CUDES CURRENT DEBATES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

Dilek, S. E. (2022). An Overview Towards Non-human Animals: An Essay in the Context of Religious, Philosophy and Cultural. *Journal of Current Debates in Social Sciences*, 5(Special Issue-1), 20-28.

Research Article

An Overview Towards Non-human Animals[1]: An Essay In the Context of Religious, Philosophy and Cultural[2]

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DOI: 10.37154/cudes.2022.40

Article Info

Received: 14.02.2022
Accepted: 01.03.2022

Keywords: Essay, Religous, Philosophy, Cultural, Non-human Animals

Abstract

There are many factors that determine the positive or negative view of people towards animals what creates the aforementioned factors is basically the human-centered (anthropocentrism) understanding that shapes the socio-cultural and natural environment. So much so that this understanding coincides with the end of humanity itself, the end of everything else, that is, the end of all beings and the eco-system. There is a religious and cultural background in the foundations of the anthropocentric view that places human in the center and that everything else, including animals, was created for him. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to examine the religious, philosophical and cultural concepts and reflections that make up our point of view towards animals. The framework that is tried to be put forward with this aim is important for the individual to transform his own paradigm towards animals.

1. INTRODUCTION

Animals share our environment in a variety of ways (Edney, 1995). In this context, it is clear that a religious, philosophical and cultural inquiry into animals is necessary. Religion and philosophy have been the main sources of traditional thinking about the moral status of animals all over the world, and both have interacted with science to shape cultural perceptions of what animals are (Degrazia, 2006, p.13). Based upon this interaction, the concepts of theriophily (love for animals) and misothery (hatred for animals) come to the fore in the discussions on animal ethics that have continued until today. In this context, the epistemological questioning of these two concepts in the historical process is extremely important in order to understand the way animals are viewed on religious and philosophical grounds, how the moral status of animals is perceived and the course of ethical discussions on this basis (Günlü-Küçükaltan and Dilek, 2019). At the same time, it is a necessity in terms of internalizing the concepts in animal ethics discussions such as speciesism, , ecocentrism, anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism, which are examined deeply in other sections.

2. TERIOPHILIST AND MISOTERIC VIEW

The concept of "misothery" combining two Greek words was first used by Jim Mason in 2005 (Fennell, 2012, p.13). Accordingly, while "*misos*" means hatred, the word "*ther*" means animal, and the combination of these two words is conceptualised as "misothery", that is, animal hatred (Vaughan, 2015). In other saying, "misothery" is used as a concept that describes negative feelings towards

[1] The concept of non-human animal is used as an animal in the paper.
[2] This study is related to author's Ph.D thesis.

animals and points out that animals are resources for human purposes only. The concept of "theriophily" (love of animals) is synonymous with the concept of "animalitarianism", which is used in the same sense in the literature (Günlü-Küçükaltan and Dilek, 2019). The concept of "theriophily" was formed by combining of two Greek words and was put forward by G. Boas (Gill, 1969). According to this "ther/therion" means animal; "philos" means love or love. The word "theriophily", which is a combination of these two words, is also used in the sense of animal love. The concept of "Animalitarianism", which is synonymous with the concept of theriophily, was used for the first time by A. O. Lovejoy and G. Boas in the paper "A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas" (Scholtmeijer, 1989). Both concepts were used to explain that animals are superior to humans in some points (intuitively or cognitively) and were written in this way (Fennell, 2012, p.22).

The concepts of misothery and theriophily have been dealt with both religiously and philosophically in the historical process, and different cultural views have emerged regarding the concepts. When the emerging cultural views are evaluated philosophically, the first name that comes to mind is Aristotle, one of the ancient thinkers. Aristotle argues that animals are lower than humans in the hierarchical structure, and that they are a suitable resource for humans' purposes, citing the fact that animals lack the ability to reason (Cevizci, 2009, p.135). In this respect, Aristotle can be expressed as a thinker who adopts the misoteric[3] understanding. Two elements lie at the basis of Aristotle's misoteric understanding of animals. The first is that men have greater reasoning abilities than women, and therefore men are superior to women. The second is that people whose bodies are stronger than their minds are fit for slavery (Degrazia, 2006, p.14). It can be said that these two arguments regarding equality between men and women and slavery constitute the legitimate ground of Aristotle's mysoteric understanding by establishing an analogy with his thoughts on the human and non-human animal relationship.

