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Political ideologies and the moral status of animals

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ABSTRACT It is noted that, whilst some exponents of mainstream ideological positions deliberately exclude non-human animals from moral standing, the orthodox position is that, whilst having moral standing, animals are less morally considerable than humans. The dominance of anthropocentrism in ideological discourse, however, has been increasingly challenged. This challenge has come mainly from within the liberal tradition but thinkers from other ideological traditions—most notably communitarianism, Marxism, conservatism, feminism and ecology—have also sought to argue the case for a greater moral status for animals. It is argued that the success of such a case, whereby animals are regarded as morally equivalent to humans, has a significant effect, not so much on the conceptual morphology of ideologies, as on the distribution of benefits deriving from them.

This article considers the relationship between political ideologies and the inclusion of non-human animals as morally considerable beings. It is noted how some exponents of mainstream ideological positions deliberately excluded animals whereas, following the influence of utilitarian thinking in particular, it is the norm now for the moral standing of animals to be recognized. Moral standing is not equivalent to moral status, however, and the conventional position, in the West at least, remains that, whilst having important interests, animals are inferior to humans. The dominance of anthropocentrism in ideological discourse is a reminder of the fact that ideologies are a reflection of power structures in society and, in this case, the pre-eminence of human beings.

Nevertheless, concerted attempts have been made to justify a greater degree of moral status for animals from within different ideological traditions. This has occurred mainly from within liberalism, but the inclusion of animals also touches upon communitarianism, Marxism, conservatism, feminism and ecology. After reviewing the literature linking competing political ideologies with animal protection, it is suggested that the acceptance of a substantial degree of moral status for animals—which adopts the view that their interests ought to be considered on a par with humans, or close to it—does not necessarily challenge the conceptual morphology of ideologies but, by decentring humans as the major
beneficiaries, has a profound effect on the distribution of benefits deriving from them.

Political ideology and the welfare of animals

An essential initial distinction to make is between moral standing and moral status. The former I take to mean the existence of any degree of moral considerability, the latter I take to mean the degree of moral worth. In the West at least, it is—with few exceptions—the ideological norm to accept that animals have at least some moral worth, that what we do to them ought to be guided by some kind of moral framework. However, the moral standing of animals has not always been recognized by those associated with particular ideological traditions.

In the first place there is little in the anthropocentric and productivist nature of classical Marxism—with its emphasis on non-humans being resources for humans to exploit—to offer comfort for animals. Likewise, most early liberal thinkers—such as Locke, Descartes, Kant and Hobbes—denied that animals had any moral standing. Whether because animals had no souls, were unable to respect the moral standing of others, or were mere machines whose actions are accompanied by no mental processes, the only duties to animals were indirect ones in the sense that ill-treating animals may infringe the morally important interests of other humans. Descartes’ view, that animals were automata, was particularly influential, illustrating how ideologies can serve common practices, in this case justifying what we would now regard as the most barbaric practices on animals at a time before anaesthetic had been developed. As an early anonymous critic of Descartes wrote:

The scientists administered beatings to dogs with perfect indifference and made fun of those who pitied the creatures as if they felt pain. They said the animals were clocks; that the cries they emitted when struck were only the sound of a little spring that had been touched, but that the whole body was without feeling. They nailed the poor animals up on boards by their four paws to vivisect them to see the circulation of the blood which was a great subject of controversy.

Generally speaking, the granting of moral standing to animals is usually associated with the recognition, denied by Descartes, that many non-human animals are sentient beings, capable of experiencing positive and negative sensations. This enables us to distinguish between animals and inanimate objects, the latter having no moral standing because they lack this capacity. It is not surprising that nineteenth-century utilitarians were among the first liberal thinkers to recognize the moral worth of animals. Thus both Bentham and J. S. Mill base a commitment to animal welfare on the fact that animals, like humans, are sentient. As Bentham points out in a much-quoted passage, ‘the question’ of moral status is not ‘Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?’

