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Humans' Moral Obligations to Animals

For too long, theorists have framed cosmopolitanism and humanitarianism in ways that solely focus upon humans and what they owe each other. Yet, the world is vast, and humans do not occupy it alone. Instead, they live alongside nature and animals. In this paper, I will illustrate how theories of cosmopolitanism and humanitarianism can be employed to understand the moral obligations that humans owe to animals. Using Sue Donaldson's and Will Kymlicka's (2013) *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* as the theoretical framework, I will argue that the ideas of Nussbaum (1994, 1996), Appiah (1997), Calhoun (2003), Feldman (2007), and Feldman and Ticktin (2010) can be translated to encompass not only human rights, but animal rights. First, I will present Donaldson's and Kymlicka's (2013) primary arguments, parsing how they understand the various relationships between humans and animals. Second, I will discuss how cosmopolitanism can be expanded to encompass animal rights. Third, I will discuss how humanitarianism can be expanded to encompass animal rights. And finally, I will conclude by offering the theoretical contributions of this paper.

Entering *Zoopolis*

In *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*, Donaldson and Kymlicka (2013) argue that humans, as the top actors in the food chain, have exploited, caged, and killed animals for their own gain. Most often, this exchange is one-sided, with humans reaping the benefits while animals are left at their mercy. Breaking from traditional theorists, who have not seriously considered animal rights as a prominent or pressing issue, Donaldson and Kymlicka (2013, 4) posit that “[a]nimals do not exist to serve human ends,” and animals “have their own moral significance.”

Provocatively, Donaldson and Kymlicka (2013, 4) contend that animals, similarly to humans, possess moral rights to life and liberty, and these rights include, among others, the right to not: (i) be separated from their families, (ii) be medically exploited, and (iii) be imprisoned against their will. Indeed, one of the core elements of Donaldson's and Kymlicka's (2013, 8) book is that, because humans and animals do, and must, co-exist alongside one another, the relationship cannot be one of sheer exploitation. Rather, because of the innate power that humans hold in the relationship, it is their moral responsibility to ensure that animals are granted the ability to live good, undisturbed lives. Human progress cannot continue to come at the expense of animals' well-beings. Thus, one cannot meaningfully discuss human rights without also understanding that humans are not the only creature living on Earth. While humans are undeniably obligated to one another and must transcend borders to assist their fellow man, they should not do so in a way that unjustly endangers or displaces animals, who are, in all aspects, their "co-citizens" (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2013, 204). The crux of Donaldson's and Kymlicka's (2013, 12) argument is that animal rights should not be excluded from the political realm and should instead be incorporated into discussions of universal negative rights and positive relational rights.

In the book, Donaldson and Kymlicka (2013) divide animals into three broad categories: domestic citizens, wild animal sovereigns, and liminal animal denizens. These distinct categories, in turn, correspond to different levels of moral obligations. Within this framework, domestic citizens—which include house pets and farm animals—are awarded the highest amount of political inclusion, as their livelihoods depend upon living in close vicinity to humans (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2013, 101). The relationship between humans and domestic animals is the most symbiotic, as both parties need and depend upon one another. Because of this, humans should not make decisions for their communities that exclude or imperil domestic citizens. Wild animal

sovereigns, on the other hand—which include bears and similar creatures—do not live alongside humans in the same communities, and thus, they are granted higher levels of deference (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2013, 156). Wild animal sovereigns are not dependent upon humans to survive and do, in fact, thrive when they are removed from human civilization. Humans thus have a moral obligation to not interfere in or disrupt the communities that belong to the wild animal sovereigns (i.e. “the wild”). Hence, wild animal sovereigns are not awarded the same political rights as domestic citizens, as they are not full members of human society, yet, humans must respect the boundaries of the two communities. And finally, liminal animal denizens—which include mice and birds—are those that have a tendency to live within human communities, but are not direct members of human households (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2013, 210). These animals have adapted to life alongside humans, and though they are not co-citizens or sovereigns of their own territory, they must be awarded certain rights to avoid outright exploitation. Consequently, humans must learn to co-exist with these liminal animal denizens, as the animals have grown accustomed to living in areas of human development and cannot realistically be relocated (nor should they).

With this framework in mind, I argue that current theories of cosmopolitanism and humanitarianism can be broadened to include animal rights in a more evocative, thoughtful manner. Discounting animals as political beings is disingenuous, as they are undoubtedly affected by the decisions that humans make on a daily basis. Truly, when humans embark upon projects of mass development, they are displacing, threatening, and even killing animals to do so. Human development should not have to come at the expense of animals—especially wild animal sovereigns, whose habitats are being increasingly shrunken each day. As such, it is ignorant to purport that the relationship between humans is the only one that matters when it comes to questions of morality and inclusion. Animal rights should, and must, be folded into this

conversation, since animals do not occupy a separate plane of existence from humans. Because humans and animals all share the same planet and resources, animals must be seriously considered as political actors who possess inviolable rights.