Although there were philosophers in Ancient Greece who did not agree with Aristotle's view, who adopted a "theriophilist[4]" understanding such as Pythagoras (animals are the reincarnations of humans) and Theophrastos (animals also reason to a certain extent), on the way, especially western philosophers took as an example Aristotle's misoteric view that "the only rational being is human and animals exist for the use of humans".

Parallel to the aforementioned philosophical ground that rejects the moral status of animals, the expressions in religious books also strengthened this rejection, causing Aristotle's widespread view to be accepted as legitimate in the religious sense. For instance, the Bible supported the thesis that "animal exists for human" in the cultural codes of Christian societies, emphasizing that God created humans in his own image and that humans are free to use all natural resources, including animals, for their own purposes. So much so that in the Middle Ages, Christian western philosophers such as Augustinus and Tomasso supported this view on both religious and philosophical grounds and mediated the spread of the generally recognized thesis in Christian societies. On the other hand, the religion of Islam defends a similar thesis with Christianity that animals exist for humans. However, it is stated in some verses of the Qur'an that it is forbidden to torture animals. Judaism, on the other hand, is dominated by the idea that "all of God's creations deserve mercy", but it also has similar aspects with other religions (WAN, 2015).

In addition to all these religious perspectives, it started with Descartes in the seventeenth century and continued in the nineteenth century. Although there are differences between the thinkers of modern western philosophy, which goes back to the end, it still remains under the influence of Christianity and reflects the view that "man is superior to animals". In this period, with the influence of modern science and the interaction of modern science with religion and philosophy, the mysoteric understanding towards animals became stronger. The idea that animals lack the ability to reason, as well as the ability to perceive and feel has begun to become widespread. Thus, in addition to the common misoteric view, just as the male-dominant understanding morally ignores women, it has resulted in animals not being placed in any moral status in the eyes of humans. Here, thinkers such as J. Bentham and J. S. Mill, who advocate the "utilitarianism" view, stated that it is the right behavior that the balance between pleasure and pain dominate in favor of pleasure, and that this is also true for

intuitive animals, and stated that animals cannot be ignored morally. In other words, they stated that animals have interests at least as much as humans and that the traditional misoteric thought towards animals should be rejected and, in a sense, the terophilist perspective should be accepted. Within this process, Schopenhauer, who was influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism, also states that reasoning, self and power cannot be decisive in terms of the moral status of animals and that all beings capable of suffering must have an ontological and a moral status.

With the extension of the scope of modern science and its acceptance by the society, more radical paradigms have emerged than Schopenhauer's view (Günlü-Küçükaltan and Dilek, 2019). As a matter of fact, in the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin's radical idea that humans were descended from other animal species (the theory of evolution) revealed that animals also have a kind of reasoning ability and complex emotions. Although this situation is ignored by scientists, it has made it difficult to defend the generally accepted cognitive gap between human and animal. Thus, an important breaking point was experienced in the transformation of people's misoteric understanding of the moral status of animals.

The dominance of all this misoteric understanding, which the West accepted on both religious, philosophical and scientific grounds in the historical process, was not found in the cultural codes of eastern societies. The "ahimsa[5]" doctrine was accepted both in the religions of Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism and in the Confucian tradition, which is still alive today. Therefore, in the historical process up to the present, eastern societies that accepted this doctrine considered life, including animals, to be more sacred than the west. Degrezia also explains this difference between eastern and western societies; “a westerner and an easterner may say that life is sacred; but he will probably only mean the whole of eastern life (Degrazia, 2006, p.18). As a result, the moral status and ontological acceptability of animals are directly proportional to the philosophical, religious and scientific influences of western and eastern societies. Therefore, while western societies are mostly under the influence of a misoteric understanding in in philosophy and religion, eastern societies adopt a terophilist understanding.

