

**Jean Kazez**

*Animalkind: What We Owe to Animals.*

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With half the U.S. cropland used to feed animals, livestock and feedcrops now occupy 30% of the total land surface of the earth. Expanded animal agriculture threatens many forms of wildlife by encroaching on their habitats; it also raises a host of other ecological concerns from water pollution to global warming. Emphasizing the more human dangers of environmental change may be part of the growing literature by animal welfare advocates intended to call attention to the formidable consequences of our continued use of animals as resources for food, clothes, and even entertainment. It's bad for us, not just for them. Yet, we both inhabit the planet, so what, exactly, do we owe them? *Animalkind: What We Owe to Animals* is a scholarly attempt to answer that question. It takes into account not just the self-interested ways in which treating animals affects us; but what we owe them, if anything, in terms of their own intrinsic value as well. This is a work that honestly acknowledges the competing interests of human and nonhuman animals and explores the cooperative nature of their relationships as well. We are similar in many ways, yet vastly different. The question of the moral significance of this difference is at the heart of this book.

At the outset Kazez says she is not going to tell us what to wear or what to eat—but that is not quite true. Just a few short paragraphs later she says her central question is, 'What do differences matter, ethically speaking' (5)? Of course, differences may be morally relevant, or not. Yet, somehow to suggest there is no moral imperative before we know how things turn out seems disingenuous to the whole project. If the question really is, 'What do we owe animals?' answering that question requires that we may be obligated to pay up, if it becomes clear that there is a debt. This is not a trivial issue. What is the debt? What do we owe animals? Surely we are asking out of genuine moral concern.

Throughout, the investigation in *Animalkind* is informed by a great variety of literature. On the question how we should treat other creatures, various 'myths of consent' suggest that animals somehow consent to being killed and eaten. The Arctic aboriginals, for example, believed that a whale spirit must be treated with respect in order for the whale to 'give itself' to the people. But for most of us today, whales can hardly be thought to give themselves freely to be killed. They dive away from hunters and swim away when possible. What the existence of these myths implies, Kazez notes, is some unease about killing: 'Killing an animal is not like pulling a carrot out of the ground' (18). These stories suggest that we have struggled with the issue of killing animals for a lot longer than most of us realize.

Some readers might be surprised that doubts about animal consciousness are addressed. So-called ‘deniers’ suggest that the brains of nonhuman animals function without conscious awareness—that creatures move about like robots, unaware, experiencing nothing. The issue is significant because an important part of consciousness is the ability to feel pleasure and pain. If animals cannot feel pleasure and pain this makes a difference to the way we ought to treat them. Since we don’t understand the neural basis of consciousness in us, it is difficult to evaluate claims about any kind of consciousness. So how do we evaluate the capacities of cats, for example, or of fish, mice and birds? Kazez considers the work of ethologists, psychologists and other animal specialists, like primatologist Frans de Waal. But even their work is controversial. Experimental situations are artificial and results are open to various interpretations. Anthropomorphism and anthropodenial—the idea that animals don’t share anything with us—are simple extremes. What about similarities or differences between human and nonhuman brains? The complex truth is that the mirror test for self-awareness, for example, wouldn’t be passed by prosopagnosiacs, yet they are just as self-aware as any other adult human; reciprocation seems present in chimpanzees and capuchin monkeys; proto-moral emotions appear in rats and rhesus monkeys. There are so many ways animals are like us, so many ways we resemble them. Instinct and mechanical rote govern much of our respective lives. (How many times have you found yourself at school, when you meant to go to the store?) What can we glean from such a tangled web? For Kazez, the answer lies somewhere in the middle: ‘We do owe serious consideration to animals, but not exactly what we owe to each other’ (75).

If there are morally relevant differences between human and nonhuman animals that justify treating them differently, what are these differences and how do they matter? ‘Animal lives are not entirely like ours, but how does that affect questions of value and morality’ (79)? Years ago, Peter Singer argued that our treatment of animals was based on speciesist attitudes, i.e., biases or prejudices in favor of our own species no more justifiable than racism or sexism. According to Singer, all sentient creatures have some interests in common, such as the interest in avoiding pain. A rejection of speciesism entails that we consider these interests equally in deciding what to do. Though she considers his views carefully, Kazez rejects what she calls Singer’s radical egalitarianism, in favor of the view that ‘all animals are *not* equal’ (94).

There are, she contends, relevant differences between human and nonhuman animals that justify treating them differently. Appealing to our intuitions that people should be saved before nonhumans in disasters like Katrina, Kazez defends a speciesist position where animals ‘deserve consideration in proportion to their cognitive, emotional, and social complexity’ (93). She admits we must be ‘cautious’ about creating a scale of ‘lesser or greater value of one species over another’ (94). But, she says, ‘if we’re biased in placing ourselves on a higher rung than other animals, it’s a bias we can’t avoid’ (88) Human lives are more valuable than nonhuman lives because human capacities are

superior to the capacities of nonhumans. It's not easy to make comparisons, and they aren't made with precision. Moreover, the value of other creatures is not simply proportionate to their genetic and evolutionary similarity to us. Nevertheless, human lives have special value.

Arguments of this kind inevitably run up against the problem of marginal cases. Whatever characteristics one chooses to justify treating humans differently, the problem arises of humans who do not possess those characteristics. For example, if you think our capacity for reason justifies treating us differently from nonhuman animals, you run into the problem of those who are human, but do not have the capacity to reason—such as babies, the senile, or those in a comatose state. The problem of marginal cases suggests that our propensity to treat humans in a special way can't be justified by appeal to some special feature, or collection of them, that captures all and only humans. Kazez is fully aware of the issues here and addresses them thoughtfully. 'Can we coherently explain why equality extends to the species boundary and not beyond' (96)? Part of her response consists in the 'pull' that members of our species have on us; we feel a certain obligation to members of our own species. Another component is the respect due others based on our own self-respect and sense of accountability in pursuing what we consider to be our serious interests.

Yet, feeling the pull toward members of our own species and even demanding consideration and respect for other species before hurting, killing or harming them, is not enough for a justification. What needs to be addressed is the suggestion that our obligations run not along speciesist lines, but across species to what one might call 'persons'. We might consider dolphins, for example, as having attributes that make it worse to kill them than certain humans. They are highly intelligent, self-aware, social beings. We could then argue that in disasters like Katrina, we have certain obligations to dolphins, these nonhuman persons, that we don't have to some humans. Of course, this is a position Kazez would not accept; but given the 'sliding scale' she supports, it's unclear exactly why not. We may not feel the 'pull' toward dolphins that we do toward humans; but that we feel this way is precisely what needs justification. Kazez says it's important '*not to elevate animals to a status we can't seriously regard them as possessing*' (94). But, maybe it's not we who do the elevating. Maybe certain animals have a certain status and we need, seriously, to acknowledge it.

You may not agree with her conclusions, but *Animalkind* contains thought-provoking, careful, articulate philosophy. Kazez considers a full range of animal welfare issues including those raised by environmental ethics. This book would be useful for courses in applied ethics or simply for anyone interested in addressing challenging arguments regarding animal welfare and advocacy.

**Jonelle DePetro**

Eastern Illinois University