

Convergence and/et Divergence Between Animal and Environmental Ethics Entre éthique animale et environnementale

Organisée/organized par Gregory Mikkelson, Mauro Rossi, Christine Tappolet, Frédéric Bouchard, Kristin Voigt, Valéry Giroux et Sophia Rousseau-Mermans.

Presenters informations

Budolfson, Mark (University of Vermont)

“Opportunities and Challenges for Pro-Animal Initiatives in Philanthropy and Beyond”

Effective altruists and others are increasingly investing in and creating pro-animal initiatives. This leads to a number of pressing questions, including how to weigh the interests of different animals and properly make tradeoffs when animal interests are opposed. It also leads to specific as well as general questions about the efficacy of initiatives of different types. This paper attempts to move the debate forward on these issues, especially by identifying a number of not-much-discussed considerations that are important to these questions.

C.-Dussault, Antoine (Université Paris 1 / IHPST & University of Toronto / IHPST)

“How not to be a Sentientist? From Biological Interests to Health in Environmental Ethics”

Many environmental philosophers advocate the non-sentientist view that moral considerability should be extended beyond entities that have valenced mental states such as preferences or hedonic experiences (Goodpaster 1978; Taylor 1986; Callicott 1989; 2013). This leads many of them to argue that *non-sentient* biological entities (organisms, species, ecosystems) have a *good of their own*, which is commonly taken to be equivalent to their having *interests*. I will argue that this assimilation of the notion of *having a good of one's own* to that of *having interests* is ill-advised as line of defense for non-sentientism. I will propose that although non-sentient biological entities *do* have a good of their own, this good is conceptually distinct from that which underlies the paradigmatic notion of interest. More specifically, drawing upon Sumner's (1996; 1998; 2002) distinction between *prudential* and *perfectionist* goodness, I will contend that the kind of good that can be attributed to non-sentient biological entities is better captured by the notions of *health* and *biological perfection*.

This demonstration has two main values. First, it reconciles the non-sentientist intuition that non-sentient biological entities in some sense have a good of their own, with the sentientist intuition that sentience nevertheless undergirds a special kind of good. Second, it reinforces the theoretical plausibility of non-sentientism by exonerating its defenders

from the necessity of arguing that non-sentient biological entities have interests in the same sense that humans and other animals do.

My presentation will be structured as follows. First, I will present Sumner's (1996; 1998; 2002) argument that, insofar as the good intuitively possessed by non-sentient biological entities can be interpreted in terms of the Aristotelian notion of "good-its-kind", this good is more adequately envisaged as a form of *perfectionist goodness* than as a form of *prudential goodness*. This entails that this good is conceptually more similar to the notion of *excellence* used to evaluate artifacts (e.g. it is good for a knife to be sharpened) or the character of moral agents (e.g. it would be good for me to become more generous), than to the notion of *interest* used to evaluate the well-being of moral patients (e.g. it is good for a dog to be unleashed). Next, I will discuss and criticize two possible ways to defend (contra Sumner) the ascription of interests to biological non-sentient entities: 1) Varner's (1998) attempt based on the alleged fact that non-sentient biological entities (but not artifacts) are shaped by natural selection; and 2) McLaughlin's attempt based on the alleged fact that non-sentient biological entities (but not artifacts) are *autopoietic* entities. Thirdly, I will argue that non-sentientists should concede Sumner's argument instead of attempting to refute it. Linking Sumner's perfectionist goodness with the neo-Aristotelian notion of *natural goodness* (Foot 2003; Thomson 2003; 2008) and recent discussions of the concept of *health* (Hamilton 2010; Glackin 2016), I will argue that the moral considerability of non-sentient biological entities should be based on their being bearers of *health*—defined as *biological perfection*—rather than their being bearers of interests.

Hettinger, Ned (College of Charleston)

“Avoiding Animal Suffering and the Value of Naturalness”

This paper explores the tension between the environmental value of naturalness and the importance of minimizing the suffering of sentient creatures, a value central to the concern for animals. This conflict is made evident by some prominent philosophers. Because species in nature do not enjoy “cooperative and mutually supportive relations,” Martha Nussbaum has called for “a gradual supplanting of the natural with the just” (*Frontiers of Justice*, 400). In light of the “unceasing slaughter” in wild nature, Jeff McMahan concludes that “we have reason to desire the extinction of all carnivorous species” (*NY Times*, Sept. 19, 2010). Both suggestions are anathema to those who value the autonomy of nature. Considering birth control for wild animals and predator restoration will bring this tension into sharper focus.