Accepting the validity of the moral standing of animals is not equivalent to
regarding human and animal interests as worthy of equal consideration. This position still remains peripheral to all ideologies, with the exception of ecology. The conventional position is that whilst animals have some moral status, human interests take precedence. The classic animal welfare position, then, holds that it is illegitimate to inflict unnecessary suffering on animals but where humans can benefit substantially from such suffering it becomes morally acceptable. To give a crude example, the use of a blowtorch on a rabbit just for the fun of it is unacceptable whereas its use, say, to assess the treatment of burns might have important human (and animal) benefits and ought therefore to be at least considered.

Most contemporary political theorists, particularly from the liberal tradition, have adopted an animal welfare approach. One of the key debates here is whether animals ought to be recipients of justice as opposed to a more general notion of kindness. Rawls, among others, has suggested that the moral inferiority of animals means that they cannot be considered as beneficiaries of justice, on the grounds that only ‘moral persons’, those, that is, who can understand what it is to be just, and those who are able to claim it for themselves and respect the rights of others, are entitled to be beneficiaries of justice. One of the problems of doing otherwise is to leave animals as potential victims of the influential liberal principle of moral pluralism whereby what we do to them becomes a matter of preference rather than obligation (see below). It is possible, however, to incorporate animals within a liberal theory of justice so that, for instance, Mill’s harm principle is adjusted to take into account the fact that harm inflicted on animals that can be shown to be trivial is prohibited whereas those actions harming animals that serve significant human benefits are regarded as legitimate.

**Animals, moral equality and ideological discourse**

Incorporating animals into ideological discourse has relatively little impact whilst human moral superiority is accepted. Notions of rights, freedom, equality and representation—constituent elements of political ideologies—are not materially affected by animal welfare. Animals are not accorded rights, remain the property of humans, and are consequently unequal. Indeed, such is the inferiority of this position that some scholars argue that it amounts to very little protection for animals, that in reality almost any human benefit is enough to justify the exploitation of animals, and that only when their property status is revoked can their welfare be genuinely improved. Such debates become redundant if one accepts that animals ought to have a moral status more or less equivalent to humans. Yet no political system in the world has adopted such a principle. More significantly, for the purposes of this article at least, although there have been concerted attempts to justify according to animals a higher moral status than allowed for by the moral orthodoxy, these remain peripheral to the ideologies from which they are derived. An historical
examination of ideologies reveals that this is not surprising. Ideologies and their characteristics tend to reflect the existence of powerful forces within society. In this way the class basis of liberalism and socialism has given ground in the post-1945 period to, for instance, a feminism which has arisen on the back of an emerging women’s movement, and an environmentalism which has been a product of factors such as affluence and the creation of a new class more likely to have post-material values.

The problem for animals is that, as Adams points out, ‘the “oppressed group” is not going to have its consciousness raised or participate in its own liberation’. Moreover, for humans to campaign on behalf of them requires an altruism that is much more profound than for other social movements. Not only does it involve action to seek the advancement of the interests of another species, there is also a potential conflict between the interests of animals and those of humans. Animals provide direct economic benefits; they are used as a source of nutrition, as vehicles to test potentially dangerous products, as scientific models in the search for new drug products and medical procedures, as well as sources of entertainment and clothing. Given this, it is hardly surprising that attempts to justify an increase in the moral status of animals remain peripheral to mainstream ideologies.

Nevertheless, intellectual attempts to shift the anthropocentric bias of ideologies do exist, and these have developed simultaneously with a new animal rights movement which emerged thirty years or so ago in Britain and more recently in the United States. Indeed, it is striking how the re-emergence of the animal protection movement is inseparable from the radical, animal rights-driven, character this re-emergence has taken. The newer groups are invariably abolitionist, seeking the end of animal experimentation or the rearing and slaughter of animals for food. Moreover, there is a much greater emphasis now on grass-roots campaigning, and even direct action, illustrating the strength of feeling that activists have against what they see as unjust (and not just unkind) practices and their impatience to see them eradicated.

