

Tom L. Beauchamp and R. G. Frey, eds.
The Oxford Handbook of Animals Ethics.
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This substantial collection is a wonderful addition to the diverse philosophical discourses concerning animals, their moral status, and human obligations to nonhuman species. In the thirty-five chapters here assembled, contributors explore a range of topics within the history of philosophy, philosophy of mind, philosophy of biology, philosophy of cognitive science, philosophy of language, ethical theory, and practical ethics (4). A short review on such a diverse compilation hardly does justice to this project; a few selective notes must suffice.

Following the editorial introduction, the opening two chapters of Part I survey the history of philosophical thought about animals, providing a foundation for what follows. At the outset, I highlight a brief remark by Stephen R. L. Clark from his lead chapter “Animals in Classical and Late Antique Philosophy” that nicely encapsulates the state of modern conversations about animals represented throughout the book. The evidence from the ancient world, he notes, “is often as confused and confusing as present-day human attitudes to the nonhuman” (38). He challenges simplistic reductions of early Greek (and non-Greek) thinkers as merely a dualistic distinction of rational human souls and the animating souls of non-rational animals. Rather, the “philosophical connections” from the ancient world “are more complex than this” (36), with diverse thinkers like Lucretius and Porphyry offering reflections on animals often quite at odds with their contemporaries (37–8). What was true of the ancients is true of the current state of affairs, something amply born out in *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*, which represents and dialogues with the wide spectrum of “present-day human attitudes to the nonhuman.” Collectively, the contributors demonstrate the relevance of these “complex” philosophical conversations for readers as well as infusing their arguments with a sense of urgency in a time of rapid scientific and technological advancement and environmental concern.

There are six chapters in Part II critiquing types of animal ethical theory (Kantian, Humean, etc.), each addressing views on the nature and justification of moral rights, moral obligations, and standards of moral character, and their various strengths and weaknesses. R. G. Frey’s piece on utilitarianism and animals (172–97), for instance, is particularly helpful given the widespread appeal to Jeremy Bentham and his disciples among animal ethicists. Frey reminds readers that measuring the “welfare” of humans and animals is not as straightforward as is often assumed: “It is far from clear how we are to understand welfare and well-being. If it is difficult to determine human well-being, how much more difficult will it be to determine animal well-being?” (192).

The chapters in Parts III examine the Moral Status of Animals and Person Theory, while those in Part IV address Animal Minds and their Moral Significance. Questions about animal cognition are key because ethical questions concerning animals tend to hinge on conclusions reached about their mental capacities. As far back as Aristotle and on through such luminaries as René Descartes and David Hume, the limited cognitive abilities of animals, or the differences

between the human and nonhuman mind feature prominently in ethical discussion, many citing the absence of reason or an emotional life as a basis to exclude creatures from moral consideration.

Several contributors challenge that position. Sahar Akhtar, for one, explores the cognitive life of animals in relation to their experience of pain (495–518). It is commonplace to argue that animals suffer differently because they do not experience “the higher order suffering that may accompany the feeling of pain in us,” which leads some to conclude animal pain is not as bad as that which humans experience (495). Akhtar finds this view wanting. She notes that the same assumptions about animals—namely that they are incapable of sophisticated forms of suffering, owing to their lack of self- and time-awareness—means “a given amount of pain may actually be worse for animals in certain respects than many have thought and may even be worse for them than the comparable amount of pain in us” (495–6; cf. 511). Self- and time-awareness, she suggests, potentially reduces the role of pain in determining a human’s welfare through an ability to increase the number of “other, more complex interests,” and by the ability to discount or to choose to avoid “focusing on pain” (510).

Some readers will find the book is particularly challenging to habits of thinking and praxis in Parts V and VI, which treat a range of subjects raising ethical questions about the place of animals in the modern world. There are five essays treating *Species and the Engineering of Species*, and eleven chapters categorized as *Practical Ethics* respectively. The issues examined here is broadly representative of areas of concern frequently noted by animal activists, including such matters as zoos, hunting, pets, and the use of animals in biomedical research. On a few occasions, we find contributors acknowledging the challenge of turning philosophical argument into behavioral responses, as in Stuart Rachels’ observation that “The philosophical arguments for vegetarianism are easy. What’s hard is getting people to stop eating meat” (898). At other times, they are blunt regarding certain behaviors that must change or that at least deserve greater scrutiny. David Degrazia, for instance, insists that “no one is exempt from the responsibility to consider the ethics of confining animals,” which has specific implications, including choices about animal-based foods, attendance at zoos, aquariums, horse races, and even “whether or not to adopt pets” (763). For Jeffrey Kahn, society as a whole must assess animal well-being at the level of government policy: “It is time to move past a limited humane care ethic that exploits animals under the justification of a commitment to human interests, while taking only an instrumental view of animal interests” (929). Here and elsewhere in the book, we see a relationship between the variety of philosophical arguments and speculations regarding animals and human obligations to them and what we might term forms of praxis and activism that build on this reasoning. Particularly compelling are those occasions in the book where the contributors encourage forward thinking and speculate on the challenges that lie ahead for future generations with respect to animals. We find this, for instance, in Julian Savulescu’s chapter, “Genetically Modified Animals: Should There Be Limits to Engineering the Animal Kingdom?” Here, the urgency to anticipate inexorable scientific progress involves a shift from mere speculation to a call for action: “We will need a well-developed ethics to govern the creation of novel life.” Further, “One of the most urgent tasks for modern bioethics is to elaborate on and develop a full-blooded normative framework for evaluating the creation of radically genetically modified animals,” something that is currently lacking (664–5).

The various forays into activist thinking found in this book are welcome because so often the trickle-down from theory to action proves fruitful in the long term. Peter Singer's widely disseminated and highly influential *Animal Liberation* (1975) illustrates the potential for philosophical argumentation to seep into public consciousness, which underscores the importance of the debates represented in this *Oxford Handbook*. Singer's publication claims that "If a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration" (2009 HarperCollins edition, 8). Singer's book popularized Richard D. Ryder's term "speciesism" and introduced many to the horrors of factory farming and medical experimentation. Whether or not one agrees with his particular arguments (which are discussed in *The Oxford Handbook* at various points, including Christine M. Korsgaard's "Interacting with Animals: A Kantian Account" [93–6] and R. G. Frey's "Utilitarianism and Animals" [172–6]), Singer's work illustrates the potential of philosophical argumentation to shape public opinion, and inform and influence policy.

The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics serves us well by presenting a broadly representative spectrum of the questions and proposed answers currently in circulation regarding animal ethics. If there is a regret, it lies in the volume's almost exclusive focus on Western philosophical thought. To include, for instance, aboriginal/first nations perspectives on animals and animal-human relations would be a welcome complement to the European-dominated worldviews represented here. And related to this, there is a relative dearth of attention to the world's religions and their views on animals, which, though beyond the primary mandate of the book, would also stand nicely along side this material. I mention this because it is an important category to consider the history of human-animal relations, including views of their place in the world and moral obligations to them. The gap is more noticeable because there is a chapter on "Literary Works and Animal Ethics" (Tzachi Zamir), which "exhibits the variety of moral insights offered by literary explorations of animals and our relations with them" (952), so surely a cross-disciplinary foray into religious studies investigating similar themes would not be out of place. Useful companion volumes to the essays in *The Oxford Handbook*, for those wanting perspectives stemming from the world's religions, include Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton, eds., *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics* (Columbia University Press, 2006) and Lisa Kemmerer, *Animals and World Religions* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

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