

Searching for the Animal of Animal Ethics

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Animal domestication: Primordial sin or fair contract?

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Abstract

The moral imperative of the "Animal Rights" movement as represented for instance by Tom Regan is "do not treat animals as you wouldn't treat your fellow men!" Surely the idea of breeding a group of people so that they become totally dependent upon their breeders and in addition maximize certain exploitable traits like milk or hair production, seems abhorrent today. But domestication took place many thousands of years ago. Our ancestors' behavior was probably in an intermediate stage between that of animals shaped by evolution and that of conscious moral agents. Domestication at that stage could be regarded as akin to symbiosis. Symbiosis, on the other hand, shares some characteristics with fair contracts.

I suggest that a "domestication contract" could be formulated, which may be acceptable to humans, thus satisfying the demands of animal rightists. The terms of this contract are however a far cry from modern industrialized exploitation of domesticated animals.