Not surprisingly, given its dominance in the West, most of the intellectual challenges to the moral orthodoxy have come from within the liberal tradition, in the form of rights, contractarian and utilitarian accounts. The rights-based approach is particularly associated with Regan who suggests that, like humans, some animals—to be precise mammals one year of age and older—are ‘subjects-of-a-life’ in the sense that they are aware, have beliefs, act intentionally, have a memory, and are capable of having an emotional life. The contractarian account is a specific sub-set of the rights school, deriving primarily from attempts to amend Rawls’s theory of justice in order to incorporate animals. Rawls, it is suggested, illegitimately excludes animals as entities who can be beneficiaries from the decisions taken by participants in the original position. Just as knowledge of gender, economic circumstances and physical and mental well-being is lacking, there is no reason why the veil of ignorance cannot be thickened further to exclude knowledge of animal species. As a result, due to the possibility that the participants in the original position might turn out to be
animals, it is in their interests to ensure that adequate protection is provided for animal species.

Singer provides a utilitarian account which differs in two key respects from Regan’s. First, Singer bases a great deal of his argument on the sentiency of animals as opposed to other intellectual characteristics. Thus he suggests that animals, like humans, can suffer and have interests in avoiding suffering. So, although he is prepared to recognize that in some cases humans may suffer more than animals, this is a matter of empirical examination. What he insists upon is that such human and animal interests be considered equally. Secondly, as a utilitarian, Singer eschews the benefits of rights and so suggests that before acting we should weigh up the distribution of goods and bads likely to accrue. On balance, Singer suggests, such an approach rules out as morally illegitimate the killing of animals for food and their use in scientific procedures.

Singer has come in for a great deal of criticism, particularly from rights advocates such as Regan, for this utilitarian approach since it is by no means clear that it does protect animal interests in the way Singer suggests. In particular, an account based on sentiency minimizes the importance of painless death. This leaves open the possibility that, for instance, a reformed system of animal agriculture, removing the worst excesses of factory farming, could conceivably meet Singer’s demands. Similarly, Singer might also have to regard as morally legitimate scientific procedures, which used anaesthetics, and which practised euthanasia before their effects wore off.

Moreover, a utilitarian approach which seeks to aggregate preferences may well be faced with a situation where the interests of individual animals may have to be sacrificed in order to maximize human (and other animal) preferences. Indeed, this is exactly the calculation made before animals are used in scientific procedures which may cause them suffering but which may also produce huge benefits to humans and other animals. While this issue is undoubtedly a problem for Singer, it should be recognized that he is not advocating an anthropocentric version of utilitarianism whereby only animals are subject to an aggregation of preferences. Thus, Singer can claim that all present practices are speciesist in the sense that non-trivial human interests are excluded from the utilitarian calculation. Until, that is, we consider using humans in, say, scientific experiments from which other humans and animals might benefit, then Singer’s version of utilitarianism is sheltered from the criticism of animal rights advocates.

It is not the primary purpose of this article to assess critically these attempts to accord to animals a higher moral status than the moral orthodoxy allows, only to examine their impact on ideologies. Very briefly, it should be noted though that the denial of equal moral status depends to a large degree upon the successful identification of a morally relevant characteristic possessed by humans but not by animals, thereby justifying differential treatment. Usually, it is the greater mental capacities of humans that is utilized here, in the sense that humans can suffer in a much more profound way than animals and, in particular, through death which forecloses all possibilities of finding satisfaction in life. It is also commonly suggested, as a sub-set of the mental complexity approach,
that animals are not entitled to be beneficiaries of rights or justice because, as is Rawls’s view, they are not able to reciprocate by respecting the rights of others.18

In response, one of the major challenges to this utilization of mental capacities is the so-called argument from marginal cases. Here, it is argued that the attempt to distinguish between humans and animals on the grounds of mental capacity falls down when it is considered that some, so-called ‘marginal’, humans do not have the mental capacity, and therefore moral worth, of other ‘normal’ humans. The fact that this former group also includes young children adds to the case for saying that mental capacity is not the key dividing line between humans and animals that its exponents thought it was. The argument from marginal cases has produced a substantial literature but no decisive blow has been struck by either side.19