Horta, Oscar (Universidad de Santiago de Compostela)

“In defense of intervention to aid animals in the wild: from population ecology to applied ethics”

According to the standard animal ethics view that only sentient beings are considerable, we should support intervening in nature to reduce the natural harms suffered by nonhuman animals. Many environmental ethicists reject this, as it clashes with the

promotion of other things they deem valuable. Their view is undoubtedly an intuitive one. However, it is also very intuitive that suffering and premature death matter. If this is so, there should be some amount of them such that eliminating it outweighed other conflicting values. There are reasons to think this is the case in nature. Population dynamics indicates that the vast majority of animals die shortly after coming into existence, thus having few if any possibilities for enjoyment. They typically die in ways that are likely to be very painful. Suffering thus appear to prevail overwhelmingly over happiness in nature. This makes the case for intervention in nature much stronger than most people think.

McElwain, Gregory (The College of Idaho)

“Midgley at the Intersection of Animal and Environmental Ethics”

This paper explores the intersection of animal and environmental ethics through the thought of prominent British philosopher Mary Midgley. Midgley’s work in the early 1980s and beyond presents a shift away from liberal individualist animal ethics toward a sophisticated relational and holistic value system grounded in community, care, sympathy, and other components of morality that are often overlooked or marginalized in (hyper)rationalist ethics, though now heavily emphasized in ecofeminist ethics. This is most exemplified in her concept of “the mixed community,” which gained special attention with Baird Callicott’s usage of it in his effort to create a “unified environmental ethics.” In this, Callicott rightly saw the potential in Midgley’s thought for bringing animal and environmental ethics “back together again.” However, this paper argues that he misinterpreted, oversimplified, and misused Midgley’s complex concept. This is, among other reasons, primarily due to his attempt to harmonize Midgley’s approach with a rigidly dichotomized understanding of domestic versus wild animals—as well as individuals versus species—in his conception of the land ethic in the tradition of Aldo Leopold. This paper further argues that Midgley does indeed have much to offer to animal and environmental ethics in her own work. She addresses some of the most important issues in uniting the field, though the answers may not be as clean and tidy as they are often made to seem—the simple answers, she reminds us, are seductively deceptive. Midgley offers a sensible and community-based approach to ethics that integrates numerous elements of our place in the world and our connection to animals and wider nature. Ultimately, she adds complexity and further challenges to the debates surrounding domestic/wild animals and individuals/species in animal and environmental ethics. This paper is supplemented with excerpts from personal interviews with Midgley on the topic from a forthcoming introduction to her thought.

Maris, Virginie (CNRS)

“Another ‘Great Divide’ – Rethinking Wild Nature in a Human-Dominated World”

In my presentation I will defend the necessity to rehabilitate the “great divide” between nature and culture.

A common analysis of the present environmental crisis roots it in the dualist worldview inherited from Modernity. The so-called “Great Divide” between culture and nature is considered as a cogent explanation for the destruction of natural habitats and species and the overexploitation of natural resources. However, rather than the separation itself, these destructive patterns of contemporary societies may lie in the hierarchy between humans and non-humans much more than in the recognition of separate realms between culture and nature.

First, following Frédéric Neyrat (2016), I will question the strength of the supposed modern dualism. The central argument is that modernity is not characterized by a truly naturalistic ontology in the sense given to this concept by Descola (2005). Rather, the modern worldview and ideal represent a form of anaturalism, which denies the proper existence and properties of nature, or at least which tends to annihilate nature much more than dividing it from humans and human artifacts.

Then I will offer a conception of the culture-nature couple that rehabilitated the epistemic and normative strength to the reference of wild nature. This new form of dualism will not be one of contempt and domination but rather one of recognition and respect for nature, considered in its radical otherness.

This will lead to defend in a third section a new sense of the "great divide", not (or not only) as a “great separation” but above all as a “great redistribution” of space, resources and moral concern, admitting that humans are grabbing far more than their fair share .

McShane, Katie (Colorado State University)

“Why animal welfare is not biodiversity, ecosystem services, or human welfare: toward a more complete assessment of climate impacts”

Using climate policy as an example, I argue that evaluating policy alternatives by focusing on ecosystem services and biodiversity on the one hand and human welfare on the other hand ignores the very important effects of our policy choices on the welfare (as opposed to the mere existence) of nonhuman animals. First, I argue that climate policy has enormous consequences for the welfare of nonhuman animals, and that these consequences are ones that animal ethics should accept as within the sphere of our moral concern. Next, I argue that the welfare of nonhuman animals cannot be thought of as reducible to or adequately represented by considerations of biodiversity, ecosystem services, or human welfare. Finally, I sketch out what a helpful analysis of the impact of climate policy on animal welfare might look like, what data it would require, and what consequences it might have for the relationship between animal ethics and environmental ethics. I conclude that in this area, the concerns about wild nature from environmental ethics and the concerns about animal welfare from animal ethics converge in a particularly urgent and important area of policy, and that collaboration between theorists in these areas would be fruitful.