Who is a Cosmopolitan? What Should a Cosmopolitan Be?

The definition of cosmopolitanism is multi-faceted, but its various elements can all be construed in a new way: to encompass animal rights. Appiah (1997, 619), for his part, contends that cosmopolitanism is more a sentiment than a strict ideology, as it is malleable and cannot be constricted within one dominant set of beliefs. Arguing that “liberals have been too preoccupied with morality *within* the nation-state,” Appiah (1994, 620) posits that cosmopolitanism transcends the nation-state by asserting “the equal dignity of all persons,” not just those located within the borders of one’s country. Nussbaum (1994) supports this position, holding that a cosmopolitan is “the person whose primary allegiance is to the community of human beings in the entire world.” This definition, of course, is inherently limited, as it assumes that humans live in a community of their own without any other beings. A *true* cosmopolitan, I would argue, should understand that humans are not the only creatures in the world. Thus, a *true* citizen of the world would also consider the allegiance he should have to animals—his equal co-citizens. As Donaldson and Kymlicka (2013, 252) persuasively claim, “animals are related to political institutions and practices of state sovereignty, territory, colonization, migration, and membership.” Animals cannot be excluded from such conversations, as they are citizens of the same world and share the same land as humans.

The definition of a cosmopolitan must be extended, then, to include animals. Appiah’s (1997, 621) contention that cosmopolitans “value the variety of human forms of social and cultural life” can be restated as a valuation of the varieties of *life*, in general. In essence, humans should

value the distinct cultures and environments of animals and not try to alter them. For instance, imagine how harmful it would be for humans to interfere in the natural food chain and try to forge an artificial pyramid of hierarchy. Inarguably, such an intervention would be catastrophic for ecosystems. Yet, by valuing the discrete nature of each form of animal life, humans will allow all ecosystems to flourish. Indeed, if humans conceptualize themselves as a collective identity and see the world through that lens alone, they will try to assert their dominance over the animals and “go imperial” (Appiah 1997, 632). Hence, when Nussbaum (1994) maintains that one must transcend one’s “local origins and local group membership” to become “more universal,” we can understand this to mean that humans must stop thinking of themselves first by looking beyond their membership to the human community. Once humans see that they are not the only community that exists—that there are also animals with whom they work and live alongside—then they have truly conceptualized themselves as citizens of the world.

While Nussbaum (1994) focuses upon the dangers of nationalism, positing that an “America-first” mentality is exceptionally treacherous, I offer an extension: a “human-first” mentality is far more damning, as it incorrectly assumes that humans are the only beings that matter and that their well-being should be prioritized. Donaldson and Kymlicka (2013, 9) expertly demonstrated that “humans do not exist outside of nature, cut off from contact with the animal world.” Certainly, the human and animal worlds are naturally linked, and the two parties cannot live without one another. This prevailing belief, then, that humans can continue to industrialize and destroy animal habitats without any repercussions to themselves is not only uninformed, but reckless. Animals must be part of humans’ considerations, and their rights cannot—and should not—be so thoughtlessly disregarded. Nussbaum (1996, 143) briefly notes that children “have more intense moral concern for animals than for the adults around them.” While I do not intend to

argue that adults must care more for animals than their fellow men, I do contend that adults must restructure their moral priorities to account for the welfare of animals. Only then can a true cosmopolitan view of the world be employed.

Dissimilarly to Appiah (1997) and Nussbaum (1994), however, Calhoun (2003) does not believe that social relationships and solidarities should be so flippantly discarded as antithetical to cosmopolitanism. Instead, Calhoun (2003, 545) argues that when cosmopolitan elites downplay the importance of social solidarities, they are “[inhibiting] self-organization by members of any group traditionally on the losing end.” Therefore, while a good cosmopolitan aims to be a citizen of the world, it is insincere to contend that all social solidarities are dangerous. Animals can easily be considered a group on “the losing end,” as humans have historically exploited animals for their own gain. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the solidarities that animals have amongst themselves are not only sufficient, but necessary for their well-being and survival. The social solidarities that exist among deer, for instance, should not be framed as a form of dangerous nationalism, as deer have traditionally been hunted by humans and thus must band together to preserve their own kind. Hence, Calhoun’s (2003) caveat that social solidarities can serve to strengthen marginalized communities can be extended to encompass human and animal relationships—especially regarding humans’ encounters with wild animal sovereigns and liminal animal denizens. When Calhoun (2003, 547) posits that “[s]olidarity may be underwritten by mutual interdependence in exchange,” this more explicitly describes the relationship between humans and domestic animals, as the two parties are mutually dependent upon one another for survival and co-exist within the same communities—even the same households.