Liberalism does not have an ideological monopoly on the incorporation of animal interests. Indeed, there are some reasons for suggesting that it ought to be dispensed with as the appropriate ideological location for animal protection.20 One of the key problems is that, as indicated above, the human benefits involved in the exploitation of animals and their inability to fight for their own liberation make it unlikely that the radical agenda will be achieved. This would not be quite so bad if a viable version of animal welfare could be incorporated within liberalism, but this is problematic primarily because of the central role in liberal thought of moral pluralism. In so far as animal welfare becomes an issue of morals rather than justice, as it does for Rawls and Barry, then the protection of animal interests, as we saw above, becomes subject to moral preferences rather than obligations. Of course, legislation to protect the interests of animals does exist in liberal democracies, but arguments invoking moral pluralism and the tolerance of competing versions of the good life remain powerful defences against legislative compulsion. They are commonly used, for instance, in the campaign against the legislative abolition of fox-hunting in Britain. Likewise, choice rather than compulsion remains prominent in other aspects of animal usage, so that, for example, one can choose whether to buy factory-farmed or free-range animal products and choose whether to buy cosmetics that have not been tested on animals.

Beyond liberalism

Because the relationship between animal protection and liberalism is problematic, it is worthwhile exploring the fit with other ideological traditions. One such ideology is communitarianism, which has provided a strong intellectual challenge to liberalism in recent years. There have been no attempts to provide a communitarian account of animal protection, although MacIntyre hints at the possibility.21 Clearly, with its emphasis on a shared conception of the good life promoted by a perfectionist state, communitarianism minimizes the problems generated by the liberal insistence upon moral pluralism. However, this presupposes, of course, that a shared moral code includes respect for the
interests of animals. Moreover, communitarianism, in contrast to other ideologies such as liberalism, eschews the universalism that would ensure that animals are respected everywhere and not just in those communities who decided it was important. Indeed, in this sense, communitarianism would affirm the massive disparities in the treatment of animals that occurs not just in the world but also in the continent of Europe, as indicative of appropriate moral plurality.

There is also a case for claiming animal protection for the left. Empirical research in Britain and the United States has revealed that animal protection has been an issue particularly attractive to politicians from parties of the centre-left. In particular, for various historical reasons, positions on the hunting debate in Britain split almost entirely on party lines with Labour MPs traditionally hostile. In general terms, animal protection might be attractive to the left because animals are perceived as another exploited group that needs defending. The link is closer here when it is recognized that the target of the animal rights movement is not individual acts of cruelty so much as the institutional and corporate exploitation of animals by big business in factory farms, scientific laboratories and breeding centres. Whilst not anti-capitalist, the animal rights movement is opposed to profit taking precedence over animal suffering, a theme which the left would find it easy to endorse.

There have also been attempts, mainly associated with Benton, to rescue Marxism for animals. Benton draws upon Marxism’s traditional suspicion of rights to suggest that liberal rights language may not be the most appropriate way of protecting animals. In the first place, while it is usually possible to identify who is responsible for infringing the rights of companion and hunted animals, most animals are exploited in a system of institutional exploitation involving many complex cogs. In such systems—involving agricultural and experimental animals—it is not so easy to locate who is to be responsible for upholding their rights. Secondly, following another familiar Marxist theme, since the ‘requirement for rights is … only a symptom of social pathology and moral disintegration’, it is far better to effect a transformation of society where the need for rights is either eradicated or at least reduced. In terms of animals, Benton suggests that ‘more benign and compassionate moral sentiments’ towards them are likely to come about only when they have ceased to be regarded as expendable commodities in an industrialized and mechanized system of exploitation. In other words, reflecting the traditional Marxist distinction between the formal possession of rights and their substantive enjoyment, there is little point in according rights to animals unless there is a substantial change in attitudes towards them which can only be produced by a radical shift in social relations.

