

FACULTEIT DER NATUURWETENSCHAPPEN, WISKUNDE EN INFORMATICA

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Ethics and animal experiments

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Ethics and animal experiments

Summary

- What is ethics?
- Changes in animal ethics
 - From anthropocentrism to zoocentrism
 - Extension of the moral community
- The moral status of animals from different ethical perspectives

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What is Ethics?

- Systematic reflection about morality
 - Morality: actually existing values and norms
 - Ethics: thinking about morality
- Ethics asks for the *reasons behind* moral claims
- Process: finding an equilibrium between moral intuitions, rational moral principles and relevant facts
- Function:
 - Societal decision making
 - Accountability on a personal and public level
- "Ethics is merely subjective"?
No: ethics is about inter-subjectivity: about those beliefs and convictions that we share or seek to share

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When is a discussion a moral discussion?

- Normative (→ what is the 'norm'?)
- Aimed at **fundamental, intrinsic values** (good, bad, right, wrong)
- Pretence of **universality** (each moral conviction wants to be more than just ones personal opinion next to which other opinions are equally right)

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Changing moral views on animals

Debate about animal experiments is dominated by the extremes

- "It is wrong!" Animals and humans are equal
- "It is right!" Humans are allowed to do as they please
- "It is only allowed under certain conditions"

Ethics tries to **articulate moral intuitions**, to come up with **justifications**, to **clarify moral dilemmas**, and thus **provide the moral debate with reasonable arguments**
→ arguments and theories

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Changing moral views on animals: anthropocentrism

- Traditional ethics for a long time was *anthropocentric*
- **Anthropocentrism**: humans are central:
 - Only humans count morally.
 - Animals (in themselves) do not have right to moral consideration. (No animal rights)
 - The only value of non-human beings is their usefulness to humans. *Just instrumental value*

→ Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)



Kant's justification of anthropocentrism

- **Only humans** possess rationality, free will and consciousness.
 - humans can make decisions for which they can be held responsible (moral actors)
- All **moral actors** together form a **moral community**
- **Within a moral community, rights and duties exist.**
 - Moral actors should treat each other as 'ends in themselves' and not merely as useful means. We should respect each other's autonomy, humanity and reason.
- If I reduce another human to a mere means to an end, I undermine my own humanity
 - In other words: we have direct duties towards other humans.



Kant's justification of anthropocentrism

- We have direct duties towards other humans.
- But **animals are essentially different** from humans:
 - They do not possess reason, free will, or consciousness.
 - They do not distinguish between right and wrong.
- **Therefore animals are not morally responsible**
 - They are **no moral actors**
 - Thus **no members of the moral community**
 - Therefore they do **not** have **rights nor duties**
- Animals do not have a right to moral consideration



Changing moral views on animals: justifications of anthropocentrism

"Animals are innocent (= not morally responsible)" ?
contrasting view:

- If animals are seen as beings with a soul, who have a social contract with humanity. They perform certain **duties in exchange for food and shelter**. *Therefore*, they can also **be held responsible** if they fail their duties to humanity.
- NB: Animals and insects faced the possibility of criminal charges for several centuries across many parts of Europe, the so-called **animal trials**



Changing moral views on animals: anthropocentrism

But even according to anthropocentrists, humans have certain **moral obligations** with regard to animals: we should not be **unnecessarily cruel** towards animals, but should treat them **humanely**.

2 anthropocentric reasons against animal cruelty:

- Certain people will take offence with cruel treatment of animals (animal abuse as *indecent* behavior)
- if we would get used to animal abuse, we would eventually also get used to the maltreatment of humans (Immanuel Kant) and lose our own humanity

→ These are only **indirect** duties towards animals



Changing moral views on animals: anthropocentrism

20th Century: increased **criticisms of anthropocentrism**:

Our image of animals changed.

- We discover new similarities between humans and non-humans.
- The old **categorical** distinctions between humans and nonhumans, now seem merely **gradual** :
 - Some (all?) animals can experience pain
 - Some animals have a degree of self-consciousness



Experiments show self awareness in animals





Changing moral views on animals: anthropocentrism

20th Century, growing **criticisms of anthropocentrism**:

Our image of animals changed.

