‘Other Animal Ethics’ and the Demand for Difference

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally animal ethics has criticised the anthropocentric worldview according to which humans differ categorically from the rest of the nature in some morally relevant way. It has claimed that even though there are differences, there are also crucial similarities between humans and animals that make it impossible to draw a categorical distinction between humans who are morally valuable and animals which are not. This argument, according to which animals and humans share common characteristics that lead to moral value, is at the heart of animal ethics. Lately the emphasis on similarity has been under attack. It has been claimed that the search for similarity is itself part of anthropocentric morality, since only those like us are valuable. It also has been claimed that true respect for animals comes from recognising their difference and ‘otherness’, not from seeing similarities. This paper analyses the new ‘other animal ethics’ by critically examining its basis and consequences. The conclusion is that despite the fact that other animal ethics is right in demanding respect also for difference, it remains both vague and contradictory in its theoretical basis, and leads to undesirable consequences from the perspective of animal welfare.

KEY WORDS

Animal ethics, anthropocentrism, anthropomorphism, Heidegger, post-structuralism

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INTRODUCTION

When animal ethics was first properly launched in the writings of, for instance, Peter Singer and Tom Regan, the main arguments concerned the similarities between humans and animals. Like us, animals are sentient beings or 'subjects of a life', and therefore they deserve respectful treatment. Behind these arguments was the belief that dissimilarities in character lead to dissimilarities in moral treatment. If animals are perceived as mechanisms instead of human-like organisms, they will be pushed outside the moral sphere; if animals are perceived as being similar to humans in certain respects, they will become a permanent part of morality. This belief seems to be an elementary part of western ethics, and touches not only animals, but also other humans. Recognition of basic similarities has often been the key notion in the fight against discrimination.

The emphasis on similarities has, however, gradually started to fade. There is more and more talk of respect for *difference* instead of demands for *similarity*. For instance, many of the so-called 'marginal groups' have started to embrace their differences from the 'normal' and demand moral equality, not despite these differences, but because of them. Difference has become something to embrace and to be proud of, not something to hide in order to be the same as everyone else. This has become evident also in animal ethics, where an increasing number argue for respect for the differences of animals as 'others'. For example, Val Plumwood (1998: 302) states that an ethics that points to similarity is 'not the result of a critique of egoism; rather it is an enlargement and an extension of egoism', in that it makes the value of others dependent on their being like us. 'Others are recognised morally only to the extent that they are incorporated into the self, and their difference denied.' The change is quite radical and interesting: where as those who argue for similarities claimed that it is by breaking the boundaries between animals and humans that we can break the anthropocentric and speciesist worldview, the new claim is that it is by emphasising the boundaries that all this can be achieved. The first group states that bringing animals under the headline 'us' *decentres* humans, the second states that doing so is merely to *recentre* human importance.

In this paper I wish to explore what the arguments emphasising difference actually are. As they come mainly from two traditions, Heideggerian and post-structuralist, the paper concentrates on these. It should be noted that the paper does not analyse either of these traditions as such, except as they have been used in animal ethics. Therefore, whatever follows is not to be taken as criticism of these traditions in general, but as analyses of the specific way of using them in animal ethics. It should also be noted that because of this the descriptions of the traditions are far from comprehensive. In the course of the article I shall refer to the emphasis on difference as 'other animal ethics' as distinct from more traditional 'animal ethics'.

THE HEIDEGGERIAN VERSION

Frank Schalow (2000, 260) criticises the animal rights movement for being part of an exclusivist morality, according to which there is a moral community of 'us' that depends on similarity. He claims that 'contrary to those who propose an 'egalitarianism' between animals and humanity, it is really the differences separating them which dictate why we should protect animals from acts of cruelty'. We ought to stop making moral categories on the basis of similarity, and start respecting animals in their difference. Schalow goes on to argue that respect is based on understanding that we share a common habitat with other creatures: we are all different beings who are tied together by the common world. A similar tone can be found in number of papers. The demand for similarity is understood as an anthropocentric attitude, and talk of animal rights as part of a misleading modern ethics that presupposes distinctions and exclusions between those who are like us and those who are not. To replace this human-centredness, an ethics that emphasises both some kind of *ontological similarity* and *characteristic difference* is offered. To put it simply: we are different kinds of creatures all in the same boat.