This application of a theory designed exclusively for humans to animals is not entirely successful. It is plausible to suggest that relationships between humans can be altered positively through social, and particularly economic, reform that removes or reduces the need for competitiveness and exploitation. Applying this to animals would seem to mean that in order for them to be regarded in a more positive light the abolition of institutional exploitation is required. The question then is, how is this to be achieved, particularly since, as we have seen, animals
are not capable of their own liberation? In the absence of such a movement of self-liberation, of course, the movement—of humans—on their behalf has employed the tactic of suggesting that animals have a sufficiently high moral status to be accorded rights which, in turn, makes institutional exploitation illegitimate. Marxists have to show how this circular argument is to be broken to enable the relegation in importance of rights discourse.

Conservatism is another ideology that has its advocates as an appropriate location for the protection of animals. Whilst there is no one coherent account of conservative prescriptions towards animals, familiar themes within conservative thought can be utilized in their favour. The major exponent here is John Gray who, writing in a classic Burkean idiom, condemns the industrialization of farming as an ill-founded attempt to control and dominate nature. The resulting crisis in food production—BSE, CJD and salmonella—he sees as inevitable consequences of tampering with a system that we are ill-equipped to understand fully. Scruton adopts a similar line when he asks us to value piety as ‘a confession of ignorance’. Piety, he continues, would have ‘caused us to hesitate before feeding to cows, which live and thrive on pasture, the dead remains of their own and other species’. Piety would, in general terms, mean that we would ‘hesitate before the mystery of nature, to renounce our presumption of mastery, and to respect the process by which life is made’. A similar critique of enlightenment rationalism can be utilized to challenge the validity of using animals in the increasingly extreme pursuit, now involving genetic engineering, of scientific knowledge.

Two newer ideologies, feminism and ecology, can also lay claim to be the most effective vehicles for the protection of animals. There is now a fairly extensive feminist literature on animal rights, which is a sub-sector of similar arguments employed in the more general eco-feminist field. From this perspective, ‘Androcentrism, not anthropocentrism, is the chief enemy of women and nature’. There are two main themes in this discourse. The first might be described as the ‘oppression’ argument in the sense that it seeks to show that sexism and speciesism are interconnected, mutually reinforcing systems of oppression and ways of organizing the world. The second theme is an attempt to employ an ‘ethic of care’ as an alternative to rights-based theories of justice. Both themes are accompanied by much evidence that there is a predominance of females in the animal rights movement, at least at grass roots level.

The first, oppression, theme—particularly associated with Carol Adams—which sees parallels in the oppression of women and animals, only takes us so far. It is, of course, true that women are the victims of a shocking amount of male-induced violence, not least in the sado-masochism prevalent in the pornography industry. It is true too that the patriarchal language sometimes used to describe women—as ‘meat’, ‘cows’, ‘bitches’ and so on—is animalistic and exploitative. However, animals are, in every society in the world to varying degrees, exploited on a scale that has no parallels in the treatment of women. Moreover, the law in most societies prohibits violence to women whereas the law specifically allows violence to be visited on animals. Finally, exploiting
animals is by no means a male preserve. It is true that a significant proportion of vegetarians and animal rights activists are women but then some are men and the vast majority of women are neither.

The second, ethic of care, theme suggests that liberal accounts of animal rights or animal liberation are flawed because they rely on arguments based upon rationality, logical consistency, universality and fairness. Such—essentially male—language is problematic for feminist animal protectionists because it replicates those human characteristics that are used to justify moral superiority over animals. Instead, this discourse should be replaced, it is argued, by a ‘care ethic’, associated in particular with the work of Gilligan, which privileges essentially female values such as compassion, empathy, sympathy, and context. This, it is argued, constitutes a much more appropriate language for animal advocates than rationality and justice.