3. CONCEPTS AND THEORIES UNDER THE SCOPE OF ANIMAL ETHICS

3.1. Speciesism

Animal rights defenders stating that animal liberation is directly related to human liberation; They also use the concept of speciesism towards humans. The term "speciesism" is generally used to criticize the human-centered modern society. The expression "speciesism" was first used by Richard Ryder in 1970 in a statement prepared against experiments on animals in research laboratories at universities (Ryder, 2004). In addition to that, the first source in which the concept of speciesism is clearly defined is in the book Animal Liberation (2005) by Peter Singer, who studies on moral philosophy. Singer defines speciesism as “*the bias or biased behavior of a person in favor of the interests of one's own biological species and against the interests of other biological species*.” (Altınal and Tekdemir, 2020, p.494). On the other hand, Ryder in 1970 makes an analogy with the concept of racism. The author explains how he found this concept in his article as follows (Ryder, 2010, p.1):

“*The revolution in the 1960s on racism, sexism and class discrimination ignored the plight of animals. Politics and ethics ignored non-humans. Everyone was busy reducing prejudice against people. As a medical scientist – which Dr. Ryder is a clinical psychologist – I knew hundreds of animal species were in pain, fear, and suffering. While I am against racism, gender discrimination and class discrimination, why am I not against this discrimination against animals? Something should be done about this too! We also need to take a parallel stance between ourselves and animals. We cannot ignore animals. With these thoughts in mind, one day (in 1970) while I was lying in the bathtub of my bathroom, the concept suddenly came to my mind: Speciesism*!”

Speciesism, as a concept, can be expressed as the intellectual infrastructure of the domination that humans have established over animals from past to present. As stated in the first chapter, people tend to ignore animals morally and ontologically in the historical process. The main reason for this situation is the belief that animals are only a resource for humans, under the dominance of philosophical, religious, scientific and cultural references and a misoteric view. In other saying,

[5] The "Ahimsa" doctrine is the view that argues that all life forms are sacred, and in this respect, it is similar to the philosophy of Gaianism.

animals exist for humans, and from a philosophical point of view, animals are non-reasoning beings. The expressions in the holy books show parallelism with the philosophical discourse in question. General statements such as "*God created animals and all nature to serve the purposes of humans*" are found in religious books (Aebersold et al., 2007, p.354). In scientific terms, animals are used in scientific processes to cure people's illnesses or to make them more beautiful and happy. Since cultural codes are already shaped by what is transferred from religion and the past, the superior view of societies towards animals brings with it an attitude that ignores them.

All these references show that a speciesist understanding, in which humans marginalize or ignore animals, is considered legitimate in the human-animal relationship. So much so, that Peter Singer's philosophical approach, which is cited as an important turning point by animal rights defenders, in his work "Animal Liberation", which states that "animal experiments can only be considered legitimate if the intended benefits exceed the harm caused" can also be described as speciesist. As a matter of fact, Francione also criticises Singer at this point and articulates that he has a completely different view with him (Francione, 2015). Since this situation is discussed in the following sections as a debate between animal welfare and animal rights theorists, only the concept of speciesism is discussed here.

In this regard, speciesism forms the basis of animal ethics discussions. For instance, failure to provide legal protection to a human being to a cat or dog is referred to as speciesism by some animal rights theorists (Regan, 2007; Francione, 2008) . From another view point, if the only reason for the social protection of a living thing or for its moral existence to be accepted is the species to which it belongs, that society and the individuals living in that society have a speciesist point of view. Therefore, according to that society, no living thing other than humans can be accepted as morally or legally equal. As Ryder stated at the beginning, speciesism approach should be socially rejected by making analogies with both racism and gender and class discrimination. Such that, it is unacceptable according to the principle of equality for a person to act prejudiced or biased in favor of the interests of his own biological species and against other biological species. Because the principle of equality; It should apply to all beings, white or black, female or male, human or not (Singer, 2002). This situation is embodied by moral and cultural effects of human behavior, and is associated with people's views of life, and in direct proportion to this brings two basic philosophical concepts to the fore: "Anthropocentrism" and "Ecocentrism".