As the idea of ontological similarity suggests, much of the 'other animal ethics' is Heideggerian. Schalow talks of the process of 'unconcealment' through which the diversity of nature manifests itself, and of the human 'dwelling' as a way of 'cultivating our kinship with animals'. The common aspect that humans and animals share is unconcealment, the process of 'being' manifesting itself. Still, all of us have our own specific way of manifesting being, and in this respect we all are different. The specific way of humans comes from being able to understand 'being' as such: we have an 'openness to the world'. This characteristic makes it possible for us to address animals in their difference and to understand that despite their different appearance we are all parts of 'being' itself. Through this understanding we come to dwell in our surroundings, 'care' for it and guard it instead of owning and commanding it. The most crucial part is 'letting be', which can also be interpreted as respect. We ought to let other creatures manifest themselves as their specific kinds of beings instead of subordinating them to our wishes.

A similar, but more detailed description comes from William McNeill (1999). He starts by analysing Heidegger's concept of an organism: all organisms manifest their potential, but human beings have a 'selfhood'. It is this selfhood that makes humans different from inanimate things and animals: even though ontologically we are the same (creatures manifesting being), characteristically only humans are 'world-forming' in their capability to not only live, but to be 'open' to other beings. Stones are 'worldless' and animals 'poor in the world'. Unlike stones, animals have 'access' to the world, but they cannot understand beings *as beings* like humans can; animals cannot 'dwell' in the

world or be open to it. The differences are not, however, hierarchical, for part of dwelling is the attitude of 'letting be', of 'going along with' other animals. From this letting be comes 'attending to', or respect for each animal's special way of being.

Simon P. James (2000) goes a step further and connects the Heideggerian idea of respect in the form of 'letting be' to Buddhist thinking. He claims that the ideas of 'form' and 'emptiness' in Buddhism come close to Heideggerian philosophy, and sees as the crucial point the claim that instead of us creating 'our' being, being exists through us. 'Things' are not autonomous subjects that build themselves; instead they gather the world and reveal being. Gathering makes the thing and the world mutually dependent in the manner that form and emptiness are, for neither can exist without the other. This in part leads to the need of 'letting things be', for when we recognise the dependency that exists between others and ourselves, we learn to respect others as they are. James then talks of understanding dependency as resulting in 'boundless compassion for all beings' and sees Heidegger's notion of 'letting be' as an equivalent of such a feeling.

The three writers (for a more critical version see also Zimmerman 1993) have differences in their interpretations of Heidegger, but the main chain of premises seems to be this: 1) animals and humans are all creatures through which being occurs, 2) each creature manifests being in a different manner, 3) the special characteristic of humans is their openness to the world (understanding beings as beings), and 4) this characteristic leads (or should lead) humans to let beings manifest themselves and their difference in peace. What is crucial here is the disappearance of the concepts 'subject' and 'object', the lack of hierarchy, and the freedom to manifest difference. When applied to animal ethics, the message is clear: there is no hierarchical value-order among animals and humans, and animals do not have to resemble humans to count morally. Instead we are to respect animals in their difference.

A similar line of argument has also come from those turning to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. For instance, Elizabeth Behnke (1999) and Ralph R. Acampora (1999) use Merleau-Ponty's idea of flesh as a starting point for a new kind of ethical stance toward animals. Being a body means 'situated reflexivity' or having 'a position' in the world, not standing outside the world as a distinct entity. Humans and animals share this situated reflexivity: we are all similar as bodies positioned in the world, even if our bodies are different. Because of this 'co-existence in the flesh' we understand and feel compassion for animals.

It seems, however, that the step from 'letting be' to 'moral respect' and to 'moral value' is not clear. We can let things be without feeling moral respect toward them or seeing them as morally valuable. The step seems especially awkward when we recognise that Heidegger himself did not want to talk of 'morals' in the traditional sense (even if his philosophy does carry heavy moral implications). As James (2000) acknowledges, to speak of 'values' was in Heidegger's mind actually to fail to let be, for it includes anthropocentric

presuppositions of the world. In the light of this it comes as no surprise that the term 'value' is quite rarely used. In the place of it we see terms such as 'cherish', 'wonder' and 'awe'. Traditional understanding of morality and traditional moral concepts are replaced with a new approach to morality and new moral terminology. This is understood to answer the question concerning the link between letting be and moral value, for such a link is not thought to be necessary with the new terms.