- We discover new similarities between humans and non-humans.
- The old **categorical** distinctions between humans and nonhumans, now seems merely **gradual** :
 - Some (all?) animals can experience pain,
 - Some animals have a degree of self-consciousness,
 - Some animals appear to have a primitive form of culture and language

→ Animals are no longer conceived of as automatons, but as beings with their own course of life and a good of their own



Changing moral views on animals: criticisms of anthropocentrism

→ Why should only moral actors have a right to moral consideration?

- We respect the interests of some people that are nonetheless no moral actor in the full sense: babies, demented elderly, deep psychiatric patients

These so-called **marginal cases** prove that moral actorship apparently is NOT a necessary condition for having moral status.

→ Apparently, being that are not moral actors can deserve respect



Changing moral views on animals: criticisms of anthropocentrism

Why, then should this only hold for humans?

Is it more than merely **speciesism**?
(discrimination on membership of the species homo sapiens)

Should not all living beings with equal capabilities be treated with the same respect?

→ Peter Singer: "All animals that can experience pain, deserve moral consideration *for that reason*. We must take their interest into account as well"



Changing moral views on animals: criticisms of anthropocentrism

Animal ethicists and environmental ethicists argue for an extension of our idea of the moral community (*widening of the circle*)

Basic idea: humans are simultaneously part of different communities, each with their own moral obligations.

These communities can be conceived of as concentric circles

We have duties towards those that are nearby, but duties towards more distant beings as well. The weight of the moral duties that we have towards others depend on the distance between us and our fellows



Changing moral views on animals: widening the circle

- Extension of the moral community via concentric circles

We have direct duties towards other people → human rights.
E.g.: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, etc



Changing moral views on animals: widening the circle

- Extension of the moral community via concentric circles

We must take into account the interests of conscious and intelligent beings



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Changing moral views on animals: widening the circle

- Extension of the moral community via concentric circles

We must prevent unnecessary suffering

Community of moral actors
Community of conscious beings
Community of beings that can suffer pain

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Changing moral views on animals: widening the circle

- Extension of the moral community via concentric circles

We must respect all life

Community of moral actors
Community of conscious beings
Community of beings that can suffer pain
Community of all living beings

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Changing moral views on animals: widening the circle

- Extension of the moral community via concentric circles

We must respect the regenerative ability of ecosystems as a whole

Community of moral actors
Community of conscious beings
Community of beings that can suffer pain
Community of all living beings
Community of all living and non-living entities

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part II

Moral status of animals in different ethical theories

Acknowledgement of the moral status of animals can be articulated in different ethical theories / perspectives

Ethical theories try to articulate and justify moral intuitions and experiences.

Roughly speaking, there are 3 basic styles of thinking/ basic perspectives / theories in ethics

- Utilitarianism
- Deontology
- Virtue ethics

In all these perspectives one can try to explain why animals have moral status

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Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:

1. Utilitarianism

- Utilitarianism (utility / purpose - what is it good for?)
 - Basic moral rule: ensure that your actions contribute to an increase of the total amount of wellbeing / happiness
 - Utilitarianism is a consequentialist ethic: judge an action by it's consequences:
 - are they advantageous or not?
 - Purpose in terms of produces happiness and suffering
 - Utilitarianism is unbiased. Only amount of suffering counts
 - Aggregative: according to utilitarianists can ethics be traced back to a *moral calculus*

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Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:

1. Utilitarianism

- Peter Singer ('Animal Liberation' 1975) tries to give animals their place within a utilitarian framework
 - Suffering of animals = suffering of humans
 - Only the amount of suffering counts!
 - Animals experiments: speciesism alone is insufficient justification. The capacity to suffer should be the only relevant factor!
 - Marginal cases. If we do not accept experiments with people in coma – why should we accept animal experiments? (justice)



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:

1. Utilitarianism

- However, in utilitarianism some animals experiments could still be justified:
- If the prevented suffering of humans resulting from an experiment (e.g. new medicine) outweighs the expected suffering of animals, then an animal experiment can still be justifiable.
 - the final total good should outweigh the moral costs

Singer stresses, however, that the prevention of human suffering should not *automatically* always outweigh animal suffering.



