

A view of intrinsic value not based on animal consciousness

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There can be no doubt that the discussion about the status of animals in moral theory (short 'animal ethics') is dominated by the questions whether animals are sentient (consequentialist approaches), and/or whether they have some kind of autonomy and thus could be or not be bearers of rights (deontological approaches). Instead of providing another overview of these discussions we refer to a recent survey by Garner (1993), and we would rather deal directly with what he calls 'preliminary difficulties'. These difficulties have to do with the fact that in the debate about the moral status of animals conclusions are drawn from their capabilities:

Put simply, if animals are regarded as mere unconscious machines we would seem to be justified in treating them in any way we choose. If, on the other hand, we accord them sentience -the capacity to experience pain and pleasure- then it is clear that there ought to be at least some constraints on our behaviour towards them (9).

Because we cannot ask animals 'what they feel and think', Garner says that determining the capabilities of animals is fraught with difficulties, but even when there would be agreement that animals are 'sentient and have a certain degree of intelligence or rationality -although less than humans- how ought we to treat them'?

We do not want to add another contribution to the ongoing discussions within this moral framework. We rather want to question the assumptions, the implicit premises underlying this framework, as far as sentience is concerned. These implicit premises are:

a necessary and sufficient condition for having moral relevance is that an entity must be conscious; the class of natural entities having moral relevance is the class of sentient animals; the more these animals resemble human beings in this respect, the more they ought to be treated as human beings.

The first premise is thus about the moral relevance of natural entities. The second premise is about the nature of our moral obligations towards these entities. In the next paragraphs we will deal with these premises and point out some limitations which seem to be inherent in them.

Morality and consciousness

We first discuss the premise that an entity must be conscious in order to be morally relevant. This idea is implicit in the work of Rosemary Rodd and Bernard Rollin. According to Rodd 'questions about mind and consciousness in other animals are of central significance for a

theory of their moral status" (Rodd, 1990, 7). We think that a specification should be given of what is meant with 'central significance'. Does Rodd mean that consciousness is a necessary condition, a sufficient condition, or a necessary and sufficient condition for an entity to have moral relevance? If it is a necessary condition it implies that an entity without consciousness will not be morally relevant, in the sense that moral agents have no direct moral responsibilities with respect to these entities. If it is a sufficient condition one can conclude that being conscious implies moral relevance, but being conscious is not necessarily the only criterion for inferring moral relevance. Rodd is not explicit enough about this. She says that we ought to consider in our calculations all those beings who are likely to possess mental states, if we want to increase good and to decrease evil. We agree with this, but the question is whether only these beings have to be considered in our ethical reasoning. Animal ethicists such as Bernard Rollin are quite explicit about this. In an article about genetic modification of animals he says that only sentient individuals are morally relevant (Rollin, 1986). There is no place in his ethical system for non-sentient animals, plants or ecosystems. For Rollin 'being conscious' clearly is a necessary and sufficient condition for being morally relevant.

In environmental ethics several authors defend the view that not only sentient creatures but all living beings have intrinsic value. As a well-known example we refer to the 'biocentric outlook' on nature developed by Paul Taylor (1986). Paul Taylor argues that, to have a coherent outlook on the natural world and the place of humans in it, humans ought to be seen as members of the 'Earth's community of life', integral elements in a system of interdependence, and not inherently superior to other living things. In this outlook all organisms have an 'inherent worth', because they are "teleological centers of life in the sense that each is a unique individual pursuing its own good in its own way" (100). This means that moral agents ought to respect all living organisms, not only sentient animals.

In philosophy the concept of intrinsic value is traditionally associated with subjective human experience. To prevent this usage Taylor speaks about 'inherent worth'. In animal and environmental protection movements, however, the concept of intrinsic value is used as well, to counteract the exclusive emphasis upon the instrumental value of nature in radically anthropocentric theories (Verhoog, 1992a). In the radical anthropocentric view natural entities do not have a 'value of their own', independent of human interests in these entities: they are not considered to be morally relevant. To defend that animals have moral relevance, members of these movements had to argue that animals and/or other natural entities have intrinsic value as well. That natural entities have intrinsic value implies that moral agents have to consider them in ethical reasoning, in particular when these entities are harmed due to human activities. Taylor gives the following definition of 'inherent worth':

Inherent worth is the value something has simply in virtue of the fact that it has a good of its own. To say that an entity has inherent worth is to say that its good (welfare, well-being) is deserving of the concern and consideration of all

moral agents and that the realization of its good is something to be promoted or protected as an end in itself and for the sake of the being whose good it is.