For instance, Jane Howarth (2000) wishes to separate the notion of Heideggerian 'value' (if such a term can be used at all) from the usual distinction between intrinsic and instrumental values, and calls this new value 'cherishing'. Cherishing springs from interaction between the valuer and the valued, referring to something irreplaceable and something with a history (such as the first teddy bear of a child). Howarth ties cherishing to Heidegger's term 'care' and claims the two to be very similar. She goes on to argue that cherishing is a vital part of environmental ethics because of three characteristics – interaction, irreplaceability and history. R. W. Hepburn (2000), on the other hand, talks of 'wonder' as a substitute for 'value'. He makes a distinction between a passing emotional response and a permanent wonderment, claiming that it is through the latter that we find respect for other beings. Part of wonder is that it resists mastering and lets 'the other' remain other. This wonder is connected to moral attitudes: to be 'other-acknowledging' is to act on another's behalf, to be 'compassionate'. Also James G. Hart (1999) emphasises compassion and talks of 'empathic presentation' of others, and of 'awe' and 'wonder'. The idea behind these claims is that we no longer need to *value* others in the traditional way, but instead to take some kind of a respectful *attitude* (be it cherishing, wonder or awe) toward them – 'a value' and 'an attitude' are separated, and the latter replaces the former.

We now have a fifth premise to be added to the argument: 5) 'letting be' leads to a moral-like (but not 'moral' in the traditional sense) acknowledgement of animals as others in the form of wonder. We have travelled from stating that humans and animals share a similar ontological position as creatures through which being occurs to claiming that we should respect and marvel animals in their difference. We see how others are both interconnected with us, and different with respect to us. This makes us feel for them – or create a moral-like attitude toward them – in a non-hierarchical manner: we understand that they are close to us, but at the same time feel wonder at their difference.

THE POST-STRUCTURALIST VERSION

The kind of argument described above is a common part of post-structuralism. Like their ancestors Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, post-structuralists tend to criticise the old subject-object model and emphasise 'situatedness' in the world. This situatedness and interconnectedness to other beings are thought to lead to

some kind of 'responsibility'. The motive seems to be to go even further than Heidegger and get rid of the human point-of-view altogether, so that there are only different ways of being, not 'poorer' and more advanced (Derrida 1991).

In the structuralist tradition Claude Lévi-Strauss has criticised heavily the subject-centred idea of nature, which divides humans and nature into an oppositional pair and which understands ecology as a hierarchical categorisation of species. As a replacement for this belief Lévi-Strauss wants to decentre man by acknowledging that mind is not separate from the world, and he advocates an idea of ecology as an active and diverse interaction between species (Lévi-Strauss 1973, 1985; see also Conley 1997: 42–55). In his footsteps Félix Guattari talks of 'eco-subjectivity' and constant 'becoming' as a way to fight the modern conception of the subject as distinct from nature. Instead of talking of nature as a system of distinct and often oppositional entities that can be categorised into separate classes, we are to understand nature as an open whole full of connections between different (not 'oppositional') beings which are all a part of a constant process of becoming (Conley 1997: 92–103). In again similar, but more radical, tone Hélène Cixious claims that we ought to replace oppositions between nature and culture with 'differences', and go back to communicating with nature through 'bodily immediacy' (Cixious 1986; Conley 1997: 123–9).

The list is far from complete. It comes as no surprise that post-structuralism is something that the philosophers arguing for animals' 'otherness' turn to. For example, Lynda Birke and Luciana Parisi (1999) use the texts of Guattari and Deleuze, and emphasise the way being is not a stable thing but a never-ending process of 'becoming'. Part of this becoming is a shift of focus from static individuals to relationships and to the understanding of difference both in kind and in degree. This again is supposed to lead to 'experiencing connection' with animals: we are all parts of the same process of becoming, but different in the type and the stage of that process.[1] Steve Baker (2000, 102–113) uses the same text to analyse the nature of 'the postmodern animal', and emphasises the way 'becoming an animal' – movement between animal and human identities, or their complete disappearance – helps us think differently about the roles of animals and humans. These authors emphasise 'becoming' as something that breaks boundaries and makes it possible to connect with animals. Animals remain different in their characteristics, but are ultimately the same as us on the ontological level. David Wood (1999), on the other hand, claims that it is in Derrida's philosophy that we find a better basis for understanding our relationship with animals. The crucial point is understanding that there is no animal 'as such', but an 'extraordinary variety' of animals. From this understanding of difference we can proceed to feel responsibility toward animals, not in the ordinary moral sense, but as being 'open to' and 'responsive' to their difference. Again the idea is very similar: there is no opposition between humans and all other animals, but only an innumerable amount of different beings. Through

breaking the opposition we can become open to the animals' difference and understand them in a new 'responsive' way.

