animal rights.

Christine M. Korsgaard, A Kantian case for animal rights

Kant's moral philosophy is usually considered inimical both to the moral claims and to the legal rights of non-human animals. Kant, a German Enlightenment philosopher whose ideas greatly influenced Western philosophy, is one of the few philosophers to say openly that animals are "mere means" who can be used for human purposes as opposed to human beings who are "ends in themselves" and should not be so used. He also believed that the point of legal rights is not to defend important interests but to uphold a kind of political liberty or personal autonomy that non-human animals could not possibly have.

Nevertheless, I argue that Kant's views about the human place in the world require us to acknowledge our fellowship with the other animals in ways that have important moral and political implications. Kant denied that we have access to metaphysical truths about the world as it is in itself, and therefore to metaphysical insight into values. The claim that we are ends in ourselves is not a metaphysical claim about value, but a presupposition of rational choice, for in order to rationally pursue the things that matter to us, we must suppose that those things are good. And to suppose that the things that are good for us are good absolutely, and so worthy of pursuit, is to suppose that we are ends in ourselves. Similarly, our claim to have rights over some of the resources of the earth is grounded in a presupposition of rational action, a presupposition that we are doing no wrong to others when we take what we need in order to survive and pursue our projects, and so that we have a claim that they not interfere.

The fact that only rational beings need to make these presuppositions does not show that they apply only to rational beings, and in fact they are most naturally understood as extending to the other animals: the other animals are ends in themselves because what is good for them is good absolutely and have rights, because they have a claim on what they need to survive and live their lives.

Keynote session 4: Animals and public policy

Robert Garner, Animal rights in a non-ideal world

This talk focuses on the contribution political theorists can make to the debate about animals. Such a task seems appropriate since, despite the fact that the ethical case for an enhanced moral status for animals is now well established, there remains a huge discrepancy between what many animal ethicists prescribe and the way animals are treated in practice. It is argued that part of the reason for this is that animal ethicists have paid insufficient attention to justice, a concept central in political theory, and in particular to the distinction between ideal and nonideal theories of justice.

Three major questions can be asked about the relationship between animals and justice. Can animals be worthy recipients of justice? What do animals gain from justice? And what are animals due as a matter of justice? This talk focuses on the third question. It is argued that those interested in the protection of animals need to pay attention to the distinction, current in political theory, between ideal and nonideal theories of justice. Ideal theories focus on the validity of a theory of justice or morality in relation to how far it is considered to approximate to the truth, in as far as normative arguments can arrive at such a determinate answer. However, a theory of justice must also be judged in relation to its feasibility, how far it is practically possible to achieve at any point, and a valid theory of justice must also consider how we get from where we are now to where we want to be. The theory of animal rights that is often described as abolitionist is problematic from the standpoint of both ideal and nonideal theory. From the perspective of the latter, abolitionism is clearly so far from current reality that nonideal theory will have to be invoked to consider how we get from where we are to what we want to be. However, it is also suggested that abolitionism is also an inadequate ideal theory since it is mistaken on the grounds of ethical principle, and because it demands too much of

humans and is therefore faced with unalterable constraints. Abolitionism, therefore, ought to be regarded as closer to what Rawls regarded as a utopian, rather than an ideal, theory. This does not mean we should necessarily reject a rights-based ethic for animals as our ideal theory, only that this rights-based ethic must be shorn of the species egalitarianism central to abolitionism.

Any ethic based on according rights to animals, even if not based on species egalitarianism, must engage with non-ideal theory. Using the model provided by Rawls, it is argued that - taking into account factors such as the need to provide a reasonable balance, effectiveness, moral permissibility and political achievability - an ethic based on prohibiting the infliction of suffering on animals as a matter of right is a more appropriate nonideal theory than one based on prohibiting unnecessary suffering.

Will Kymlicka and Sue Donaldson, Do we need a political theory of animal rights?

Political theorists have been largely AWOL in the animal rights debate. This is unfortunate for both strategic and intellectual reasons. Strategically, political theory is the primary vehicle by which ethical concern for animals can be translated into the language of government and public policy. Our legal and constitutional order is grounded in principles of democracy, citizenship, and popular sovereignty, and animals are unlikely to be taken seriously until we can situate them within this political order. Intellectually, the tools of political theory help us to better identify our obligations to animals: political theory can help us identify forms of injustice that are not visible within existing animal rights theory.