3.2. Anthropocentric and Ecocentric Approach

Approaches that examine the human-environment relationship can be considered within a new discipline of moral philosophy called environmental ethics or environmental ethics (Karakaya and Çobanoğlu, 2012). These approaches can also be the determinants of our view towards animals, which are a part of the natural environment. Considering that human behaviors are shaped by moral and cultural influences, it can be stated that it is the moral and cultural systems created by humans that shape people's perspectives towards animals. In this context, two approaches, anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, draw attention. According to anthropocentric approach, it is important for people to create ethical values towards their environment (Savaş et al., 2009, p.55): (i) Humans are dependent on nature in terms of basic needs; (ii) Beyond meta-value, nature makes people happy for aesthetic reasons; (iii)Three approaches play a role: being respectful to nature is educational about respecting other people as well.

In the anthropocentric approach, there are two levels called hard and soft (Goralnik and Nilson, 2012). One of the best example of those who support the rigid anthropocentric view is Descartes. Descartes divides the environment into matter and spirit. According to Descartes, the human body and animals are matter. No matter how, while humans also have a soul, animals are "organic machines (automata)" (Wilson, 2015). According to Descartes, it is natural to describe or evaluate animals completely devoid of both reasoning and emotions as organic machines (Descartes, 1993). Evaluating the human body in a similar way, the philosopher argues that the essence of humanity is not the body (matter), but the soul, which includes consciousness alone.

In addition to that, the soft anthropocentric view basically parallels the strict anthropocentric view. The difference is that in the soft anthropocentric view, the notion that bad behavior towards animals can make people bad too. However, it can be said that it still has a human-centred, bossy and

speciesist perspective. The thinker most suitable for this view is Kant. Kant expresses that animals can also suffer, but they have no legal and moral status (Savaş et al., 2009).

Physiocentrism, which is the exact opposite of anthropocentrism, includes an understanding that nature is at the forefront and people are at the periphery (Mittelstrass, 1999, p.279). The concept of physiocentrism is basically similar to ecocentrism. While physiocentrism is mostly involved in ethical debates in the field of science such as medicine and biology; It is used in discussions on more philosophical grounds such as ecocentrism, animal ethics and environmental ethics (Kortenkamp and Moore, 2001). Both concepts in question are used in animal ethics debates to indicate whether people are a part of nature or whether they defend an understanding that is dominant over nature. These two concepts are frequently encountered in the studies of animal welfare and animal rights theorists such as Singer, Regan, Degrezia and Francione.

3.3. Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism describes the tendency to imbue the real or imagined behavior of non-human animals with humanlike motivations, characteristics, emotions or intentions (Epley et al., 2007). Or to describe it more briefly; anthropomorphism is determined as people's attribution of human characteristics to non-human creatures. The basis of attributing human characteristics to non-human creatures is the anthropocentric view. According to the anthropocentric view, although humans have no responsibility to respect nature or other non-human creatures, it is argued that nature is at the bottom of the hierarchy of existence and non-human creatures can be used for human purposes. Therefore, a dolphin, walrus or whale can entertain people by performing, a dog or a monkey can be eaten for people's taste, horses, elephants, mules or donkeys carry people around, animals are disabled in the development of products that "benefit" for humans by using them in experiments, or According to this understanding, his death is considered legitimate.

There are many studies on the concept of anthropomorphism in the literature, which is described as the attribution of human characteristics to non-human creatures (Butterfield et al., 2012; Tam et al., 2013; Urquiza-Haas and Kotrschal, 2015; Günlü-Küçükaltan and Dilek, 2019). These studies focus on the positive aspects of anthropomorphism in terms of animal welfare. It is stated that anthropomorphism is divided into two as "interpretive" and "imaginary (imaginary)". While the effort to understand the psychological states of non-human creatures based on the human self is defined as "interpretive anthropomorphism", attributing various characteristics to non-human creatures is defined as "imaginary or imaginary anthropomorphism" and it is stated that this situation is particularly important for animal welfare (Singer, 2002; Goralnik and Nilson, 2012).