Even though the philosophers mentioned here would deserve fuller accounts that would show their arguments in detail and point to their differences, again we seem to be able to draw up a simplified model of the ideas: 1) we are all beings that are part of the process of 'becoming', 2) we are different in the specific ways and stages of becoming, and 3) we should be 'responsive' to the difference of other beings.

Again, as Wood points out, we are not to speak of morality in the traditional sense (which Derrida sees as 'calculation'), but of some kind of 'openness' toward difference, similar to 'awe' or 'wonder'.

THEORETICAL PROBLEMS

Other animal ethics has changed the emphasis from resemblance to difference. This seems like a welcome idea, for it steps away from the anthropocentric view which claims that moral value is possessed only by 'us' and those like us – it gives room for 'cherishing' the differences amongst animals.

Unfortunately, there are difficult problems in other animal ethics when we look at the moral implications more broadly. First of all, we encounter the problem of replacing traditional moral terms (such as 'value') with attitudes (such as 'awe'). As mentioned earlier, the replacement serves the need to abandon 'traditional' ethics and the need to find an alternative approach. Other animal ethics criticises traditional ethics for being exclusive, demanding similarity, believing in 'subjects' and 'objects', and generally for making morality a kind of a distanced, objective and rational procedure through which to *analyse* what is valuable instead of *understanding* it. It links traditional ethics to Cartesian dualism, where the subject distances herself from the world of objects, and performs rational analyses on them like a scientist on a molecule, looking for an ultimate theory that would safely explain everything. All is dependent on the subject's point of view, and only those that serve her self-interest or are like her become labelled 'valuable' – understanding others as they are in themselves is forgotten. Other animal ethics (and postmodern ethics in general) wants to abandon the dualism and stop looking for rational, absolute theories of morality. John Caputo (1993) states this very clearly: in his opinion post-structuralism deconstructs the idea of rational ethics that gives us clear, safe answers; to be a poststructuralist is to be 'against ethics'. As an alternative to safety, ultimate theories and rationally 'concluding' that we ought to behave in a certain way, he offers a 'feeling of being bound' that we find ourselves entangled with. This feeling (which grows into an 'obligation') is not something that we analyse and rationalise, but something we come to see existing in us. Morality is about

understanding, not analysing – it is something we find in ourselves, not a product of our rational abilities. In the light of this, 'wonder' too (or the other moral-like attitudes) is something that takes a hold of us instead of being something at which we rationally arrive. Wonder is then a moral attitude in a new sense that avoids old concepts of 'subject' and 'reason', and which does not rest on dualistic distinctions. This again sounds convincing, for surely we have to understand morality as something more than a purely logical calculus. The problem, however, is what exactly these attitudes are. We can talk of coming to understand feelings of being bound in ourselves, but it remains unclear, first of all, what these feelings are based on, and secondly, what they tell us to do.

The main question is, where do these feelings or attitudes come from? It seems to be a commonly known fact that different individuals often have different intuitions, and the same goes for 'feeling bound': surely we come to understand attitudes in ourselves that are different from those of others. It cannot, then, be mere random feelings that are of significance here, and we need some guidance as to what kind of attitudes are to be fostered. Other animal ethics would perhaps not endorse our following whatever feelings or attitudes we happen to have, but only those that are influenced by the correct view on the world. Of course this can be a contradiction, for if we have a theory or an ontology that guides our attitudes, they are no longer quite so non-analytical and against ethics as other animal ethics would like them to be. Still, it is worth a while to take a look at what the feelings or attitudes could be based on.