Mikkelson, Gregory (McGill University)

“Convergence and Divergence about Net Value, Wild and Domesticated”

Animal and environmental ethics should converge on the following three value judgments: Natural ecosystems generally involve more good than harm; predation in nature tends to yield positive net benefits; and at least on a global scale, livestock farming is destroying more value than it is creating. But the ecocentric criteria of environmental ethics, and the sentientist criteria of animal ethics, have strongly divergent implications for capitalism's main effect on the world: the collapse of wild nature due to explosive growth in the human economy. Arguably, sentientism must count this effect as a net gain, whereas ecocentrism surely rates it a massive net loss. While supporting the above claims, I show how they fit into a larger argument in favor of the broader, ecocentric value theory of environmental ethics; and against the narrower, sentientist axiology of animal ethics.

Palmer, Clare (Texas A & M University)

“Conservation Policy in a Changing Climate: What should we try to protect?”

Climate change poses threats to many wild species. But traditional policy responses – in particular, those that protect species by protecting their habitats - won't remove the threat from a changing climate. Recognition of this has generated new, more interventionist policy proposals to conserve species.

These proposals include assisted migration (moving species populations into different, more climate-compatible habitats) and the use of tools from conservation genetics to increase species' resilience to the challenges of climate change. The primary aim of such proposals is to protect entire species from extinction and endangerment. But, in practice, such policies would, of course, have other effects. They would inevitably change ecosystems. They would impact both the existence, and the welfare, of individual organisms, including sentient animals. Implementing such policies may also change human valuations of organisms and places. Can we value the wildness and resilience of a gnarled whitebark pine, if we know it's been deliberately relocated and scientifically selected for resistance to fungal rust?

This paper assumes – for the sake of argument – that some of these interventionist policies, if implemented, would succeed in protecting target species. The focus here is on what this means for the other values at stake, in particular values relating to animal lives and welfare, ecosystems and wildness. Do interventionist species conservation policies significantly threaten these other values? If so, what should we try to protect? I'll argue that while (in some senses) ecosystem and wildness values may be threatened, these values should not be prioritized over species protection. Animal welfare, on the other hand, I'll argue, should be so prioritized. This is likely to rule out some interventionist species conservation policies (including attempts at the de-extinction of recently lost mammal species). However, I'll also argue that many interventionist species policies would not, over time, significantly threaten animal welfare, and that therefore we should seriously consider pursuing them.

Pepper, Angie (Centre de recherche en éthique)

“Delimiting Justice: Animal, Vegetable, Ecosystem?”

The last decade has seen the so-called ‘political turn’ in animal ethics in which theorists have focused on extending the domain of justice to sentient animals and “imagining how our political institutions, structures and processes might be transformed so as to secure justice for both human and non-human animals” (Cochrane, Garner & O’Sullivan, 2016). For many of these theorists possession of sentience is a necessary requirement for consideration within schemes of justice (e.g. Cochrane 2012; Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011; Nussbaum 2006). However, attempts to draw the bounds of justice at sentience have been met with renewed criticism by those working in environmental ethics. Some have objected, for instance, that “the sentience threshold fails for being inappropriately anthropocentric” (Fulfer 2013) and is unjustifiably biased towards sentient beings (Schlosberg 2007). These critics have further argued that nonsentient entities can also be subjects of justice, with some arguing for the inclusion of all forms of life, including plants and insects, and others advocating on behalf of the inclusion of collective entities such as entire ecosystems.

In this paper I show that existing attempts by sentientists, biocentrists, and ecocentrists to establish the bounds of justice are inadequate. I further suggest that we must take a closer look at the distinctive features of the domain of justice in order to determine which entities can be *potential* recipients. I begin by noting that all parties to the dispute are interested in what I will call ‘political justice’, which concerns institutionally enforceable rightful entitlements. While there is significant disagreement about the substantive content of entitlements and duties of justice, theorists agree that political justice is concerned with the protection of inviolable rights, and with ensuring that the benefits and burdens of social cooperation are fairly distributed. I then explain and defend the idea that one central function of justice is to protect the rights of beings who have the capacity to experience things as negatively or positively valenced. The upshot of this view is that insentient entities, such as plants and ecosystems, cannot be the direct recipients of justice and thus they cannot be treated unjustly. I conclude by responding to two objections. First, I consider the objection that justice need not be characterised in terms of moral rights. In response, I argue that extending the concept of justice to entities that cannot possess rights has theoretical implications for theorising about justice that are too costly. Second, it might be argued that the view I advance here is too restrictive because it excludes entities widely believed to have standing as subjects and agents of justice such as nation-states and cultural groups. In response, I cast doubt on the claim that abstract entities can act justly or be treated unjustly apart from the subjectively aware beings that constitute them.

