

Searching for the Animal of Animal Ethics

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Positive moral duties to dependent animals

Robert Heeger

Professor of Ethics, Utrecht University, Ethics Institute, Heidelberglaan 2, NL-3508 TC Utrecht, the Netherlands

E-mail: f.r.heeger@uu.nl

Abstract

Philosophical animal ethics has been characterized as an area of both increasing diversity and unrealised potential. The present paper points in the direction of an unrealised potential by raising the problem of positive moral duties to dependent animals such as companion animals or farmed animals. It deals with the question of whether we to these animals have duties beyond the moral floor of non-interference duties. Our discussion is divided in two parts. First, we try to determine on what basis such duties could be defended. Second, we make some proposals about the content of such duties. The first part is connected with the debate about the moral status of animals. We set our view apart from discussions which appeal only to one criterion of moral status, e.g. the property of sentience that grounds negative duties of non-interference. In addition, we distance ourselves from the assumption that only intrinsic properties of animals can justify ascribing moral status to them. We think that we also have duties to animals due to our connectedness with them. In order to ground both negative and positive duties we plead for a multi-criteria approach that also includes relations. The second part of the paper is about the content of positive duties to dependent animals. Recognizing that each animal has a good of its own we argue for being concerned about its dignity and its flourishing.