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:

1. Utilitarianism

- Advantages of utilitarianism:
 - Clear
 - Consistent
 - Pragmatic
 - Ordinary everyday reasoning



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:

1. Utilitarianism

- Disadvantages of utilitarianism:
 - Sacrificing individuals for the common good?
 - Calculus?
 - 20 times small suffering versus 5 grief suffering?
 - Only the suffering and wellbeing are taken into account:
 - this would mean, that one can not make any reservation as soon as the animal does not suffer. However, many people believe that even then one can have serious and justified reservations about some animals experiments (Genetic modification)



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:

2. Deontology

Deontology = duty-ethics (Immanuel Kant)

- Point of departure: our actions should be in compliance with our duties as moral beings.

General rule (categorical imperative) :

Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

(± golden rule: "treat others as you would like to be treated.")



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:

2. Deontology

- According to Kant, reason, separate from all empirical experience, is capable of determining the principle according to which all ends can be determined as moral, and it is this fundamental principle of moral reason which is known as the *categorical imperative*.

Deontology is interested in those things that have to be respected in themselves

- E.g.: it is wrong to lie, irrespective of the circumstances



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:

2. Deontology

- Categorical imperative: **Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.**
- According to Kant, *reason alone* is capable of determining the principle according to which all ends can be determined as moral.
 - E.g.: Lying is in contradicts with our duty
 - Why? If everyone would be allowed to lie, then people have no reason to believe each other. But then it would be useless to lie in the first place. Therefore, it makes no reasonable sense to allow lying would be allowed.
 - lying can not be established as a general rule of moral behavior. (A similar argument exists against murder)



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:
2. Deontology

- We should have respect for intrinsic value of the animal
 - An animal is different from a stone
 - An animal leads a life of its own, and has a 'good' of its own
 - An animal deserves respect because it is value on itself

We have a duty to respect an animals as an end in itself, and should not treat an animals as if it were merely an instrument.

cf. human dignity: Although I am allowed to 'use' another person for my means (for for company, as research subject), I am not allowed to reduce that person to an instrument for meeting my needs (e.g. as a slave), because in disrespecting his dignity I lose my own dignity



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:
2. Deontology

Example: Tom Regan's ideas on 'animal rights'

- Central to Regan's philosophy is the *subject-of-a-life* criterion:
- Any being with a **complex mental life, including perception, desire, belief, memory, intention, and a sense of the future** –among other attributes, and which Regan spends much time exploring – is a subject of a life.
- All "subjects of life" have a **basic right** to be treated with respect. There can be no *utilitarian trade-off*.
- Why? Each subject of a life cares about his or her life. And therefore has 'inherent value.'
- Individuals have moral rights based on their inherent value.
- Inherent value does not come in degrees (one either is or is not a subject of a life)
- Regan does not deny that experience and usefulness to others do have value too, but distinguishes this sort of value from the inherent value of the individual



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:
2. Deontology

- All deontological concepts in animal ethics somehow indicate that there are fundamental values at stake in our relation with animals that have nothing to do with animal welfare:
 - "Subject of life" (Regan)
 - "Integrity"
 - Telos – a good of its own* (Taylor)
 - "Flourishing"
 - Self-reliance
 - "Hands of"
 - "We should adjust the stable to the animal and not vice versa"
 - "In animal experimentation, we should not reduce animals to mere instruments"
 - Genetic modification can be a problem even if the animal in question does not suffer → integrity



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:
2. Deontology : integrity concerns

- From deontology, one could even object to certain procedures with animals that do not cause animal suffering, but ...
- that interfere with the wholeness and integrity of an animal;
 - that inhibit species specific behavior of an animal;
 - that deprive an animal of the capacity to sustain itself independently in a surrounding that is fitting for the species
- concept of **integrity**



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:
2. Deontology : integrity concerns

- Docking a dog's ears and tail.*
- Breeding of double-muscled beef (dikbilrunderen), that can only calve with human assistance (Caesarian).*
- (SF-scenario) The egg machine – By means of genetic technology breeding of chickens without consciousness – innocent meat?*



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:
2. Deontology

For deontologists, moral problems arise when there is an underlying conflict between different duties

E.g.:

- Our duty to treat animals in a human way, and prevent unnecessary cruelty
- can contradict with*
- Our duty to help the sick and needy whenever possible

→ The question at stake is what duty outweighs the other in any concrete case. Some animal experiments can eventually be justified, but ultimately, animal experiments will remain a necessary wrong



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:
3. Virtue ethics

- Virtue ethics does not look at the consequences or the intentions of an act, but at the character, and attitude of the one who acts
 - According to Aristotle, a virtuous act testifies of 'a stable equilibrium of the soul'
 - → "be 'temperate' and avoid extremes"
 - E.g. the virtue of courage is not the absence of fear (which may be a vice), but the ability to feel the appropriate amount of fear; → courage is a **mean** between timidity and overconfidence.
- Do our lab experiments testify of a wise judgment?