As noted, the ontology that other animal ethics uses as a basis for moral-like attitudes emphasises interconnectedness: we come to cherish other beings because they are close to us on the ontological level. This would mean that we feel bound when we recognise the interconnectedness. Unfortunately, interconnectedness is not enough to explain a moral-like attitude. We can be interconnected with many things (the bacteria which live in my body or the tree which produces the oxygen I breathe) but this in itself does not necessarily lead to anything more than instrumental values. A harsh simplification will do here: bank robbers keep hostage five people of different ages and racial groups. They all realise that they are in the same situation; they understand that the behaviour of each will affect the others; they also realise that in that situation there is no hierarchy between the ages or races, just differences. Do they really start to gaze at each other in wonderment? It seems that something further than interconnectedness is needed for a moral-like attitude: mere recognition of being in symbiosis with something, of needing something, or of being part of a same system with something does not necessarily lead to respecting them as themselves. I can cherish the bacteria only because I need it. The point here is that something more is needed to explain the basis of 'being bound' or of 'wonder'. Understanding interconnectedness can be one aspect of it, but as such is not enough.

Because of this, the attitudes offered to replace traditional moral concepts remain vague. What is left unexplained is where they come from: what is 'wonder' and why do I feel it toward other beings, where is the basis of it? This can, of course, be said to be exactly what deconstructionist ethics is, for it renounces safety and easy answers. According to this interpretation the lack of a clear basis could even be intentional, for vague terms resist rational calculus and serve the post-structural motives of being 'against ethics'. However, when dealing with the actual world and actual animals, this reply will not do. We can be as exciting as we want in theory, but when we have to decide how to behave toward other creatures that are made of blood and bones, we need something more concrete to rely on.

This vagueness becomes even clearer when we look at the problems concerning the implications of moral-like attitudes. It is unclear who is to be included in the scope of these attitudes, and what are the concrete actions the attitudes guide us to do. Other animal ethics are especially critical over exclusions, and argue that traditional animal ethics and in particular the concept of 'animal rights' are fundamentally anthropocentric since they categorise beings into those who are like us and those who are not. Instead of this exclusivist morality we are to break categories and resist fixed criteria. For instance, Thomas Birch (1993) claims that tying moral considerability to any given 'criteria' results in an 'elitist' morality, where certain humans and nonhumans are given 'membership of the elite club' and benefit from the 'exploitation of the rest, of the Others'. As a replacement for this kind of thinking he offers universal consideration, which, instead of dividing beings into different categories, keeps the categories open. Now, this argument leaves a lot of issues unaddressed. It seems that since morality as an exclusionist process is to be rejected, we cannot really talk of scope at all. Instead, all the different beings are equally worthy of awe, for creating boundaries is out of the question. If the point is that all 'things' manifest themselves (in the Heideggerian version) or are part of the interconnections and becoming (in the post-structuralist version), then 'beings' include not only humans and animals but, for example, plants and rocks as well. This would mean that we would have to 'let them all be' and be in 'awe' of them too. (Consistently, Jim Cheney (1998) does speak of treating rocks with 'ethical regard'.[2]) This seems to be an issue that raises conflicting attitudes. On the one hand, other animal ethics denies strongly that there are any boundaries, on the other, some of them seem to take it somehow for granted that animals are more important (more awe-deserving) then plants or rocks. The basis of this distinction is unsurprisingly vague, for other animal ethics faces here a difficult problem: if, for instance, sentience is made the criterion for wonder (or for 'more' wonder), then we have made a moral boundary around some human-like characteristic and are, ultimately, demanding 'sameness': if we do not have any specific criteria there is no moral difference between a rock, a bacteria and a dog.

In the light of this, the scope of wonder and awe remains unclear, and perhaps impossible to determine.

Beside scope, it is unclear what action-guiding implications other animal ethics gives. What are 'awe' and 'letting be' in actuality: When I see a mistreated horse starving to death on a field, what am I to do? The answer seems to be that I ought to marvel at it and let it be, but what do these terms mean: Am I to let it be in a literal sense, or bring it back to good health and then let it be? Some of the philosophers mentioned earlier talk of the 'compassion' that follows from understanding difference, but this too remains vague: what will my compassion lead me to do? Moreover: should I try to make others – like the farmer mistreating his horse – behave in a certain way as well, even if that would interfere with 'letting them be' and following their own 'feeling of being bound'? The point here is not only verbal play over the meaning of 'letting be', for the specific content of it does remain unclear. It is unclear how we are to behave toward animals, and how we are to affect others in their behaviour. As Tim Hayward (1996, 57) points out, the 'openness' that for example Birch talks about does not tell us what to *do*. Birch claims that 'practical reason' will guide us, but this again is vague: what is this practical reason and what does it actually guide us to do? Hayward states quite accurately that 'it is too indeterminate to be action guiding or, therefore, to be an ethic as such'. It would seem that again vagueness and resisting any universal norms are what other animal ethics strive for, but as before, this will not do when we are dealing with real animals. We need to have clear norms concerning them, if we want to take their welfare seriously into account.

