

Module 4

Introduction to Animal Welfare Ethics



This lecture was first developed for **World Animal Protection** by Dr David Main (University of Bristol) in 2003. It was revised by **World Animal Protection** scientific advisors in 2012 using updates provided by Dr Caroline Hewson.

Free online resources

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In this module you will learn

What people mean by ‘ethics’ in everyday life

Why ethics are not ‘just subjective’ or ‘just preferences’

Common ethical theories about how we ought to relate to animals

Review

Understanding animal welfare requires **science**

How different environments affect animals' health and feelings, from the animal's point of view

Deciding how to apply those scientific findings involves **ethics**

How humans should treat animals: people around the world have always been concerned about this

Sentience

- ❖ Sentience is the capacity to experience suffering and pleasure
- ❖ It implies a level of conscious awareness
- ❖ Animal sentience means that animals can feel pain and suffer and experience positive emotions
- ❖ Studies have shown that many animals can experience complex emotions, eg grief and empathy (Douglas-Hamilton et al., 2006; Langford et al., 2006)
- ❖ Animal sentience is based on decades of scientific evidence from neuroscience, behavioural sciences and cognitive ethology

Ethics are part of everyday life

Our actions can affect the interests of others

- ✦ Concern that we may make others worse off, i.e. harm them or deprive them

We have moral values – views about what is right and wrong

Influenced by (Rollin, 2006)

- ✦ ‘Social ethics’ – rules that have emerged to enable us to live together
- ✦ Professional ethics
- ✦ Personal ethics – derived from experience (Heleski & Anthony, 2012)
- ✦ Ethical theory

Ethics and philosophy

Ethics is a branch of philosophy – ethical theories

The logic and reasoning behind different views about right and wrong (Rollin, 2006)

How we 'ought' to relate to others

Criticisms

'Just subjective'

'Just preferences'

Are ethics 'just subjective'?

- ❖ **Not just private judgments**
- ❖ **Moral values and prevalent ethical theories hold societies together**
- ❖ **Wide agreement between different ethical theories and between different cultures**
- ❖ **Ethical theories have systematic logical reasoning**

Are ethics 'just preferences'?

- ❖ **A preference requires no rational defence**
- ❖ **A preference is not binding for others**
- ❖ **Preference values vs. moral values (Fraser, 2008), eg**
 - 'It is better to get our dietary protein from peas than from animals' versus
 - 'We ought to avoid eating animals and get our dietary protein from peas instead'
- ❖ **Ethical theory ❖ moral justification**
 - Reasons leading to a conclusion

Position 1: Animals do not require moral consideration 1

❖ We have no duties towards animals because:

- Unlike *homo sapiens*, animals cannot think
- They lack sufficient consciousness
- They do not have a soul
- Therefore, they cannot reciprocate any moral consideration

❖ Descartes (17th century): animals cannot suffer

❖ Kant (18th century): animals can suffer but this does not matter because animals are not rational

Position 1: Animals do not require moral consideration **2**

Religious philosophies

- **Hinduism, Buddhism – ahimsa (not harming any living being)**

- Personal purity – helps to prevent you from suffering in future incarnation (consequentialist)

- **Judaism, Islam, Christianity**

- Personal purity (consequentialist)
- Animals can suffer (consequentialist)
- Duty of care because they are God's creation and we have rationality (duty-based)
- Christianity historically: 'great chain of being' – animals do not require moral consideration in themselves

Position 1: Animals do not require moral consideration **3**

**Carruthers (1992):
animals have mental states but are not
conscious of them, so they cannot suffer**

**Narveson (1983):
we do not have duties to animals
because they cannot enter into contracts**

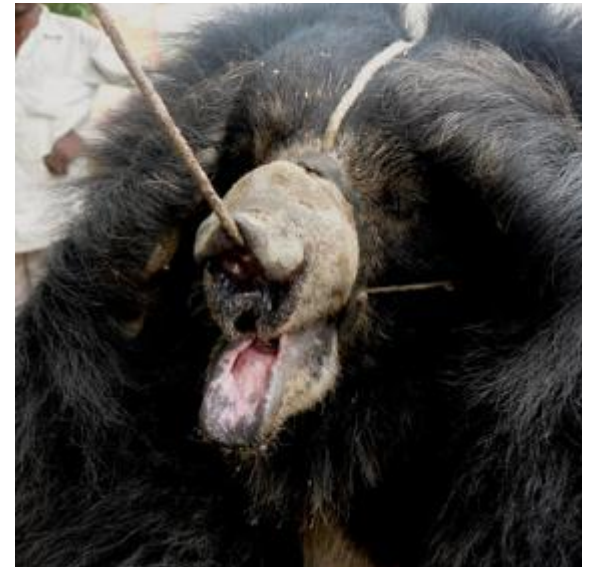
We must treat them well because
harming them would be an indirect
harm to other humans with whom
we do have contracts

Position 2: Animals require moral consideration because they can suffer

Babies, people with disabilities, have moral status

- They cannot speak / reflect / reciprocate any moral consideration
- They can suffer

Animals can suffer too, therefore they are worthy of moral consideration



Position 2: Animals require moral consideration because they can suffer **2**

✦ **Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832)**

“... But a full-grown horse or dog is ...
a more rational ... animal than an infant ...

The question is not, can they reason?
Nor, can they talk? But, can they suffer?”

✦ **Consequentialist: acts are judged on the utility of the consequences – suffering or pleasure?**

✦ **Modern science – animals can suffer**

Position 3: Animals require moral consideration because they have intrinsic value **1**

Each animal matters for his or her own sake, regardless of his or her effect on others

Why?