Applying the feminist care ethic to animals is also problematic. In the first place, it assumes that the rationalistic animal rights/liberation approaches are entirely devoid of feelings of care, sympathy and compassion. Surely this dichotomy is too stark. Rights theory is built on respecting individuals, recognizing the harm that can befall them, and seeking to alleviate it. Another, related, argument is to question whether the ethic of care—which, it should be noted, is not an approach universally accepted by feminists—is a moral position exclusively upheld by women, as opposed to being a factor, say, in the culture of all marginalized groups. Contextualizing animal suffering in particular circumstances is undoubtedly enriching and there is much value in Kheel’s assertion that: ‘If we think, for example, that there is nothing morally wrong with eating meat, we ought perhaps to visit a factory farm or slaughterhouse to see if we still feel the same way’. However, as Regan responds, an ethic of care, unlike a theory of justice based on rights, provides little guide as to how we would universalize an individual experience to appeal to those who have not had that particular experience.

A related criticism is that an ethic of care does not provide us with much of a guide to action in general. For example, an animal rights perspective rules out meat eating as morally wrong, or does so if, like Regan, we apply a right to life to animals. It is not clear, by contrast, whether or not an ethic of care brings us to the same conclusion. As Manning admits, it could be consistent with vegetarianism but on the other hand ‘it is possible to give an animal care that is sensitive to its interests up to the moment of slaughter’. The vagueness of an ethic of care is particularly problematic when it is recognized that care works both ways in the animals debate. For instance, as defenders of animal experimentation have been increasingly vocally pointing out, the care of humans—men and women, adults and children—is dependent on animal research. In such a conflict of caring whose interests should we choose to uphold? Whilst an animal rights position has a clear answer to this question—that there may be gains from animal research but these gains are illegitimate because ill-gotten—an ethic of care has no such guiding principle. It is for this reason, perhaps, that, contrary to those feminists who advocate animal protection, ‘the overwhelming
majority of feminist theorists have actually been keen to reconcile the two ethics in some way.\textsuperscript{39}

Ecology is the one ideology that has, at its core, the removal of humans from the moral pedestal, thereby setting it apart from traditional western schools of thought. Such a position needs to be distinguished from an anthropocentric environmentalism that regards the value of the natural world, including animals, as extrinsic to its use for humans. For example, a classic case of an anthropocentric wildlife treaty is the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, originally created in 1946. This treaty, under which there is now a moratorium on commercial whaling, was designed to conserve whales, not because they are intrinsically valuable and therefore worthy of some respect and decent treatment, but because whaling nations recognized that whale species needed to be conserved in order for hunting them to continue.

By contrast, an ecocentric position is concerned with recognizing the intrinsic value of non-humans. The most absolutist version of the dethroning of humans is associated with thinkers such as Naess and Fox.\textsuperscript{40} This position—often referred to as ‘deep ecology’—holds that non-human elements of nature have an intrinsic value, independently of their use value for humans. The philosophical and political difficulty of establishing this ecocentric ethic has led a number of Green political theorists to attempt to formulate an ‘enlightened anthropocentrism’ which, whilst recognizing the human-centred reality of the moral world, does claim to be consistent with a high degree of protection for non-human nature.\textsuperscript{41} Such a case is based primarily on an empirical claim that the protection of the natural world is in the interests of humans.

The ‘enlightened anthropocentrism’ is clearly inadequate from an animal liberation perspective. It can be readily agreed that, on occasions, the interests of humans and animals (and humans and nature more broadly) coincide. However, this relationship remains a contingent one, and there are many cases where protecting animals may serve no particular human interests or where, most significantly, there may be a conflict between upholding the interests of animals and those of humans. Indeed, this is precisely why an issue such as animal experimentation is politically contentious with exponents arguing that scientific procedures involving animals are vital for the advance of knowledge and advocates of animal rights denying the moral right of scientists to engage in it irrespective of the outcome.