In the light of this, other animal ethics is in trouble, for it cannot explain what exactly our attitudes to other beings are based on, what is their scope and what they tell us to do. As already stated, in theory it is intriguing to play with vague terms and construct new ontologies. However, when considering concrete actions in this actual world toward actual animals, we need something more precise. These problems touch generally the difficulties in post-structuralism. The main problem seems to be that it carries an inner contradiction between having a clear moral understanding and resisting moral theories. Other animal ethics is guided by a need to show why we ought to respect animals; at the same time it resists making any strict normative claims about this respect, and ends up not claiming much at all.

SENTIMENTALISM AND ANTHROPOMORPHISM?

What is it about traditional animal ethics that the other animal ethics wants to get rid of? As already mentioned, the core argument is that we should not respect other animals in their similarity to us, but in their difference. The reason for this can be found in the philosophy described above, but behind it there is also another

less ontological claim. This claim is that respecting animals because of their similarity is actually based on anthropomorphism and sentimentalism.

Guattari's and Deleuze's (1988) notion of the 'other animal' rests on the idea that we are not to make the animal meaningful through human terms. The animal must remain different, independent and distinct from humans and we are not to make sense of it through human conceptions. All demand for similarity and identification must be forgotten. In analysing the postmodern animal in both art and philosophy, Steve Baker concludes that this sort of unwillingness to see the animal through human eyes is at the heart of the postmodern animal: 'This is perhaps the most radical postmodern option: the animal as a strange being encountered and experienced, rather than rendered familiar through interpretation' (Baker 2000: 81.). This reaction against interpreting animals with human meanings goes so far that it not only opposes the process of humanising, but also the actual animals that are thought to be humanised: pets. Baker brings out how not only Guattari and Deleuze, but postmodern thinking in general seems to loathe the pet as some kind of an entity that has lost it's true 'animality' (whatever is meant by the term). Behind this Baker sees 'anthropomorphophobia', the strong fear of seeing animals uncritically and sentimentally through human concepts (Baker 2000: 169–75).

It is here that we find the alleged faults of animal rights movement and the traditional animal ethics. In claiming that animals are sufficiently similar to us to count morally they actually try to turn animals into humans, and do so with sentimental motives. Other animal ethics seeks to avoid this, as Baker says: 'Not to sentimentalise; not to moralise; these are the imperatives for the postmodern artist and philosopher' (Baker 2000, 178). We are to avoid turning animals into humans; we are also to avoid 'sentimental' feelings. For instance, Carleton Dallery (1999) claims, leaning partly on Vicky Hearne's ideas, that animal rights are founded on misguided conceptions of animals as little people toward whom we are to be kind, and identifies suffering as the central concept to inspire sentimentality. He goes on to argue, borrowing from Diane Starr Cooper, for *respecting* and communicating with the other animal, instead of *loving* it. We are not to see them as similar to us, and we are not to have sentimental reactions toward them. A place to see and experience these other animals is the circus, where animal difference is glorified, and where sentimentalism as 'a deception, almost a cultural hallucination' is not present. The two things to be avoided, then, are turning animals into humans and adopting sentimental attitudes toward them. Animals are to be themselves in their difference, and we are not to 'love' them, but to respect them and let them be. For instance, Hub Zwart (1997) talks of seeing the animal through its difference instead of using human concepts to explain it, and goes on to criticise animal rights for seeing animals as 'partners' and forgetting that they are distinct from us. His conclusion is familiar: 'No doubt, a moral assessment of our relationship with animals must start from our actual estrangement from them'. It is the fault of traditional animal ethics, and

especially of animal rights, to demand moral status for animals because they are like us and loveable in their likeness. These charges seem, however, both unclear and unjust.

First of all it should be noted that conceptualising the animal as difference seems to render the animal in itself meaningless. What matters are not the specific characteristics of it, but the fact that the characteristics are different – it is the form that matters, not the content. The nature of the animal does not get attention: only the label 'difference' stuck to its forehead is worth noticing. Because of this the animal itself has vanished: we do not see its desires, interests or abilities, we only see it as an abstraction. It is this that makes it possible to marvel at the mistreated circus animals and despise pet owners who 'love' their animals. The interests of the animals do not matter as long as we glorify the difference we want to see in them. It should be clear that as an animal ethics this approach is lacking (to say the least). To respect the welfare of an animal we have to pay attention to it as something more than an abstraction: we have to see the content of its characteristics and understand its interests, instead of marvelling from a distance at the form its 'difference' takes.

