

Searching for the Animal of Animal Ethics

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Is it being human or being us that makes the difference?

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Abstract

The question about the descriptive differences between humans and animals might be important in its own right, but it is argued that it is of little importance to the problem of whether it is ethically legitimate to give priority to us humans over animals. This ethical discrimination does not depend on (i.e. the difference in ethical status does not directly supervene on) any difference in terms of universal properties. Rejecting the principle of universalization, it is argued that our ethical importance is based on *the indexical property of being (one of) us*, not on universal characteristics like being human, being rational, being moral agents, possessing language, etc. Some of these universal properties might be important as psycho-sociological, causal factors behind the formation of those social bonds that make us form our community. Our "we-ness" is not definable in terms of these factors however; it is irreducibly indexical.