(Taylor, 1984, 151)

Taylor argues that all living beings are 'teleological centers of life' and therefore it is only with reference to living beings that it makes sense to speak of promoting or protecting their well-being and doing this for their own sake. We can conclude that, for Taylor at least, having conscious experiences of pleasure or frustration is not a necessary and sufficient condition for having intrinsic value.

We have now mentioned at least three normative outlooks on life, the anthropocentric one, the zoocentric one of Rollin, and the biocentric view of Taylor. The ecocentric outlook goes one step further and speaks about the intrinsic value of species and ecosystems. Aldo Leopold's famous 'land ethic' is an example of such an ecocentric outlook (Leopold, 1949). In the ecocentric outlook, or an environmental ethics based on it, the extinction of a species or the disruption of an ecosystem is considered to be of greater importance than the death of the individual beings belonging to that species or ecosystem. Those who defend this view believe that species and/or ecosystems can be seen as distinct natural entities, to some extent comparable to individual organisms. In the ecocentric view the prima facie moral demand not to kill individual animals may be overruled by man's moral responsibility for the survival of the species or ecosystem as a whole. In Taylor's biocentric view the ecosystem or species has no intrinsic value/inherent worth; the existence of a healthy ecosystem or population has an instrumental value for the good of individual living organisms. For Rollin the extinction of a species is not morally relevant; it is seen as an aesthetic loss:

There is certainly a great loss in species becoming extinct, but it is fundamentally, perhaps, an aesthetic one, analogous perhaps to our repulsion at trampling a flower. Ethics is relevant only insofar as one is morally obligated not to destroy aesthetic objects, or to deprive future generations of having them in their Umwelt (289).

A successful argument in favour of the intrinsic value of non-sentient natural entities clearly is a test-case for the question whether being sentient/conscious is a necessary and sufficient condition for having moral relevance. If sentience is not a necessary and sufficient condition this may be a reason to broaden our theory of animal ethics. One way of doing this is to consider animal ethics based on sentience as being a part of a wider ethical theory dealing with human relationship to nature as a whole. Rosemary Rodd is clearly against this. In her chapter about 'Animals as part of the environment' she tries to show that this can only lead to 'confusion and muddled thinking'. She believes the question of animal rights and the question of environmental protection to be two fundamentally separate issues, dealing with different

values, and leading to different duties. Rodd thinks that we do not have any direct moral responsibilities with respect to non-sentient natural entities, and therefore they cannot have moral rights:

The question of animal rights is essentially based upon the significance of the subjective experience of the individual: environmental questions are much more closely related either to purely prudential problems of human survival or to questions about aesthetics and the maximization of abstract qualities such as beauty (105).

As far as this aspect is concerned Rodd's view is very similar to the one held by Rollin. Both believe that 'being conscious' is a necessary and sufficient condition for having moral relevance, and any duties we might have towards other natural entities are not direct moral duties, but indirect moral duties to human or animal sentient beings. This is a widespread view nowadays, especially as far as our behaviour towards domestic animals is concerned. Nearly all our domestic animals are both vertebrate and sentient. Human beings live in more or less close social relationships with domestic animals. These animals are to a large extent 'socialized' to human beings and can therefore be seen as part of the human community. Having made these animals dependent upon our care, we have a direct responsibility towards them. Animal rights or animal liberation groups are primarily concerned about our relation to these animals. The idea of 'direct moral duties' arises quite naturally in this context. It explains why the emphasis in a zoocentric approach is so much on the individual animal, in contrast to the ecocentric approach.

It is not possible to 'prove' that one of the four outlooks mentioned is the 'best' one in any objective sense. But this does not mean that there are no criteria at all, on the basis of which one could say that one of these is more complete, or more coherent than the others, and/or doing more justice to our moral intuitions or to a specific kind of interaction between humans and animals. We think that Rodd and Rollin go too far in completely separating ecological theories of value from the question of animal rights, as if the first were only dealing with aesthetic values and the second with moral values. In cases such as the hunting of wild animals, or the killing of animals which are not indigenous to a particular ecosystem, we have to make a decision about the positions of these theories in relation to each other. We will use the case of the genetic modification of animals to show that even with domestic mammals sentience cannot be the only relevant moral criterion involved. Analysis of this case will at the same time show that drawing a sharp borderline between environmental ethics and animal ethics leads to conclusions which are counter-intuitive.

