
Ethical Perspectives on Animals in the Renaissance and Early Modern Period edited by Cecilia Muratori and Burkhard Dohm

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Recent years have seen a surge in studies of the history of attitudes toward animals, not least from a social, intellectual, and ethical perspective, as well as in relevant studies of early modern Europe. Yet, as Cecilia Muratori's and Burkhard Dohm's new collection of essays proves, there remains much to be said regarding this topic. In their introduction, the editors declare their wish to approach early modern attitudes toward animals without regarding the Cartesian view of animal automatism as a central point of interpretation. More importantly, they aim to address what they see as a lacuna in current scholarship, the lack of attention to the early modern ethical consideration of real animals, not just symbolic ones, and of any attempt to understand what 'animal ethics', to use a modern term, might have meant in the past. Consequently, a central theme of the articles in the book is the consideration of rationality and speech as criteria for inclusion in the realm of justice and how the possibility of this ethical outlook on animals developed in early modern thought. The editors' claim for originality may be somewhat overstated since scholars have for some time been discussing early modern ethical views of animals. Yet this does not detract from the quality and versatility of what is an important collection.

The volume begins with Amber Carpenter's article, 'Eating Your Own: Exploring Conceptual Space for Moral Restraint', in which she discusses the classical, mainly ancient Greek, sources of philosophical attitudes toward animals, with particular emphasis on the concept of *δίκη*, the sense of right. It is our possession of this sense of justice, not the possibility of animals possessing it, which in Carpenter's estimation should preclude the eating of animals. Among other issues underlining human/animal relations is metempsychosis;

yet in this context, the author regards the Buddhist approach, rather than the Greek one, as evincing a truly sensitive attitude toward animals.

Matthias Roick's 'Animals at Court: Ethical Perspectives on Animals in Neapolitan Humanist Thought' discusses three 15th-century Neapolitan figures: Antonio Beccadelli, Lorenzo Valla, and Giovanni Pontano. Beccadelli's discussion of King Alfonso of Aragon's act of saving an ass which had fallen into mud centered on the relationship of the king and his people, yet also left room for a certain sensitivity to animals in themselves. Valla rejected the hierarchical Aristotelian taxonomy of living beings in favor of a view of animals as inferior to human beings in degree, not kind. Nevertheless, Valla did not specifically pursue the ethical consequences that this entailed for the treatment of animals. Pontano discussed the attitude toward courtly animals which were maintained for the glory of rulers. Like the other two figures discussed in this article, his approach hinted at possibilities for ethical consideration of animals which were developed, however, only to a limited extent.

Gabriella Zuccolin's 'Living with Animals at a 15th-Century Court: Physiognomy, Dietetics—and Poetry' is an intricate discussion of various aspects of attitudes toward animals in the context of early modern court culture, where animals were often in close proximity to human beings. Contemporaneous attitudes toward animals both established new empirical criteria for discussing them, yet also enabled expressions of growing sensitivity toward them. These varying approaches were exemplified by the court physician Michele Savonarola, whose physiognomic writings tended to blur the line between humans and animals, while his dietetic discussions were less sensitive to animals. In courtly surroundings, it was poetry and epistolary writing that most evinced affection for animals, mainly pets.

Nicola Panichi's article, 'Montaigne and Animal Ethics', presents a specific interpretation of one of the better-known figures in studies of early modern attitudes toward animals. Panichi centers on Montaigne's cosmology and on Plutarch's influence on his sensitive consideration of animals. Montaigne's reading of Plutarch entailed seeing animals as inferior to human beings in degree, not kind, yet also as morally superior to the latter in certain respects. While Panichi does not mention the terms 'primitivism' and 'theriophilia' (love of animals), the discussion basically addresses the notions underlying these concepts and their amenability to early modern critiques of human pride. One significant point which Panichi does not discuss is the self-ironic

limits to Montaigne's theriophily. Montaigne, after all, proclaimed his recognition of the suffering of hunted animals while admitting that he nonetheless enjoyed hunting. This gap between theoretical and practical sensitivity to animal suffering seems not to have been a rare historical phenomenon—it is found later in the work of such prominent writers as Rousseau—and should be kept in mind when discussing philosophical attitudes toward them.

Guido Giglioni's 'Life and its Animal Boundaries: Ethical Implications in Early Modern Theories of Universal Animation' presents an interesting discussion of early modern panpsychism, monopsychism, and hylozoism, beginning with an overview of the debate between Pierre Gassendi and Jan Baptiste van Helmont regarding whether human beings were carnivorous, with the former defending vegetarianism while advocating an ethical sensitivity toward animals. Giglioni then outlines Tommaso Campanella's combination of panpsychism and anthropocentrism, and Giordano Bruno's hylozoism and view of animals as expressions of life. The discussion ends with remarks on sentience and animals in modern thought.