Purves, Duncan & Delon, Nicolas (New York University)

“Technological interventions to reduce wild animal suffering”

Most people believe that suffering is intrinsically bad. In conjunction with contingent facts about our world and a few plausible moral principles, this yields an obligation to reduce or eliminate suffering, except when doing so would violate a more stringent moral

requirement. We ought to refrain from causing pain, and we ought to prevent or relieve pain, except when pain is necessary for the achievement of some greater good.

The prevalence of suffering is clearest, some have argued, when we consider the lives of wild animals, both in terms of scope and magnitude. If we accept the moral principle that we ought, *pro tanto*, to reduce the suffering of *all* sentient creatures, regardless of species membership, and the prevalence of suffering in the wild (through disease, starvation, parasitism, predation, disproportionate infantile mortality, etc.), then we seem committed to the existence of an obligation *pro tanto* to prevent this suffering. Call this surprising conclusion *the Problem of Wild Animal Suffering (WAS)*.

As proponents of WAS reduction/elimination argue, it's not just utilitarians who are committed to these claims. That's because everyone should believe that suffering is intrinsically bad and that a state of affairs containing less suffering is, other things being equal, better than a state containing more. The Problem is also partly independent of competing values such as the values of species, biodiversity, naturalness or wildness. Most who advocate the reduction of WAS argue that, even if we were to give some weight to such values, no plausible theory should—without undue partiality, inconsistency or implausibility—resist the conclusion that WAS is overridingly important. Yet the Problem clearly pits some animal ethicists against the desiderata of most environmentalists.

There have been many attempts to solve the Problem without committing oneself to systematic interventions in nature. Authors have appealed to the distinction between negative and positive duties, demandingness, created vulnerability, or constitutive group membership. Here we set those aside and accept the *pro tanto* desirability of a world with reduced WAS—we also set aside rights- and/or welfare- based issues (e.g., related to sterilization, culling, tagging, monitoring). Our focus is on epistemic difficulties with implementing technological interventions designed to reduce WAS, such as genetic engineering, healthcare, population control, or habitat design. We argue that such interventions, when scaled up to meet the actual demands of WAS, are epistemically fraught, and hence morally impermissible. The Problem is, in other words, largely *intractable*. We choose to focus on the case of genetic engineering, in particular 'CRISPR' technology that could be used to alter predator and/or prey behavior and experiences and the reproduction strategies of 'r-selected' species.

We defend the *negative thesis* that we are not justified in thinking that existing proposals to reduce WAS would in fact do so. Call this the epistemic problem. We also defend the *positive thesis* is that, to justify interventions to prevent WAS, we need to develop metrics and models that predict the effects of interventions on biodiversity, ecosystem functioning, and animals well-being. The positive thesis, however, might also be limited by an epistemic problem. The partial indeterminacy and extreme complexity of the ecological processes (e.g., trophic chains, genetic drift, migrations, and other aspects of population dynamics) captured by our current models and those we can hope to construct make the potentially cascading effects of massive technological interventions to reduce WAS unpredictable. The problem is compounded by the rate, magnitude and contingency of global climate change and its range of possible scenarios, as well as by a poor empirical record of successful past experiments and predictions.

Sebo, Jeff (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

“Animals and Climate Change”

I argue that animals are central to climate change, since farmed animals are a leading cause of climate change and climate change will be a leading cause of wild animal suffering. In this talk I defend these claims and examine their implications. I start by arguing that industrial animal agriculture is responsible for 18-51% of global GHG emissions, and therefore we need to center abolition of industrial animal agriculture in our efforts to mitigate climate change. I then argue that climate change will have a pervasive impact on wild animal populations, and therefore we need to center consideration of wild animals in our efforts to adapt to climate change. I close by discussing the issues in science and philosophy that we need to address to make further progress on these issues.

Southan, Rhys (Oxford University)

“Experiential Variety and Biodiversity Conservation”

In environmental ethics, conservation is often defended in blatantly anthropocentric terms, with aesthetics or the pursuit of knowledge justifying our protection of endangered lifeforms. Some philosophers find this unsatisfactory, especially when it comes to sentient wildlife. I will begin the presentation by looking at the difficulties that environmental philosophers have had with meeting what Sahorta Sarkar calls “the non-anthropocentric condition for a conservation ethic,” and why this failure to avoid a blatantly anthropocentric defense of biodiversity conservation is a problem.

