

# Searching for the Animal of Animal Ethics

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## The interface between animal ethics and animal science

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### Abstract

In order to elaborate on the interface between animal ethics and animal science, I'll start by saying something about each of these fields. Animal ethics is a growing field of research covering a range of issues (from strict theoretical to different spheres of application), all kinds of non-human animals as well as human-animal relationships. Above stating that (some) animals are morally relevant (criteria for being morally relevant may differ though, for example whether being sentient, alive or created by God) animal ethicists tend to discuss at length what is an ethically correct interpretation of "morally relevant" (Röcklinsberg, 2001). Some interpret it in terms of interests, some in terms of rights, and others in terms of telos, to mention the most well known directions. (Singer, 1990; Regan, 1983; and Rollin 1995). Hereby animal ethics is different from animal protection-movements, which have the outspoken aim to protect animals from human misuse, or use, focussing on improved practice independent of such theoretical distinctions.

Similarly animal science is a wide and heterogeneous field covered by for example biology, ethology and veterinary medicine. Striving for being "pure" science, moral statements are seldom made. This goes also for the narrower field of animal welfare science, where no researcher is expected to declare the own position on what is allowed to do with a "morally relevant" being, the ones in focus of research. What is claimed though, from both scientific community and society, is well-performed research, i.e. research coherent and founded good research ethics. This is a crucial point for the connection between animal ethics and animal (welfare) science.

Since animal ethics per se is ethics applied on animals, i.e. the human-animal-relationship, a relation to scientific findings is necessary. Animal ethics is thus dependent on a sound scientific base and results emanating from good research practice. In case of the opposite, for example unclear or irrelevant hypothesises, badly treated animals or conclusions drawn from a too restricted sample results are not only unreliable, also

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unawareness of risk of unpredictable consequences will be the case among researchers. (Nordgren and Röcklinsberg, 2005). If so, a given evaluation of results often presented as neutral facts ought to be questioned by animal ethicists and scientists alike.

As stated above there is no common moral statement among animal ethicists in general above “animals are morally relevant”. Knowing from science that those animals used in medical research, in farming and as companion animals are biologically able to experience pain in a way similar to ourselves, most animal ethicists however draw the conclusion that unnecessary suffering or pain is ethically objectionable regarding animals, not only humans. The philosophical question is of course what “unnecessary” means. Discussing the animal ethics – animal science relation, it has to be related to the issue of defining, describing or understanding pain/suffering. In order for an animal ethicist to state what is meant by “unnecessary” suffering, basic knowledge about the animal is necessary, and this is one point where sound science is crucial. This can be exemplified by relating to fish. It has for many years been argued that mammals are capable of suffering and thereby included in the sphere of moral relevance, whereas fish often have not. I.e. based on available animal (fish) science ethicists arguing that sentience is a core criteria for being morally relevant have been correct to exclude fish from their agenda (however animal ethicists arguing for moral relevance based on “being alive” or created by God etc. may not). Recent research and ethical elaboration show however, that there are good reasons to include them in the sphere of sentient beings. “...the sensory system of teleosts can detect noxious stimuli, and that some kind of phenomenal consciousness, allowing the fish to feel pain, seems to be present.” (Lund et al, 2007). Fish can thus be regarded as a recent example of the need of continuous contact between animal science and animal ethics. Solid animal ethics is dependent on solid scientific research.

Solid science does not equal neutral science though, since scientists are not and cannot be fully value neutral. Choice of research issues, research setting, detecting and evaluation of results are dependent on values, interests and perspective by the individual researcher. In my perspective neutrality is nothing to long for, rather awareness and openness about the “fact that there are few neutral facts” is a way forward. In the lecture I’ll suggest a hermeneutic meeting and balancing between animal science, research ethics and animal ethics, taking my point of departure in the reasoning above, as well as in a discussion of the triangular interrelation between facts, values and intuition.

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