Genetic modification of animals

A so-called transgenic animal is an animal whose genome is changed by adding genes from a different species. Specific physical or behavioural properties of the progeny of such an animal may be changed quite suddenly by the introduction of foreign genes. Many people have expressed their concern about such genetic modifications in which species barriers are crossed in a way which is usually called 'unnatural'. Much of this concern is related to the risks involved, for the animal (its well-being) or, indirectly, for the environment (effects on the ecosystem, as in the case of transgenic salmon). A substantial part of the concern, however, is not related to the effects (the risks) of transgenesis, but to the process of transgenesis itself. It is defended that transgenesis as such is a morally relevant issue because species barriers are crossed. The crossing of species barriers can only be morally relevant when a species, or belonging to a particular species, has intrinsic value. It is also said that bringing in genes from a different species impairs the 'integrity' of the animal. Transgenesis instrumentalizes the animal because it is manipulated only for human profit, which is incompatible with its intrinsic value.

These arguments will be clarified in our discussion of the zoocentric and ecocentric approach to transgenesis. For the zoocentric approach we refer to Rollin's article 'The Frankenstein Thing' (Rollin, 1986)¹. For Rollin, as we have seen, species are not objects of moral concern. The crossing of species barriers is not a morally relevant issue, unless as a result of it the transgenic individual sentient animals created in this way suffer. We might expect that an environmental ethicist holds a different view. As an example we refer to an article by Colwell (1989). Colwell declares that most organismal and population biologists "will admit to a strongly felt intuition that every nonhuman species has value in itself" (13). And, he says, this intrinsic value or inherent worth of a species is independent of whether the species is vital to human welfare. He defines intrinsic value as "the worth inherent in any complex and improbable natural entity that represents a center of relations independent of human will" (17). A species has intrinsic value because a species is essentially irreplaceable. Colwell calls the intentional or accidental genetic alteration of wild species through human intervention a devaluation, a degradation of their intrinsic value. But this only applies to "human intervention in the genetics of 'natural' (wild) species, living in reasonably 'natural' ecosystems" (29). A consequence of this view is that with genetically engineered fish the moral dilemma does not lie in the production of this fish in the laboratory, but in the release of such a fish into a natural ecosystem. Unlike wild species Colwell sees "no ethical justification for any bar on genetic alteration of domesticates, by whatever technical means" (33), unless animals suffer from the

¹ Recently a new book by Rollin was published: *The Frankenstein Syndrome*. Cambridge Studies in Philosophy and Public Policy. Cambridge University Press, 1995. This was not taken into account in this publication.

effects of it.

We may summarize Colwell's view by saying that for him genetic modification of domestic animals is no moral issue because these animals are not 'natural', are not 'green' anymore (Noske, 1984). Although on very different grounds he agrees with Rollin that with domestic animals moral issues only arise when they suffer as a result of genetic modification. There would be no moral barrier to the genetic modification of chickens to adapt them to the housing systems of intensive husbandry, or even to remove their very capacity of suffering pain, if the evidence indicated that the animals were happy (example used by Rollin). These implications of Rollin's zoocentric ethics are counter-intuitive. Against Rollin it can be argued (Verhoog, 1992a, 1992b) that one of the ways of measuring animal suffering is comparing the animal's behaviour with that of wild relatives. The species-specific behavioural repertoire determines to what extent animals can adapt to the surroundings provided by human beings. When they cannot adapt the animals will become ill and/or show abnormal behaviour. If we allow this fundamental behavioural repertoire to be changed by means of genetic modification it becomes difficult to establish the borderline between normal and abnormal behaviour? To some extent this critique applies to Colwell as well. There is no absolute moral boundary between the wild and the domestic animal. What unites environmental ethics and zoocentric ethics is the animal's 'telos', its species-specific organisation and behaviour, its characteristic 'nature', which is the result of a long evolutionary and/or socio-cultural process (in the case of domestic animals) of adaptation to a particular environment.

The problems with Rollin's view on genetic modification of animals are partly due to his 'receptacle view' of animal consciousness. The animal's consciousness is not seen as an integral element of the species-specific nature of an individual animal, as an embodied subject, but as a 'receptacle' for certain feelings. As a consequence of this there is no moral problem in totally eliminating the animal's conscious experience (lifelong anaesthesia), when animals are likely to experience pain and suffering for longer periods. Another likely consequence of this view is that painless killing of animals is considered to be morally unproblematic.