Cecilia Muratori's 'Eating (Rational) Animals: Campanella on the Rationality of Animals and the Impossibility of Vegetarianism' takes a close look at Tommaso Campanella's views of animals. While he distanced himself from the Aristotelian outlook and perceived nature as a living whole with a continuum of living beings, Campanella nonetheless did not deduce from this an ethical sensitivity to animals. These, and even plants, might have sensations and animals might possess rationality, though not the human mind and capacity for religious feeling. Yet precisely the ubiquity of sensation made the abstention from eating meat irrelevant. In nature, the strong dominated the weak, which made eating plants and animals permissible, although eating those too similar or dissimilar to oneself precluded immoderate eating such as cannibalism. Muratori's discussion highlights ethical points related to vegetarianism which are still relevant to modern debates of this issue.

Burkhard Dohm's article, 'Vegetarismus-Konzepte im deutschen und englischen Spiritualismus des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts', centers on early modern spiritualism and sheds important light on the development of Protestant conceptions of animals and nature. Dohm discusses several figures beginning with Sebastian Franck, who were influenced by Hindu sensitivity to animals. Johann Arndt presented the idea of an *imago Dei* (image of God) as an argument for proper treatment of animals. Paul Felgenhauer claimed

that animals shared with humans a divinely given soul and included animals in his conception of the ἀποκατάστασις πάντων (cyclical return of everything). Johann Wilhelm Petersen and his wife, Johanna Eleonora Petersen, also shared a similar outlook. Moving from German to English spiritualists, Dohm describes the radical John Everard's opposition to the slaughter of animals. Dohm closes his discussion with a detailed overview of a figure who, contrary to the others whom he considers, is familiar to those with an interest in the development of attitudes toward animals. This is Thomas Tryon, who combined a theocentric and anti-anthropocentric outlook in developing an ethics of the treatment of animals that was almost modern in view of its practical implications, even presenting an early conception of animal rights. Tryon's attitude toward animals was related, according to Dohm, to his opposition to slavery and he even recognized the deleterious implications, for both humans and animals, of air and water pollution.

James Vigus' article, "That Which People Do Trample Upon Must be Thy Food": The Animal Creation in *The Journal of George Fox*', describes the Quaker movement's traditional ethical sensitivity to animals, yet claims that George Fox's approach to animals was less clearly sensitive, due both to his style of writing and to his use of biblical imagery and predilection for metaphors. Vigus thus implies that Fox was a moderate rather than a radical in his ethical consideration of animals.

Kathrin Schlierkamp's 'Die Kontinuität der Natur und die Verantwortung für Tiere und Umwelt in Anne Conways *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*' describes the English philosopher's un-Cartesian views of both the mind/body question and animal automatism, the idea of which she of course opposed. She combined a monistic view of the world with Cabbalistic influence, leading to a consideration of living creatures as part of a natural continuum in which animals differed from humans only in degree. This led to a plea for ethical sensitivity to animals both for their own good and for the good of those human beings who treat them.

Rhodri Lewis' article, 'Thinking with Animals in the Early Royal Society: The Case of Sir William Petty', presents an interesting case of an early modern savant who discussed the theory of the Great Chain of Being in an anti-anthropocentric manner influenced by Montaigne. Like other figures mentioned above, Petty regarded the difference between humans and animals as one of degree, not kind. He emphasized in particular the mental similarity be-

tween human beings and such animals as elephants, thus distancing himself from the Cartesian view of animals. Lewis' article is an excellent example of how modern scholars may encounter instances of early considerations of animals in seemingly unlikely places, in this case that of a thinker more often familiar to historians of economic thought and political arithmetic.

In her article, 'Das Monster als Grenzfigur. Leibniz, Locke und die Tier-/Mensch-Mischwesen der Renaissance', Urte Helduser discusses a topic different from that of the other articles in the volume, that of the implications which early modern attitudes toward monsters had for the view of animals. In particular, the birth of 'monstrous' human beings posed a challenge to the early modern conception of human singularity vis-à-vis animals. Helduser gives a detailed outline of the development of early modern attitudes toward the phenomenon of monstrous births and depicts the outlooks of Leibniz and Locke as a turning-point in problematizing the ability to differentiate clearly between the human and animal aspects of such 'creatures'. This led both these prominent philosophers to an increasingly benign approach to the question whether to let such unfortunate 'monsters' live. Helduser emphasizes Leibniz in particular in this respect and also notes that this approach became more common in the 18th century. Historians of early modern attitudes toward animals are familiar with the views of these two philosophers, though not necessarily with their outlooks on this particular issue.

The volume ends with Gianni Paganini's article, 'Political Animals in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy: Some Rival Paradigms', which discusses the views of animals of Pierre Gassendi and Thomas Hobbes, both of whom disagreed with the Cartesian theory of animal automatism. Gassendi, in Epicurean fashion, maintained human superiority to animals due not least to the latter's lack of language and the consequent inability for political life. Hobbes perceived a more gradual difference between humans and animals. For him, animals had the ability to gather together, yet not in the sense of a political covenant. Possibly influenced by Montaigne, Hobbes, however, connected this seemingly superior human ability also to the propensity for moral decline. Paganini's discussion presents a different aspect of Gassendi's view of animals than that discussed in the article by Guido Giglioli.

