

Moving beyond the horizon of Homocentrism

What is an animal and what is a human?



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The basic question about the categorical division into (nonhuman) “animals” and “humans” (*homo sapiens*), brings up, probably before the question of its moral implications, the question about what exactly hides beneath both these big generalized identities. Why has the view about that what-animals-are and that what-humans-are finally lead to us only viewing animals under biological terms today? Is it enough to attribute only an instinctual behaviour to nonhuman animals? Is it the ‘fault’ of animals themselves that we can’t relate to them in any further way than how we are relating to them currently? ...

If we don’t accept the view that nonhuman animals are those who have to stand below humans within a frame given by a biological, divine or philosophical hierarchy-of-being, then such a claim doesn’t have to be solely morally motivated, but it can mean that we question the way in which both identities („animal“ and „human“) are understood. We can ask if the interpretation of the characteristics that are considered to make up the marking dividers within a human-animal hierarchy, are in reality a negation of the autonomous value of otherness in nonhuman animals. We know that the single criterion that serves as our standard is the human parameter, i.e. the human model counts as the ideal, as the standard, for creating norms. So what happens if we put this standard of measurement into doubt?

Conclusions deduced in the fields of biology and psychology, with those being the main sectors that deal with the explicability of animal identity, nail the perspectives on relevant characteristics and on how animal characteristics (in either, the case of humans or nonhuman animals) have to express themselves and in which exact correlation they have to become „measurable“ in order to reach a certain relevance or meaningfulness from a human point of perspective.

So the problem lies in the question why humans won’t accept nonhuman animal autonomy when it can’t be made fathomable through the perception of a value-defined comparison. Why are own animal criteria and why is their independent meaningfulness (for the sake of themselves and for their situation within their natural and social inter- and co-specific

contexts) rendered irrelevant when they cross our perspectival glance, when these animal criteria could also lay outside of our hierarchical-framework.

To be willing to accept an autonomous meaningfulness of nonhuman animals, means to question the deindividualization that our views and explanations about nonhuman animals purport, the views that allows us to set nonhuman animals in comparison to us, as the-human-group, and that seek to sort out how the meaning of nonhuman animals might relate to anything that matters to us. The deindividualized view of nonhuman animals almost automatically goes along with a subtraction of their value in terms of meaningfulness and so we land at the moral question.

If we can view nonhuman animals, apart from their localization in the realm of biology, for example also in a sociological context, then we could ask the question: „How do people act towards nonhumans animals?“ Can we explain the behaviour of humans towards nonhuman animals solely by referring to the common notion that one can't really behave in any particular way towards nonhuman animals because they are instinctively set and communicatively restricted compared to us, and that thus our behaviour towards them can't contain an own quality of a social dynamic? Can we legitimate our behaviour by referring to the „stupidity“ that we interpret into nonhuman animal behaviour? We probably can't ask any of these questions a sociologist. Most sociologists would most likely prefer to deal with the Animal Rights movement instead of dealing with the *interaction* between humans and nonhuman animals overall.

Biology has already determined what the identity of nonhuman animals is, and even the Animal Rights movement has satisfied itself with placing the moral question somewhere out of reach by accepting the explanation of the identity of animals as something strictly biological.

A geometrical image (- an observation alone is not necessarily bound to a moral conclusion)

Imagine two abstract groups. Group A consists of triangles and everything that surrounds them becomes mathematically relevant to their own triangular form. This happens as all which either resembles or doesn't resemble a triangle gets a certain color. Group B are circles. Now group A says that group B aren't triangles (because A are triangles) and that they also weren't squares or rectangles. Does any reason follow from this that they could exclude the circles as equally valid geometrical figures? The triangles are different compared with the circles, but both are geometrical figures and insofar of an equal value. They can be correlated due to each of their geometrical qualities, even when the circles do not match the characteristics of the triangles

Sociology does not question the social interaction between humans and nonhuman animals. They don't check that relation from their viewpoint, because the view held on the human relation towards animals is already set. The hierarchichal empire built by the natural sciences (and along with it the humanistic knowledge on which the natural sciences base upon) rules every need for any further examination and consideration of this relationship out.

Regarding the question whether animals can be regarded in any way as moral agents, one has to ask, does moral exist outside the human concept of morality? When we discuss morality we presume that the substance matter which the term comprises came into life through our perceptions, and because we define what „moral“ means we can claim a described phenomenon as solely ours. What does morality consist of? Does morality solely exist

because of a theoretical framework? One can doubt that. Morality on the one side has something to do with basic social interaction, through that morality gains value. On the other side are the superordinate agreements about morality, which are declared and decided upon by an elite or defining group/process, but through that the agreements about morality only contain a forced validity, which is disconnected to its own basis, that is the meaning of social interaction between beings, i.e. the construct about morality excludes that what lays outside of its hierarchy (other forms of interaction that contain „social values“ ...). But there does exist that what I perceive and experience in my daily encounters as „morally okay“ between nonhuman animals or humans in the whole environmental context, and there is that what a book can tell me about it or what I can learn in a university about it or finally also that what society shows me as a norm. The superordinate agreements in regards to morality are not of more importance, but they are simply the consequences that follow after an action that takes place in reality/practice (like in politics there is a practical aspect, through which everything is political, and hierarchical abstractly organisational aspect.) When we discard the human decorum that surrounds and sticks to the word morality, we can say that every action has a moral implication.

Animals have a very different philosophy-of-living in a neutral comparison to our philosophy of life, and I believe one can use the term philosophy here to describe the yet unnamed phenomenon in nonhumans animals of how they structure and perceive their own lives. I ask myself whether the human problem with nonhuman animals isn't rather to be found in the differences in their „philosophies of life“, rather than in the reasons of biological differences or in an assumed moral impotence on their behalf, etc. The problem always seems to be the difference and the coinciding similarities. In many aspects we equal nonhumans animals a lot, but in the aspect of our dominance claim, we see nonhuman animals as „the losers“, the bottom of the evolutionary or divinely ordained hierarchical order on which we can postulate our power.

That nonhuman animals are the losers amongst the biological animals is even the attitude that many of their advocates purport. I hardly ever met anybody that reckons a unique, self-sufficient quality seen to be in the closeness and distance amongst different animals (including human animals). In the forefront of every argumentation there is always: how are they in comparison to us. As if humans and nonhuman animals had to compete on an „equal scale“ ... and another related argumentation goes: how much of their „instinct“ could possibly entitle them to be granted rights that would protect them from humans (whereby it is questionable whether those who have prejudices against you, can really grant you your own rights.)

Human society, it seems, will always consider the „us“ and the „we“ as objectively more important, insofar as the „we“, the how „we are“, is the criterion, and nonhumans animals are measured against it. The crucial point is to accept others and to accept the validity of otherness. For the others *and* us?

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