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:
3. Virtue ethics

- "the rational argumentation of both utilitarianism and 'animal rights' ethics fail to capture those features of moral experience that allow us to really see why treating animals badly is wrong"
- Certain experiments with animals may be wrong
- not so much because it they violate the animal's rights
 - or because the moral gains do not outweigh the moral cost
- but rather:
- because by mistreating animals, we fail to be kind, sensitive, compassionate, mature, and thoughtful beings



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:
3. Virtue ethics

- Although laboratory animals themselves do not play a direct role in virtue ethics, indirectly they come into play via the attitude of researchers
 - Is this researcher **trustworthy**?
 - Does this researcher show **discretion** and **carefulness**?
 - Is this researcher **sensitive** to the vulnerability of animals?
 - Is this researcher **not too frivolous** about the 'costs' of his research for to his laboratory animal?
 - Is he/she **not too narrow minded** in his approach?
 - Does the researcher have a **balanced view** of the importance of his research?
- The attitude of the researchers matters in decisions of the animal experiments commission (DEC)



Moral status of animals in different ethical theories:
3. Virtue ethics

- Virtue ethics arguments against animal experiments focus on what we ourselves become like by treating animals badly.
- Virtue ethics focuses our attention to other themes and questions
- E.g.: moral reservations with regard to bio-industry
- Similar objections against the grand scale of animal testing and killing:
- The almost industrial scale of certain research laboratories can prevent us from seeing the individual research animal





The Dutch Experiments on Animals Act

Central paradox with regard to animal experiments

- We consider animal experiments to be permitted, because morally speaking there are relevant differences between people and animals
- However, animal experiments work because animals resemble humans (physiologically)

→ This tension can also be discerned in the Dutch *Experiments on Animals Act* (Wet op de Dierproeven)



Dutch Experiments on Animals Act

- **Anthropocentric basis for WOD:**

WOD presupposes that in principle animals experiments should be permitted.

- There is a morally relevant difference between humans and non-humans
(→ marginal cases show this distinction to be problematic)

- **Zoocentric basis of the WOD**

Animals experiments are *never permitted, unless* one has very severe reasons to justify them.

WOD acknowledges the *'intrinsic value'* of laboratory animals

- Animals should not be reduced to instruments.
- At the centre is the balance between animal suffering against benefits for humans

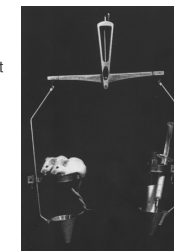


Animal ethics committee (DEC) and its ethical assessment of proposed animal experiments

First consideration: Are there alternatives?
Have the 3 R's been taken into account?
→ Replacement, Reduction, Refinement

If so, then the next consideration is:

"Does the **importance of an experiment to humans outweigh** the **expected suffering of the animal?**"



→ utilitarian framework?



Animal ethics committee (DEC) and its ethical assessment of proposed animal experiments

In reality, the ethical judgment of a DEC is much broader:

Scientific and societal **importance of experiment** (to humans) must outweigh the **costs to animals** (expected suffering AND loss of integrity)

From utilitarian perspective: Cost-Benefit-analysis

Human wellbeing / quality of life ↔ animal suffering

From a deontological perspective: What are our duties?

Duties towards humans ↔ duties towards animals

From a virtue perspective: is it wise?

Sensitive? Conscientious? Careful? Attentive? Balanced?



Concluding remarks

- Animal ethics committees do not want to prevent researchers from doing their work, but want to assure of that researchers ask *themselves* seriously the question whether the use of animals is justified in any particular experiment.
- Remember: An animal is not *just* a measuring instrument, but also a living being with a life of its own.
- Go visit your animals! It helps you remember what is at stake.