At this point we see an interesting difference between Rollin and Rodd. Although Rodd also emphasizes the moral relevance of consciousness, she does not accept the receptacle view. In her chapter on killing animals she explicitly says that the annihilation of consciousness is itself a dreadful thing. Because selves are destroyed, killing animals is a moral harm, even if there is no attendant suffering (126-128). As far as transgenic animals are concerned Rodd's view is not different from Rollin's approach. Like Rollin she does not see any moral harm in the genetic modification of animals as such, or in the making of animal chimeras, unless animals suffer as a result of it (38-41). Even the concept of animal integrity, which is so often used in

discussions about transgenic animals, is not mentioned in the index of her book.

The notion of 'integrity' refers to the particular structure of harmonious relationships between the parts and the whole of the animal, and between the animal and its environment, which is determined by its species-specific nature. The genome is a very important part of an animal, and its structure and function depends, to a large extent, upon the species to which the animal belongs. The claim that the introduction of DNA from different species is a violation of the integrity of the animal can now be argued for by saying that belonging to a particular species is part of the animal's nature; it is a necessary condition for its existence as an individual.

Individual integrity thus is a *conditio sine qua non* for having 'a good of its own' (Taylor), for 'being itself'.

Intrinsic value and human obligation

In any ethical theory about human relations to animals it is of vital importance to be as clear as possible about the use of such terms as '(intrinsic) value', 'norm', 'moral obligation', 'moral status'. And further, to make explicit how the concepts to which these terms refer, are related to each other. Our own view can now be summarized as follows.

Normative ethics rests upon the existence of moral agents, self-conscious human beings, who are obliged to reflect upon the consequences of their actions upon any being or entity which is morally relevant, either directly or indirectly. The first question we have to answer is which entities are morally relevant. In our opinion any entity with a 'life of its own', which can be furthered or damaged due to human action, has moral relevance. We believe this to be the case because a living organism is a 'teleological centre of life, striving to preserve itself and realize its good in its own unique way' (Taylor, 1986, 121). Organisms are actively maintaining their existence through time, adapting themselves to changing environmental conditions. Being alive is the most basic, necessary condition, which has to be fulfilled, for an entity to be morally relevant. A practical consequence of this view is that stones or human-made artefacts can not be morally relevant by definition. We have no direct moral obligation to artefacts as such. We may have an indirect moral obligation to the makers or users of the artefacts if these artefacts are part of their 'good'.

Having moral relevance means that the existence of living entities has 'intrinsic' value for moral agents, a value-of-its-own, apart from other values. This means that a moral agent, reflecting upon the effects of human action, has a direct ethical obligation to take the intrinsic value of a living entity into account. The entity involved has a corresponding moral claim upon human beings. Any obligation derived from the recognition of this intrinsic value may be formulated as a *prima facie* normative statement (a norm), saying what human agents ought to do (what is morally obligatory).

Recognition of the intrinsic value of living entities is a necessary condition for attributing moral relevance to them, but not a sufficient one in assessing what exactly we owe to these entities,

what kind of moral obligations we have to plants, animals, or human beings. The nature of these specific obligations is determined by the species-specific characteristics which are essential for the living being concerned to be able to realize its good. Being alive always manifests itself in a specific, (species-) characteristic way. The characteristics defining the specific 'nature' of a living being, constitute an important normative element when we have to determine what we owe to (what we ought to do or not to do in relation to) distinctive classes of living beings or to individual living beings in particular situations.

In our view the moral status of any organism is determined both by its being alive (necessary condition) and by its specific nature (sufficient condition). Being alive makes them morally relevant, obliging moral agents to respect their intrinsic value. This obligation is made concrete by taking into account the specific nature of the organism concerned. This should be the basis of a normative theory dealing with animals, and not any criteria based on similarity with human nature.

This is not the place to give a full account of such a normative theory. Any such theory should take into account our moral intuition which says that the moral status of plant-life is not the same as the status of animal or human life, although all these forms of life have intrinsic value. The ecocentric and biocentric outlook do justice to the moral status of plant-life in general. We ought to respect all plant-life, but plants are less 'centred' than animals, and therefore it is difficult to maintain that we have the same moral responsibility towards individual plants, as we have in the case of vertebrate animals. However, we have to take care that species, and the ecosystems which they need for their survival, do not disappear due to human action.