Therefore, when Nussbaum (1994) claims that “we should give our first allegiance to no mere form of government, no temporal power, but to the moral community made up by the

humanity of all human beings,” we can simply delete the word “human” in order to include animals in the dialogue. For, a true, sweeping moral community comprises *all* the relevant actors, and animals, as shown by Donaldson and Kymlicka (2013, 57), are not apolitical beings without agency; instead, animals—similarly to children—“have certain fundamental *citizenship rights*” that cannot be eradicated. We must, as Nussbaum (1994, 1996) does, think of the worlds of humans and animals as concentric circles that are not independent of one another, but, in fact, wholly part of one another. If we conceive of the world as a single body, with humans and animals as individual, yet interconnected, limbs, then we can start to pioneer an improved theory of cosmopolitanism that takes into account the necessarily cooperative relationship between humans and animals. Just as “[t]he air does not obey national boundaries” (Nussbaum 1994), our conceptions of morality should not be limited by species boundaries. One’s “respect for human dignity” (Nussbaum 1994) should be expanded to include respect for *animal* dignity, and an understanding of the moral obligations that humans owe to their animal co-citizens. And, when Appiah (1997, 638) argues that “we do not have to deal decently with people from other cultures and traditions *in spite of* our differences; we can treat others decently, humanely, *through* our differences,” we can contend that though humans and animals have innate differences, these differences need not be eliminated; rather, they can complement one another and help us curate a better, more inclusive world.

How Can Humanitarianism Account for Animal Rights?

Similarly to cosmopolitanism, humanitarianism is complex, but I posit that its tenets can be expanded to encompass animal rights, as well. For Feldman (2007, 694), humanitarianism “represents a claim that to do something (however limited that something might be) is better than doing nothing in the face of war, suffering, and human misery.” In short, a true humanitarian

should do all he can to alleviate the suffering of others so long as that intervention does not cause more harm than good. This idea can be utilized to understand the obligations that humans owe to animals—and the inherent rights that animals possess. As Donaldson and Kymlicka (2013, 179, 182) claim, though “[n]ot all human interventions in wild animal societies threaten [the wild animals’] autonomy or habitat,” it would be disastrous if humans intervened in the natural cycles of predation, as this would “[reduce] wild animals to a state of permanent dependency and paternalism.” Consequently, humans should only intervene in the affairs of animals when “[the animals’] sovereign states [are] being overwhelmed by catastrophe or suffering a total collapse of internal order and/or legitimacy” (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2013, 181). Only in those instances should humans be granted the ability to intervene; otherwise, they should allow animals to determine their own courses of action, as the animals know what is truly best for themselves. As Feldman (2007, 702) argues, a true humanitarian is one who acknowledges that sacrifices and compromises must be made for the betterment of all, even when these sacrifices are not what we may conceptualize as the ideal output. For instance, though humans may feel that it is humane to save a fly from a spider’s web, doing so is an improper intervention, as it interferes with the natural predation and food chain cycles. A proper intervention would be rescuing an animal that has been struck by a vehicle, as this injury is by no means a result of “natural” forces and is, in essence, caused by humans. Comprehending the differences between these two types of interventions helps us theorize how humanitarians can best help animals.

Truly, the vulnerability of animals at the hands of humans cannot be denied and must, indeed, be fully addressed. Humans have an unparalleled ability to wreak havoc upon the lives of all animals, and this power should be mitigated as best as possible. Feldman and Ticktin (2010, 6) note that humanity is simultaneously being threatened and threatening. For, even though the