Secondly, it is puzzling why acknowledging similarities should necessarily be anthropomorphic. It seems that the other animal ethics is saying that interpreting animals as having human-like characteristics is a projection, not reality. Paradoxically enough, this leads to the traditional anthropocentric view that humans and animals are completely distinct: we do not share characteristics, we cannot understand them, and if we do see similarities or try and understand them from our viewpoint, we are not being rational but sentimental, projecting our own beliefs on them. The world is ours, and animals are too different ever to enter it. The differentiating element that other animal ethics places between humans and animals once again seems to be language. We know other humans because we are all language-using creatures; animals we do not because they remain quiet. At some points other animal ethics seems not only to be describing what animals are, but to be demanding that they should be a certain way – animals *have to* be different, for when they are not, they lose their true nature. It seems that ultimately other animal ethics does make a very traditional, ontological separation between humans and animals (and 'humanity' and 'animality'), a separation that definitely requires justification. Looking for sameness (demanding animals be like us) is anthropocentric, but so is disregarding shared similarities. Paradoxically, the fear of anthropomorphism turns into anthropocentrism, and as such gives little hope for an animal ethics.

The main problem here is confusion about 'knowing' the animal. We are to see the animal through its own perspective, in its difference, and not to impose human conceptions on it. This leads to three alternatives: the first is that we are to stop using human conceptions in understanding animals and be somehow mystically 'objective'; the second is that since this objectivity is impossible, we are to forget about understanding animals altogether; the third is that we should

try find a common language (that both animals and humans share) through which to understand the animal. Other animal ethics opts for the second alternative, claiming we should let the animals be in their difference, and forget about imposing interpretations. We are to marvel at their difference without trying to understand it, for understanding it leads to imposing our own viewpoint on them. This ethics forgets about the third option: of seeking a common ground instead of imposing our own on animals. If we are to take animals morally into account, be it 'respecting' or 'valuing', we have to understand them, know what they are. In order to know the animal we have to be in contact with it, and in order to be in contact with it, we need to have similarities, a 'language'.

As we saw, other animal ethics at its extreme claims that we cannot interpret the animal, or ever really 'know' it, and because of this we are only to marvel at its difference. This seems a mistaken belief, for we can know the animal through interaction that depends on certain common characteristics. As Arnold Arluke and Clinton R. Sanders (1996, 43) say, 'Trainers, many ethologists, and others who interact consistently and intimately with animals outside the artificial situations of conventional scientific inquiry typically see their nonhuman associates as self-aware, planning, empathetic, emotional, complexly communicative, and creative'. To claim that this is all 'sentimental human-centred projection' or anthropomorphism that does not respect the animal's difference is (at best) false. To interpret an animal without paying attention to it would be to impose human conceptions on it. To understand it through interaction is not to impose, but actually to respect the animal enough to take time to enter its world, and not write it off as 'difference'. Interaction can actually lead to an alternative way of 'becoming an animal': through finding a common language and seeing similarities we can start to be less pompous about humanity and more understanding of our links with other animals. A good (although extreme) example of this is Dian Fossey, who in coming to know the gorillas she was studying started to talk about 'becoming' a gorilla (Armbruster 1997).

SIMILARITY AND ETHICS

What is involved in the search for a common ground – in emphasising certain similarities as the basis of moral value? The first thing to get rid of is the claim that it means to demand that animals are like us in any given way (be it having a thumb, third order beliefs or composing symphonies). This would be quite a ridiculous and anthropocentric idea, since it claims that humanity in itself and human characteristics are the basis of moral value. It would lead quickly to a situation (that to some extent is actuality today) where those animals who share 'more' human characteristics were considered more valuable, and where we would have to draw a kind of a chart for what amount of value is to be given to each species.