At the other side of the scale we have human life, which is so much individualized, that respect for personal autonomy, dignity or integrity is a direct consequence of the human way of being alive, of the realization of the good of human beings. In general we are not prepared to sacrifice individual human life to the survival of the group or species, except in extreme cases such as war.

The moral status of animal life stands somewhere between that of plant-life and human life. We ought to respect the species-specific characteristics and the Umwelt needed for the good of both wild and domestic animals. Some species of animals show clear signs of self-consciousness. This means that not giving them the opportunity to express their species-specific behaviour, matters to them individually. They may suffer as a consequence of our interference in their lives. In these cases human responsibility towards these animals gets an extra dimension, as emphasized by the zoocentric outlook. The zoocentric outlook should not be set apart from, or in opposition to the ecocentric and biocentric outlooks, as we have tried to demonstrate in an earlier part of this paper. It should rather be seen as a specification of the biocentric and ecocentric outlooks, particularly suited to sentient animals brought by man into a more or less artificial environment or modified ecosystem.

Conclusions

In the foregoing analysis we consistently reasoned on the basis of respect for the intrinsic value of life, which gives all living beings moral relevance. Any *prima facie* moral obligations, which human moral agents may have towards specific forms of life, depend upon the characteristic natures of these living beings. When sentience or conative capacities are essential constituents of the nature of animals, moral agents have to take these into account. By themselves such specific characteristic elements of the species-specific nature of organisms can never give a necessary and sufficient condition for being morally relevant. When zoocentric thinkers such as Rollin say that being sentient is a necessary and sufficient condition for having intrinsic value, they are doing exactly this. This approach unnecessarily leans on a particular concept of intrinsic value, which is inherent in the anthropocentric outlook. It presupposes that only self-conscious experiences have intrinsic value; the existence of human consciousness is taken as paradigmatic for having intrinsic value. The specific forms of animal conscious experience are then compared with conscious experiences as human beings have them. Human consciousness becomes an abstract standard, on the basis of which lower and higher forms of consciousness are distinguished. This usually leads to unsatisfying discussions about the borderlines within the animal kingdom, and between animal consciousness and human consciousness. As we have shown, it also leads to problems regarding our ethical intuitions in relation to transgenic animals. We do not think, therefore, that this is a fruitful approach; it neither does justice to animals, nor to humans. We think, instead, that we have to look to the species-specific way in which the *Umwelt* of an animal is constituted, and what the effect of our action on the animal's experiential world is. Animals are psycho-physical wholes expressing a certain species-specific nature, which can be expressed in the concept of the animal's 'integrity'. We cannot set the psychic, or conscious aspects apart from the bodily aspects as is done in the receptacle view of consciousness. In this context we endorse Wemelsfelder's view on animal consciousness which is directly expressed in the behaviour of the animal as a whole (Wemelsfelder, 1993; and her contribution to this book). Neither can we isolate a particular animal's nature from the species to which it belongs or from the environment to which the animal can adapt itself. This also applies to domesticated animals living in man-made environments. Our analysis of genetic modification of animals has shown that animals do not lose their 'naturalness' or their 'intrinsic value' once they are domesticated. Human beings are part of nature and their being in the world necessarily affects the ecosystems in which they live. As moral agents human beings have still to learn that each species of plants and animals, that each ecosystem has its own dynamics. When humans interfere in nature they ought to take these developmental tendencies into account.

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Our critique of the anthropomorphic and anthropocentric way of dealing with animal consciousness and its moral relevance, also applies to the so-called analogy postulate, saying that there is such a great similarity between the anatomical and physiological structure of humans and mammals that we can safely assume that animal consciousness is comparable to human consciousness. This argument assumes that it is impossible to give a direct proof of animal consciousness because an animal cannot say what is going on in its mind. The analogy postulate is used to make the existence of conscious experience plausible, usually in the context of defending the moral status of animals. Here again human consciousness is taken as the standard because of the assumption that conscious experience can only be known by introspection, a capacity which human beings have to some extent. As a consequence it becomes almost logically impossible to say what is going on in the mind of animals and an appeal to the analogy postulate is the only way out if one does not want to choose between introspectionism and crude forms of behaviourism. A further critique of the analogy postulate is that it can only be used as an argument for the statement that vertebrate animals are conscious in a very general sense. It can not help us in answering more specific questions, such as what it is 'to be like a bat', what the Umwelt of the bat is.