livelihood of humanity is, in many ways, at the mercy of nature, the actions of humans also endanger nature, as humans continue to develop and pollute the environment with fossil fuels and other toxins. For Feldman and Tickin (2010, 12), discussions of humanity devolve into what I refer to as *the haves* and *the have-nots*, where those who are deemed enemies of the state “are denied the quality of being human.” Humanity is thus subjective, and not universally applied. One’s humanity can be stripped away depending upon context and place. Such a tenuous concept is problematic, highlighting the power dynamics at play. Humans have historically manipulated nature to achieve their ends, and oftentimes, animals are at the losing end of this manipulation (*the have-nots*). The increasingly blurred lines between the boundaries of humans and animals (Feldman and Tickin 2010, 21) have led scholars to question whether animals are, in fact, entitled to protection from humans—and if so, how much? Donaldson and Kymlicka (2013, 94), of course, would argue that animals are, naturally, entitled to protection from humans, as humans “have an obligation not to make others worse off through [their] personal actions.” Once humans start to perceive animals as “neighbors, friends, co-citizens, and members of communities,” then they will no longer see animals as merely “vulnerable and suffering individuals” (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2013, 24). Feldman’s and Tickin’s (2010) contention that humans must acknowledge that they, themselves, are a threat can go a long way toward re-defining humanitarianism to incorporate animal rights. Humans must learn to temper their imperialistic tendencies and not so glibly discount the well-being of animals.

A true humanitarian, then, should not merely act in the favor of humans, but also consider the welfare of animals. While it is, of course, of crucial importance to help humans who have been displaced by tragedies such as war or natural disasters, it is equally important to help animals that find themselves displaced by innately human acts. Humans’ continued development, for instance,

forces animals to retreat further and further from their homelands, and increasingly, we see the carnage of this displacement in the form of roadkill. It is unrealistic to argue that humans must cease all development projects and be content with where they are; population booms all but ensure that humans will continue funding projects to build more infrastructure. Yet, an optimal humanitarian would also consider the projects that should be funded to improve—and save—animals' lives. The construction of land bridges, for example, would decrease instances of roadkill and allow animals to more peaceably move between habitats. Moreover, building wind turbines in locations that are not directly in the paths of birds' migration would also serve animals' needs. It is entirely possible to conduct research that traces birds' migration paths, and wind turbines can expressly be placed in locations that are not commonly utilized by birds. More work can be done to mitigate the garbage patches currently in the world's oceans, as this will improve the health of sea animals—as well as humans. Thus, there are ways—and rather practical ones, at that—for humans to undergo development projects that also take the needs of animals into consideration. One need not flourish at the other's expense; instead, both parties share mutual goals (i.e. clean water and air) that can be met in tandem.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the current employments of cosmopolitanism and humanitarianism do not seriously address the obligations that humans owe to animals. Using Donaldson and Kymlicka (2013) as a theoretical guide, I have purported that true cosmopolitans and humanitarians should not only consider what humans can do to help one another, but also simultaneously consider how to improve life on Earth for all *beings*—including, of course, animals. As I stated, humans do not occupy the world alone, and making decisions with only humans' wellness in mind is disingenuous—not to mention dangerous. Humans cannot continue

to invade animals' habitats, destroy natural resources, and expand their development with a "human-first" mentality. Humans and animals must co-exist, and to do so, both parties must learn (i) how to work alongside each other and (ii) where to grant the other sovereignty. In short, humans must learn the difference between a proper intervention in the affairs of animals and an improper one, and must only interfere when doing so does more good than harm.

The theoretical contributions of this paper are thus threefold. First, I have framed Donaldson's and Kymlicka's (2013) argument about the inherent rights that animals possess in an anthropological light, bringing two traditions of literature into direct conversation with one another. While anthropology deeply concerns itself with the affairs of humans and political science primarily focuses upon power relations, the two must be broadened to understand how animals also fit into predetermined notions of hierarchy, power, and sovereignty. Humanitarianism has limited itself by only appealing to humans' instinct to help one another; theories of citizenship have limited themselves by only discussing citizenship in terms of human members of various societies. Inarguably, humans must learn to more meaningfully help animals and view animals as equal co-citizens, deserving of moral and political rights and privileges. Second, I have used the writings of prominent scholars of cosmopolitanism and humanitarianism, expanding their theories to encompass the rights that animals also have as moral beings. And finally, I have suggested feasible ways that humans can start this work of "giving back" to animals.

The world is a singular entity. To preserve it, humans must do more to protect animals' rights and safety. As humans naturally hold more power over animals than animals do over them, it is humans' responsibility to ensure that animals are duly offered the rights and immunities they deserve. In my perception, animals should not be treated as periphery beings, but rather, as equal members and citizens of the world. While national boundaries are, in many ways, superfluous and

should not prevent an American from wanting to help a Filipino in need, for instance, we must also acknowledge that species boundaries are equally unnecessary. If a human can provide a good, decent life for a dog, then he should; the fact that they are different species should not prevent the human from improving the dog's life. (And, as we know, the dog will simultaneously improve the human's life.) In sum, by merely restructuring our moral priorities, we can broaden the meanings of cosmopolitanism and humanitarianism to take into account the moral obligations that humans owe to animals—as well as the political rights that animals, as co-citizens, undeniably possess.

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