All in all, this is an impressive collection of essays that sheds new light on themes both familiar and less so to scholars of early modern attitudes toward animals. The articles all exhibit a high level of erudition and are written in

an accessible and engaging style. Those addressing familiar figures present new interpretative perspectives on themes previously discussed in earlier scholarship, for example, Montaigne's views of animals or early debates about vegetarianism. Other articles discuss themes and figures much less familiar to historians, thus making a very tangible contribution to scholarship. The attempt by most of the authors to connect their historical discussions to modern issues regarding the treatment of animals is also pertinent and does not overreach the limits proper for historical scholarship, as occasionally happens in studies of this topic. The following remarks are therefore made not so much as criticisms but rather as constructive suggestions for further research.

One specific lacuna in the book is the almost complete neglect of the history of science. Someone coming to this volume without a familiarity with the history of attitudes toward animals might get the impression that the development of ethical sensitivity to animals was a purely philosophical affair. As scholars, however, are well aware, early modern scientists often grappled with the ethical complications of their experiments, specifically some of those who engaged in vivisection. Yet this topic receives practically no attention throughout the volume and the authors, whether intentionally or out of ignorance (the former seems more likely), disregard the large literature of studies of this topic by various scholars, notably Anita Guerrini [see, e.g., [Guerrini 2003](#)].

Another lacuna is the lack of proper attention to literary and artistic sources. This is no doubt intentional but the ubiquity of animal figures in early modern literature and art also had clear ethical implications. A striking case, begging attention, is presented by the editors themselves, who include only one example of a reproduced painting as a frontispiece to the volume, that of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Two Monkeys in Chains*.¹ Bruegel's painting, an important example of the rising attention to animal themes in early modern iconography, raises many potential points of interest, not least the question whether the pictorial depiction of animals differs from verbal, and specifically philosophical, considerations of animals, thus highlighting a different aspect of changing ethical sensitivity toward them. The editors, however, like most intellectual historians, seem content with using art solely for the purpose of simple illustration.

¹ The illustrations in Urte Helduser's article are less significant in this respect and simply exemplify the visual dimension of early modern fascination with monsters.

In this volume, one also finds the regrettable divide between European, mainly continental, scholarship and English-speaking, not least American, scholarship. Some at least of the authors of the various articles in this volume are aware of the important work done on early modern attitudes toward animals by scholars such as Erica Fudge, Gary Steiner, Aaron Garrett, and Peter Harrison, not to mention Keith Thomas. Yet these and other scholars are insufficiently mentioned and do not receive the attention due to their often ground-breaking work on the history of early modern attitudes toward animals. On the other hand, the volume is replete with references to studies in languages such as German and Italian which are rarely mentioned in English-language scholarship. I must admit to being surprised at the number of such references, the existence of which I was previously unaware of. As in other scholarly fields, it seems that Anglo-Saxon and European scholars are unwittingly interested in similar topics but often ignorant of comparable work being done by contemporary scholars writing in other languages.

In the same vein, this volume gives relatively little attention to an important body of work, mainly written in the United States in the second quarter of the 20th century, which established much of the modern study of early modern attitudes toward animals. George Boas' *The Happy Beast in French Thought of the Seventeenth Century* [1933] is mentioned a couple of times, though insufficiently; but there are no references to Dix Harwood's *Love for Animals and How It Developed in Great Britain* [1928], Leonora Cohen Rosenfield's *From Beast-Machine to Man-Machine* [1940] (highly relevant despite centering on the Cartesian view of animals which Muratori and Dohm intended not to be central to the volume), or Hester Hastings' *Man and Beast in French Thought of the Eighteenth Century* [1936] (the latter admittedly about a slightly later era than that discussed in the volume). These are old works but still highly relevant to scholarship today and often not given their proper due as modern scholars (writing in all languages!) attempt to assert their interpretative originality. Another highly important book not mentioned at all in the volume, though not specifically about animals but still very much relevant to understanding the history of attitudes toward nature in general, is Clarence Glacken's justifiably famous *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* [1967].

It would be an injustice to this volume, however, to overemphasize such shortcomings. One cannot expect every aspect of the history of attitudes

toward animals to be addressed in one volume and, as a work addressing mainly the intellectual facets of this topic, *Ethical Perspectives on Animals in the Renaissance and Early Modern Period* is an excellent collection of essays of a very high quality. The editors and authors have all done a remarkable job in enhancing our understanding of the development of human attitudes toward animals. The result is a volume which should interest all serious scholars of the history of attitudes toward animals and indeed of intellectual history in general.

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