Only an ethic that postulates the independent value of animals, then, will suffice if the radical aims of animal advocates are to be achieved, and this requirement is acknowledged by an ecocentric ethic. However, there are also doubts about the appropriateness of deep ecology as an ideal location for the protection of animals. In the first place, moral standing for deep ecologists is extended beyond sentient beings to encompass living, but not sentient, parts of nature as well as inanimate objects such as mountains and deserts. Such a project, of course, has to dispense with mental complexity and sentiency as the benchmark for moral standing, a criterion adopted by the vast majority of animal rights/liberationists. As Singer points out: ‘There is genuine difficulty in under-
standing how chopping down a tree can matter to the tree if the tree can feel nothing.\textsuperscript{42}

Secondly, and even more significantly, deep ecologists adopt a holistic approach emphasizing the importance of species and ecosystems rather than the individuals within them. The classic formulation of this approach is provided by Aldo Leopold, the ‘father’ of deep ecology, who wrote that: ‘A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise’.\textsuperscript{43} Such a position is clearly inconsistent with the individualistic focus of animal liberation/rights views, since it would allow the sacrifice of individual animals (and, presumably, humans) if by so doing the ‘integrity of the biosphere’ is maintained. Regan for one describes this approach as ‘environmental fascism’.\textsuperscript{44}

Political ideologies and the incorporation of animal interests

The emergence of a greater concern to protect the interests of animals has had an impact on the nature of political ideologies. As we have seen, however, it has not so much impacted on the conceptual structure of ideologies as on their coverage. That is to say, exponents of competing ideologies have sought to incorporate animal interests by extending the use of conceptual arrangements common to the ideology in question. Liberals seek to extend the notions of rights, liberty and the social contract; an animal protection advocate seeking to utilize communitarianism would invoke shared moral values; Marxists seek to show how the limitations of rights discourse impacts upon vulnerable animals as much as it does upon vulnerable humans; conservatives seek to protect animals against the ravages of rationalistic science and technology; and feminists focus on showing how an ethic of care is a preferable vehicle for animal protection than a rationalistic rights or utilitarian account. Ecology is the only ideology that has at its core a non-anthropocentric ethic. But far from being the natural home for animal protection, ecology, as we have seen, is problematic because of its holistic, rather than individualistic, approach.

Despite ideological morphology remaining virtually untouched by the challenge of non-human interests, their incorporation into ideologies still has a profound impact and, if accepted, requires a significant reconfiguration of conceptual analysis. Those who seek to promote the interests of animals and nature have challenged the presumption that political ideology is about the ‘human question’. In this sense, by extending enlightenment principles of justice, freedom, equality and rights across the species barrier, animal rights or liberation is the culmination of the modernist project. Previously, modernism has been essentially anthropocentric, designed to promote and secure human dominion over nature. This humanism has applied to ‘all major western faiths and ideologies … Christianity, Marxism, the manifold kinds of liberalism, the positivist faith of scientific fundamentalists’ who all ‘think of humans as being … the currently dominant animal species … [and] all think of the earth as a resource in the service of the human enterprise’.\textsuperscript{45} As a result of extending concepts to
include animals, modernism is fundamentally transformed since it inevitably results in human privileges being reduced. As Gray accurately comments, ‘A commitment to the earth entails a large deflation of human hopes’.46 Thus, ‘expanding the circle’, as Singer puts it,47 will require political theorists to consider what it means to say that animals have rights against humans, freedoms from humans and equality with humans. Likewise, the recognition that animals have important interests raises questions about how, and by whom, those interests are to be represented.

Accepting the legitimacy of incorporating animal interests into the centre of ideological discourse also alters permanently the way in which ideologies are characterized. As Hamilton points out, the definitional criteria of an ideology include an association with either a particular group, class or collectivity within the wider society or with the whole society or community.48 If we accept that animals should be beneficiaries of political ideologies, then any ideology not including them ceases to have any claim to be a collective and universal ideology and instead becomes a sectional one designed to promote the interests of humans. In reality, with one exception (ecology), the incorporation of animals remains at the periphery of ideological discourse. This is not surprising given that animal rights or liberation remains a potent threat to human interests, and that anthropocentrism is a powerful creed with a vested interest intent, for the most part, in maintaining species domination. There are some areas where human and animal interests may coincide, the human—environmental and food safety—consequences of factory farming being a classic example. Only when the interests of animals are incorporated fully into mainstream political thinking, however, can their well-being improve significantly.

Notes and references


34. C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).


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44. Regan, op. cit., Ref. 4, p. 362.
46. Gray, ibid., p. 173.
47. Singer, op. cit., Ref. 42.