- Animals' lives matter to them – they seek to survive, make choices
- Animals have potential to fulfil
- Animals experience mental states and can suffer

Therefore we owe them treatment that respects these attributes – we have duties to them and should not inflict suffering in order to benefit others

Position 3: Animals require moral consideration because they have intrinsic value 2

Deontological

- ✦ Greek *deontos* = obligation
- ✦ Emphasis on principles guiding behaviour rather than outcomes
- ✦ Treat people, and animals, as ends in themselves, not as means to other ends

Rights



Summary so far

Ethics: set of reasons that allow us to draw conclusions about how to act

Reasons regarding animals

- Language?
- Sentience?
- Intrinsic value?

Consequentialist vs. deontological

Extrinsic value vs. intrinsic value

Five ethical theories

(Sandøe & Christiansen, 2008)

1. Contractarian

Moral community – must be able to enter into a contract

- ✦ Animals cannot enter contracts because they do not speak and cannot reason

Anthropocentric

- ✦ We can use animals as we need to for our benefit
- ✦ We must treat them well in order to preserve our contracts with others

2. Utilitarianism 1

Emphasises consequences of actions

Seeks to maximise good outcomes

- ✦ The greatest good for the greatest number

Some problems

- ✦ Breaking rules for good consequences
- ✦ How do we make the calculation?
- ✦ How do you compare human happiness and animal happiness in the same equation?

2. Utilitarianism 2

Preference utilitarianism

- Aim to maximise the satisfaction of preferences of all species
- Peter Singer argues
 - Animals are sentient but not self-aware so incapable of having the preference to keep on living
 - Therefore, killing animals for food is allowed if they have a good life, are replaced, and die painlessly
 - However, most farming cannot satisfy their preferences so cannot give a good life, and we should not therefore eat animal products

2. Utilitarianism 3

Peter Singer

- ✦ 'Equal consideration of equal interests'
- ✦ Speciesism

3. Animal rights 1

Deontological

Kant: humans have intrinsic value ❖ human rights

- ❖ Animals are not rational ❖ no rights

Tom Regan: animals have intrinsic value
(Regan, 1984)

- ❖ “Subjects of a life”
- ❖ Rights flow from this inherent value, eg the right to have their worth respected
- ❖ Should not be used for food, clothes, experiments or entertainment



3. Animal rights 2

Rights-based decision

Not consequences for the majority,
but does it respect and preserve
the individual animal's dignity?

**Moderate rights? – can kill but right
to protection from suffering, etc.?**

3. Animal rights 3

However

- ✦ Cannot always respect everyone's rights
- ✦ Animals' inherent value cannot be compared to the inherent value of humans as moral agents – animals cannot respect rights (Cohen, 2003)

More recent animal rights theorists

- ✦ Daniel DeGrazia, Steve Sapontzis, Gary Francione
- ✦ Andrew Linzey – rights given by God, as God's creatures (Taylor, 1999)

4. Relational views 1

Care ethics (Taylor, 1999)

- ✦ Mary Midgley, Carol Adams, Nel Noddings
- ✦ Natural sympathy and emotional bond cause us to build relationships
duty of care to those animals
- ✦ Virtue ethics

Human–animal bond (Anthony, 2003)

4. Relational views **2**

Human–animal bond (Anthony, 2003)

- ❖ Farm (and other) animals are dependents
- ❖ Owners are trustees: unspoken commitment to care for their animals
- ❖ Bond means animals have expectations of care and if owner fails, this is unjust



5. Respect for nature 1

Species have value

- ▣ Individuals only matter as representatives of the group

Genetic integrity is important – domestic species are not natural

Farming practices may disrupt the ecosystem

5. Respect for nature 2

Respect the inherent, genetically driven nature of the animal

Rollin: animals have inherent nature (*telos*) ❖ animals have interests – we must respect their interests



Ethical theories are logical but conflicting 1

Logical

- ⌘ Animals cannot enter into reciprocal arrangements with us
- ⌘ Animals are sentient and their suffering or pleasure is of concern
- ⌘ Animals' lives do matter to them
- ⌘ We do have bonds with our own animals and a particular duty of care towards them
- ⌘ Harming animals can make us more likely to harm people
- ⌘ A species as a whole is different from an individual

Ethical theories are logical but conflicting 2

Conflicting:

Eg farming and meat consumption?

Rights theory = no

Utilitarianism = yes

- ✦ If humane death, good life, replaced

Relational / human–animal bond = yes

- ✦ Farmer has particular responsibilities to his/her livestock, more than to other livestock, to ensure a good life and a humane death

Respect for nature = yes

- ✦ If farming methods do not disrupt the wider ecosystem and respect the farmed animal's telos

Hybrid views

“Emerging social ethic”

(Rollin, 2003; Schneider, 2001)

- ✦ Utilitarianism: prevent suffering
- ✦ Rights: live according to nature
- ✦ Relational: maintain ‘ancient contract’ of mutual advantage between animals and people
- ✦ Partly abolitionist: no frivolous usage, hunting, etc.

Feedback:

Please let us know what you think

- ❖ How have you used this module?
- ❖ What did you like about it?
- ❖ What did you not like?
- ❖ Do you have any tips to share?

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Your feedback will help other teachers like you

Summary

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Why ethics are not 'just subjective' or 'just preferences'

Common ethical theories about how we ought to relate to animals

References

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