We are not to demand at random that animals be like us; instead, we have to have a point of reference to tell us what similarities are important. This is the question that animal welfare movement and animal ethics in general have tackled for quite some time, trying to determine what kind of a similarity is crucial when the reference point is moral value. The emphasis has been on individuality: animals do not only have value as parts of ecosystems or species, but also as individuals, 'ends in themselves'.[3] To understand what the relevant similarities are, we have to understand what is meant by 'individuality'. The Kantian approach claims it is based on rational autonomy, but this seems too exclusive in the context of morality, for it is unclear why rationality and autonomy should be the criteria for moral value – surely also those lacking in these areas can be morally valuable individuals (for an analyses of this 'argument from marginal cases' see for example Pluhar 1995). To see what is the morally relevant definition of individuality, we have to look at the basis of morality and moral sentiments. One interpretation of morality claims that it is largely/primarily built on empathy and identification. The idea is very simple: we value other beings because we can identify with them, understand (at least to some extent) what the world feels like for them (Midgley 1983; Rachels 1990). Now, what gives basis for genuine identification is consciousness in the phenomenological sense (Nagel 1974; DeGrazia 1996) – that the world truly feels like something for the other being, that it experiences its existence in some way. This is the criterion for identification, and we can also use it as the criterion for being a morally valuable individual. Animals have moral value as individuals when they experience their existence as something, and they often enough do (DeGrazia 1996; Rogers 1997; Allen and Bekoff 1997; Dawkins 1998). Individuality in a broader sense can be enhanced by different things (this is where other animals ethics gets it right), be it the dog's amazing world of smells or the human being's 'rationality'. What is at the root however, is the capability to feel existence as something, to be an *experiencing* being.

If we take consciousness in the phenomenological sense to be the criterion for the moral value of an individual, we quickly come to see that it is the similarity of experiencing existence as something, having a point of view to the world, that connects humans and most animals. Instead of difference and distant respect, it is this similarity that makes 'knowledge' of the animal possible, for it makes understanding of and entering into the animal's 'world' possible, providing a basis for empathy.[4] We cannot know or respect the animal if it remains different and 'other' to us, like a strange invisible being lurking in the forests. We have to see it, enter its world with the limited yet genuine methods we have, and come to know it through the interaction that a certain similarity renders possible. We have to understand its viewpoint to have genuine moral consideration for it, and in this way we do have to acknowledge also difference. At the heart of things, however, this understanding rests on similarities, for it is the similarities that

make taking the animals' viewpoint possible to begin with. This is not to say that we should not respect the ways animals do in other senses differ from us – for example, the way the dog's and the bear's and the pigeon's world all have their different shapes. It only means that in the end it is similarity (not 'sameness') that makes morality possible.

CONCLUSION

As said in the introduction, other animal ethics is not a univocal 'discipline'. The philosophers mentioned here all differ from one another, and to some my criticism might seem unjustified, for not all endorse fully the kind of philosophy sketched here.[5] Still, I think there are fundamental similarities that make it possible both to sketch what other animal ethics is and to analyse it.

Other animal ethics wants to respect difference and abandon exclusions based on similarity. There are good points to this argument, for surely differences should also be acknowledged, and even celebrated. However, the problems outweigh the benefits. The terminology and conception of ethics being used remain vague in explicating their bases, in determining the scope of their application, and in implicating morally justified actions. Other animal ethics also overemphasises difference, and this ultimately leads to traditional anthropocentrism and to the denial of the animal itself.

Animal ethics has tried to show that animals are individuals, and need to be treated as such. They are not exotic images, intriguing in their difference, but concrete creatures with a viewpoint on the world and needs that go with that viewpoint. Recognising animals' individuality demands that we recognise certain similarities. To reject these similarities is to reject the individuality of animals and ultimately to deny much of our moral responsibility toward them. We have to respect differences, but more importantly, we have to acknowledge similarities.

NOTES

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[1] They also emphasise becoming as a biological process: we are not biologically 'ready' beings, but a part of the movement of evolution.

[2] The idea of treating plants or even rocks with ethical regard is not meant to be ridiculed here. The only claim is that it is consistent to argue that animals have (much) more value, or value of different kind, than plants or rocks.

[3] I am making here the much-argued distinction between valuing animals on the basis of individuality, and species etc. on the basis of more holistic considerations. The simple reason for this is that animals can be considered individuals.
[4] It should be noted, that I do not mean that all people feel empathy for rats even when they see them as conscious. Empathy is not a 'cuddly' feeling that depends on personal taste, but a concern for others that has to be cultivated.
[5] For instance Acampora (1999) also emphasises similarities and empathy.

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