Sarkar suggests six adequacy conditions for a conservation ethic, including that it “should allow us to attribute value to biological entities without reference to our most parochial human interests.” Environmental philosophers sometimes address this by appealing to the intrinsic value of nature, but this can undermine the goals of conservation when intrinsic value is attributed to animals on the basis of their sentience. Sentience is not only a property of animals who contribute to biodiversity – common animals are sentient too. Prioritizing endangered species becomes difficult to impossible if all sentient animals deserve equal protection, as it would be wrong to cull members of common species to protect endangered species. Those who care more about animal rights than biodiversity conservation will not find this to be a pressing worry, and so I will raise other problems for granting rights to wild animals on the basis of their sentience.

We could however value the sentience of animals contingently without granting them rights. While I will refer to this idea in my own proposed solution, on its own, it does nothing to justify or alter our conservation choices in any way. It keeps prioritization intact, but it does not provide a way to value rare animals in particular for their own sakes, as the altruistic or quasi- altruistic reason we had for valuing rare animals would be the same as for common animals, assuming all are equally sentient.

As my own partial solution to this anthropocentrism problem, I will propose that we recognize the value of “experiential variety,” generalized at a species level. I assume many animal species experience the world in distinctive ways. Those who aspire to value rare species for their own sakes could argue that the differences in internal states that helps

distinguish different species is worth protecting. Because experiential diversity generalizes at the species level rather than individual level, it allows us to value the internal states of animals without

granting rights to individuals within the species. I will conclude the presentation by looking at various possible objections to this proposal. Some of the objections include that we do not really value experiential diversity, and that valuing experiential diversity leads to absurd conclusions. I believe all such objections may be met.

Tatjana Višak (Mannheim University)

“Are plants welfare subjects?”

If, as I assume here, only welfare grounds reasons for action, plants matter directly if and only they are welfare subjects.

In this talk, I argue that plants are not welfare subjects. Unlike other arguments for this claim, mine does not presuppose the truth of any particular account of welfare. First, I point out that accounts of welfare aim at identifying the final prudential good or goods. Second, I defend the view called welfare invariabilism, which says that the true account of welfare is true *for all welfare subjects*. Third, I argue that the goods that are available to plants cannot be final goods for all welfare subjects. Therefore the one true account of welfare, whatever it is, implies that plants are not welfare subjects.

Even if only welfare grounds reasons for action and plants are not welfare subjects, what we do to plants matters. This is because of the many effects that plants have on the welfare of welfare subjects.

ROUND TABLE – PUBLIC CONFERENCE

Chair: Desaulniers, Élise (Independent researcher)

Callicott, John Baird (University of North Texas)

“The ‘Community Concept’: Toward a Theoretical and Practical Convergence of Environmental and Animal Ethics”

20th-century animal ethics was based on an “essence-accident” theory of moral ontology. An essential attribute—sentience or self-aware subjectivity—qualified animals (human and nonhuman alike) for *equal* moral consideration or rights. Other attributes—number of legs, fur, hair, feathers, body shape, size—are, so far as ethics is concerned, accidental characteristics and thus irrelevant to ethics. Therefore, humans, dogs, cats, cows, rats, squirrels, birds have equal rights or deserve equal moral consideration. From the perspective of 21st-century evolutionary moral psychology, duties and obligations, rights and deserts flow from community membership and differ one community from another—the family community, the civic community, the national community, the global village. With humans, animals

are members of “mixed communities”—the family community (pets), the agrarian community (cattle, horses), the biotic community (wildlife)—and within each community, duties and obligations, rights and deserts *differ*. Pets deserve love and affection as well as food, water, and shelter—which their human “moms” and “dads” are obliged to provide. Through thousands of generations of artificial selection, the roles of domesticated horses and cattle in the agrarian community differ with correspondingly differing rights and deserts. Industrial animal agriculture grossly violates the rights and deserts of domestic animal members of historical agrarian communities. Because biotic communities are both shrinking (and disintegrating with climate change) due to the expansion of industrial animal agriculture (a principal source of greenhouse gases), among the environmental duties and obligations generated by human membership in the biotic community is to support policies to curtail and eventually to eliminate industrial animal agriculture.

Commented by :

- **Martin, Angela (Université de Fribourg)**
- **Rousseau-Mermans, Sophia (Université de Montréal / Université Paris 1 / IHPST)**