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► **To cite this version:**

Bruno Villalba. Animal Citizenship. Handbook of the Anthropocene, Springer International Publishing, pp.1001-1006, 2023, 10.1007/978-3-031-25910-4\_164 . hal-04244659

**HAL Id: hal-04244659**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04244659>**

Submitted on 16 Oct 2023

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## Animal Citizenship

Bruno Villalba<sup>1</sup>

***Abstract: For as long as humans have been on the planet, their interactions with animals have been based on a continuous relationship – sometimes characterised by conflict, but sometimes by mutual benefit. Whilst the predominant relationship between humans and animals is one of exploitation, with humans using animals for their own benefit, animals have also been the subject of numerous symbolic relationships. For centuries, religions and scientific knowledge have minimised animals' identity. The advent of animal ethics, and the contributions of ethology, law and animal welfare activism, have profoundly altered the relationship between humans and animals. It is now recognised that humans and animals share the same fate, menaced in equal measure by the threat of ecological breakdown. In this light, it is important to examine the political status of animals.***

Palaeolithic humans were responsible for the extinction of large numbers of megafauna species. Palaeontological data show that these species died out around the time as humans colonised their habitats (Brook and Bowman 2004). Animal populations were driven into decline by hunting; animal habitats were degraded; and animals' food sources were permanently eliminated as a result of agricultural practices (for example, the use of fire).

In addition, the evolution of the living world (spatial distribution and number of species) is dependent on climate shifts (Barnosky et al., 2004). For this reason, palaeolithic humans came to hold complex symbolic beliefs about animals (Groenen and Groenen, 2016). Thus, we can see that, since the very advent of humanity, our species' interactions with animals have been shaped by a continuous relationship – sometimes one of conflict; at other times, one of mutual benefit. The coexistence of man and beast, in an extremely complex and fragile relationship, has also been shaped by ecological shifts, and resulting alterations in the ways in which the two species interact. As the Anthropocene heralds an acceleration of social and ecological change, we urgently need to reassess these interactions and the aims defining the constantly shifting fabric linking humans and other animals (Steffen et al., 2007).

Intensive use of animals as tools

Thousands of years of Aristotelian, Christian and Cartesian thinking have led to a deep-rooted belief in a clear, insurmountable divide between humans and beasts. Animals are thought of as defined by what they *lack*: the power of reasoning, altruism, intent, independence, and imagination – with no sense of time or of their place in the world. Ultimately, dualist western thinking, based on the idea of a separation between humans and the natural world, has shaped how we understand and relate to animals. However, in the eyes of the ancient Greeks, gods and humans alike are very close to animals – the boundaries between them are porous, and the qualities of the one may easily be passed to the other. Even today, many peoples have a relationship with animals based on proximity, without any fundamental separation. In animist ontology, non-humans and humans, while they may be different in body, have the same inner essence (Descola, 2014). Dualism also impacts a broad swathe of humanity itself. Animalisation (the idea that a person is animal-like) marginalises certain colonised peoples (this is racialism). Thus, the idea of animality becomes profoundly repellent! Everyone has their place in a hierarchy based on social status, colour and species (amongst other discriminating factors). In any case, the anthropomorphic culture so typical of our society makes it easy to

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distance ourselves from animals. Animals are seen as serving human goals, helping free humanity from the constraints of the natural world. Animals greatly increase humans' working capabilities, keep humans safe, help them to conquer new lands and build towards the future. Both polytheistic and monotheistic religions reinforce this instrumentalisation of animals, because they present humans as being singularly superior (as the creation of the gods, the spark of God). Thus, humans enjoy a position of privilege in the hierarchy of species – being distinct from, and superior to, other species. Humans, too, constantly reinforce the idea of animals as being tools and little more – for example, by classifying and selecting/destroying the living world, and distinguishing between wild and domesticated animals (Darwin, 1868). On the other hand, humans are forever creating symbolic representations of animals – even those animals which we are destroying: images which glorify animals' strength, independence, craftiness, and so forth.

#### A step toward animal emancipation

Since the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, and especially the 18<sup>th</sup>, political philosophers have been examining otherness: the otherness of citizens, children, the wild and the wilderness, and animals. Jean-Jacques Rousseau looks at animals' place on the spectrum of politics, thus stepping away from the purely corporeal view of animals popularised by Descartes. Rousseau takes account of animals' sensitivity and feelings. However, he does not set out to define humans and animals as being equal. Being subject to the laws of nature, and in view of their limited capacity for reasoning, animals are viewed as incapable of bettering themselves; humans, meanwhile, are seen as having the ability to overcome the laws of nature. What is unique to humans is historicity: the capacity to improve themselves in light of what has gone before. Animals do not share this capacity. The above notwithstanding, Rousseau believes that animals are a model of the perfect balance that humans have forfeited by interfering with their own natural condition. Thus, animals are celebrated as moral beings, and Rousseau believes that as such, they should be included in the community of rights. Unfortunately, this idea of his gained little traction.

In British philosopher Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian approach, a balance must be struck between the interests of beings that are capable of having interests, regardless of species. Utilitarianism holds that human actions should be judged on the basis of their consequences. The question which must be asked, in the view of utilitarians, is not: *are animals capable of rational thought?* or *can they speak?* but rather, *are they capable of suffering?* (*An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 1789). As they clearly can suffer as the result of our actions, morality dictates that we should alter our relationship with animals.