To date, inter-disciplinary work on animal rights has primarily been advanced by moral philosophers/bioethicists and scientists of animal behaviour, cognition, etc. This partnership between ethicists and scientists has enriched our understanding of animals and compelled us to consider the moral implications for our treatment of them in light of their many capacities. However, this partnership may have distorted our perspectives on how to obtain justice for animals. Amongst both scientists and ethicists, animals appear as objects to be studied or moral patients to be protected, not as agents or subjects who have their own views about how to lead their lives, including how to relate to humans. This has led to several blind spots. First, duties towards animals are typically framed as a paternalistic duty to reduce their suffering, or to cease our intervention in their lives. Second, it has encouraged theories that assign normative rankings to animals on the basis of their observable cognitive capacities. Third, it has led to theories which emphasize the observable, generic, and intrinsic capacities of animals over their identities as unique individuals embedded in complex relationships with other individuals of their own and other species.

We propose a different starting point. As agents, animals act upon their subjective experience of the world, and we can gain insight into this subjective experience - this inner life - by entering into intersubjective relationships with them. This shifts the focus from questions such as: What are animals like? What capacities do they have? How should we treat them? to questions like: What kinds of relationships do humans have with animals? What kinds of communities do they form? What kinds of relationships do animals desire?

And this is where political theory comes in. It provides conceptual tools for thinking about the various ways that agents - human and animal - can be related to political communities, and hence their current and potential membership status. Different groups of animals are - and should - stand in very different relationships to political communities. Some animals really are members of our society, others are more akin to passing visitors, and yet others should be seen as living autonomously outside of our control. These differences matter morally, generating distinctive sets of obligations, in ways that cannot be captured by an exclusive focus on animals' capacities for pain or their possession of cognitive skills. These issues of membership status require the conceptual tools of the social sciences and of political theory, as a supplement to the long-standing concepts of both ethology and moral philosophy.

Keynote session 6: Animal capacities

Colin Allen: If a lion could speak...

Wittgenstein's pessimism about our capacity to understand animals who live other forms of life than humans is not generally shared. Nevertheless, it is a truism among ethologists that one must not forget that animals perceive and represent the world differently from humans. Sometimes this caution is phrased in terms of Jakob von Uexküll's concept of Umwelt, the unique perceptual world defined by the sensory equipment of a particular species. Yet it seems possible (perhaps even unavoidable) to adopt a common set of objects and categories when comparing different species of mind. For some purposes it seems sufficient to anchor comparative cognition in common-sense categories; bats echolocate insects (or a subset of them) after all. But for other purposes it seems necessary to find out more about how organisms organize their perceptions into biologically significant and perhaps cognitively meaningful states. Complex animals have high bandwidth sensory channels that feed into large nerve networks with very complex dynamics. Even for relatively simple animals belonging to species believed to have a small, fixed number of neurons, the odds are very much against any two animals of the same species, let alone different species, having exactly the same couplings to the environment, the same dimensionality in their nervous systems, or the same dynamics. Given such diversity, how should we think about shared representation, shared meaning, and cognitive similarity between individuals and species?

Opening lecture for Protecting the Animals Seminar Series

Jill Robinson: Truth and fiction of bear farming in Asia

Thousands of endangered Asiatic black bears, together with brown bears, are imprisoned in cages no bigger than their bodies on bile farms across Asia - sometimes for as long as 30 years. Many have been illegally caught from the wild. Milked for their bile, they suffer from a variety of cruel and insanitary extraction methods, despite the availability of herbal and synthetic alternatives. To date, Animals Asia has rescued hundreds of bears in China and Vietnam. They arrive in deplorable physical and psychological condition, having endured years of pain and malnutrition, as well as spatial and behavioural deprivation. Surgery is required to remove their diseased gall bladders and address a catalogue of abuse and health concerns. Today, irrefutable evidence surrounding the contaminated bile, together with conservation concerns and the sickening exposure of the physical and psychological health of the bear farming victims, is seeing increasing waves of public sympathy in support of closing the industry down. Jill summarises nearly two decades of a strategy that covers welfare, politics, education, public health, conservation, Traditional Medicine, and basic ethics, and exposes a practice so morally bankrupt and corrupt that only one conclusion can, and is, finally being reached.