Three centuries later, *animal ethics* emerged in the 1970s. Subscribers to this school of philosophical thought set out to examine humans' moral responsibility towards animals, on an individual basis. Animal ethics includes a number of subsidiary doctrines, with two main approaches. The first is welfarism, represented by one of its first major contributors, Peter Singer (*Animal liberation*, 1975). The second is the theory of rights, formulated largely by Tom Regan (*The case for animal rights*, 1983). In Singer's view, our current moral attitudes toward animals are based on anthropocentric prejudices which are equally unjust as racism or sexism. Thus, equal consideration ought to be given to the interests of beings capable of suffering, whether physical or emotional. Singer advocates the principle of equal consideration of interests in favour of all sentient creatures, believing we should radically alter our attitude toward animals and seek to ensure their *welfare*. Regan's theory of animal rights is based on the observation that, to all living beings, whether or not they are capable of rational thought, their own life matters (thus, all living beings are *equal from the perspective of livingness*). This shared biological existence overrides differences between species on the basis of cognitive ability. Thus, such differences can no longer justify different levels of rights, or the belief that humans alone have moral capacity. Since then, philosophers have delved into the complexity

of the relations between the animal and human worlds (Pelluchon, 2019). Animal ethics has helped legitimise movements in favour of animals (anti-speciesist theories, the concept of animal welfare, veganism, etc.). These movements, in turn, have reshaped public perceptions of animals.

From the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, into the early 21<sup>st</sup>, ethology – the study of animal behaviour – has experienced a major shift in the way in which animals' social interactions are observed and explained. *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions?*, wonders Vinciane Despret (2016). This change of direction was the result of a significant epistemological shift, driven notably by a number of trendsetters (such as Konrad Lorenz), but particularly by researchers Jane Goodall and Thelma Rowell, who changed the way in which observations are selected and interpreted. Paying closer attention to the power dynamics, these women refined the vague notions which, up until that point, scientists had projected onto primate social lives: the ideas of hierarchy, competition, the alpha male and his harem, a war for existence with 'every animal for itself', etc. For example, they demonstrated that primate hierarchy is not established through coercion alone, and that decisions on collective action often involve a process of negotiation between group members. Were ethologists to 'ask the right questions' of animals, and abandon the reductionist presuppositions of behaviourists, then even with their skewed human perspective, they would be able to observe rich and complex realities in the animal kingdom (Despret, 2016). Ethologists have concluded that animals have mental awareness of life, and their intellectual capabilities have been demonstrated by numerous observations. This branch of science has also proven that language use and moral awareness cannot be used as the basis for so clear-cut a distinction between humans and animals, whereby animals are perceived as inferior. Intelligence, consciousness, language, culture, politics, affection, suffering, empathy, the capacity for socialisation and learning, etc., can no longer be viewed as the exclusive preserve of humans, because examples of these qualities can be found in many animals (de Waal, 2017). The *Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness* (2012) concludes that non-human animals have consciousness similar to that of humans. Thus stripped of what it had been believed made us unique, humans were forced, once more, to accept our role as an integral part of the living world.

Animal rights reflect this shift. Gradually, animals' status within the world has changed. European institutions have developed regulations which favour the wellbeing and humane treatment of animals raised for human consumption, and stricter controls are exercised on animal testing (both for scientific and for commercial purposes). There has been increasing support for 'de-animalisation' of animals in the food industry. There has also been an improvement in the status enjoyed by domestic animals: since 2006, in Britain, they have had legal status in their own right. In France, animals were once classed as 'movable property' (in the Civil Code of 1815). In 1976, they were raised to the status of 'sentient beings', whose owner must house them in conditions compatible with the biological needs of their species. Then, in 2015, they were reclassified as 'living beings with sensitivity' (this classification precludes animals from being treated as movable property). The same is not true, however, of wild animals, and the cruellest practices, such as the *corrida* of bulls, hunting for sport, cockfighting, ritual slaughter, or certain forms of fishing or livestock rearing. In 2021, a law was passed to combat mistreatment of animals, but nevertheless, there seems to be no question of endowing animals with actual rights.

A step towards animal citizenship... perhaps

The changing perception of animals (in terms of their cognitive and relational capacity), their legal status, and their role in society, have profoundly altered the relationship between humans and animals. However, worldwide, we kill somewhere between 60 and 140 billion animals for food each year – and meat-eating is still on the rise. The wild living world is collapsing at an

ever-increasing rate (according to reports from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, IPBES; Kolbert, 2015), and domestic animals are losing genetic diversity. In addition, intensive livestock farming accounts for 15% of greenhouse gas emissions, consumes 45% of water reserved for the production of animal feed alone, and 60% of available land worldwide. However, in the Anthropocene, humans and animals are united in danger: we are, equally, threatened by global climate shifts, and must find new ways of working together in order to deal with that threat.

The development of a new 'relational framework' linking humans and the rest of the living world presents the opportunity to improve the balance in that relationship (Morton, 2012). From this standpoint, one of the most promising strategies would be to restore a genuinely political relationship between humans and animals, so as to better organise the living space available to the *polis*. In *Zoopolis* (2013), Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka put forward a political theory of domesticity: the relationship which we must inevitably have with animals necessitates that we recognise animal rights. Some are negative rights (such as the right not to suffer); some are positive (such as the right to be represented within the political community). Beyond this, though, Donaldson and Kymlicka lay the foundations for *animal citizenship*. Animals must be endowed with an extended form of status, which implies a type of citizenship: the categories of sovereignty, nationality (residence) and political participation can now be extended to them. Naturally, this raises important questions about the relation between *Animalism* and *Humanism*. However, such questioning must be adapted to take account of the dire situation now facing all earthlings, both human and non-human (Del Amo, 2020).

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