3.4. Concepts in Animal Ethics Discussions

There are concepts that are frequently used in animal ethics discussions. The concepts in question are important in terms of forming the basis for the views and discourses put forward both in religious and cultural sense and on the philosophical ground. Understanding and internalizing the concepts is necessary at the point of determining our perspective towards animals.

- ***Consciousness***

The concept of consciousness is handled in terms of etymology, metaphysics, psychology and philosophy and is defined in different ways according to the field in which it is used. However, in accordance with the purpose of the thesis, the concept of consciousness is discussed from a philosophical point of view. In this context, consciousness; human thought, emotion, will, character, excitement, opinion, intuition, etc. It can be defined as the sum of all instantaneous processes or the reflector of objective reality in humans. However, in animal ethics discussions, consciousness is not only a concept specific to humans, but also a concept used for animals.

- ***Pain***

Pain reflects not a concept in animal ethics debates, but rather an idea of where people can look at the moral status of animals. For instance, Bentham, who is accepted as the founder of utilitarian ethics, expresses this situation as follows in his work “Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation” (Singer, 2002):

"…….Maybe one day the rest of the animal world will also have rights denied them only by violence. The French understood that a person cannot be left unconditionally to the will of a tyrant just because his skin is black. Perhaps one day it will be realized that the number of legs and the amount of hair on the skin are equally insufficient reasons for abandoning a sentient being to the same fate. What else could draw this impenetrable border? Reasoning ability? Is he capable of speaking? But an adult horse or dog is far superior to a day old, a week old, or even a month old baby, both in terms of intelligence and communication; but even so, what would that indicate? The question we should ask is not can they reason or speak, but "Can they suffer?" should be"

This reflection is important in terms of understanding the epistemological infrastructure for the concept of pain. In summary, while there are good reasons to assume that other humans can suffer as we do, similar justifications do not exist in the case of animals because of the speciesist approach, which believes that pain is only for humans.

- ***Happiness***

Happiness is a state of consciousness, a mental event, just like the concept of pain, and it can be understood that a human or non-human creature is happy through external signs (Singer, 2002, p.48). A human's smile or a dog's tail wagging when it sees its owner can be interpreted as an indication that happiness indicators cannot differ between human and non-human creatures. However, the fact that a dolphin in captivity is perceived as "smiling" by people due to its physical characteristics does not mean that it is happy. Dialectically speaking, pain and happiness can be expressed as opposites of each other. At this point, the first name that comes to mind is Epicurus, one of the ancient philosophers. According to Epicurus, happiness is the state of being free from pain and suffering (Gündoğan, 2010, pp.128-129). In other words, one can be happy if there is no pain. In Epicurus' thought, in order to get rid of pain and achieve happiness, the individual should have adopted a simple lifestyle away from social life. From the perspective of utilitarian ethics, seeking happiness and avoiding pain can be summarized as the principles of utilitarian ethics. Happiness in the principles expressed by Mill, one of the representatives of the utilitarian ethical understanding; "It is not the happiness of the individual, but the correctness of the action he has taken for everyone" (Jacobson, 2008, p.169). From this point of view, it can be concluded that happiness is not only for human animals, and an action can cause happiness or pain for non-human animals as well.

- ***Utilitarianism***

Benefit or utilitarianism, which is included in the concepts of happiness and pain, has an important place in animal ethics discussions. The concept of utility is used and discussed in a philosophical sense, rather than an economic definition as "the ability of goods and services to meet needs" in the thesis. Although there is a philosophical background in the definition of utility in economic terms – the relationship between economy and philosophy can be understood more clearly especially in Adam Smith- and there is no harm in saying that utility is considered as a philosophical concept related to utilitarian ethics and that it is directly proportional to the result of human behavior. According to the utilitarian ethical understanding, the result of the behavior of the individual gives rise to the benefit. If the action performed creates happiness for everyone, that action is beneficial.

- ***Moral Status***

Moral status draws attention as a concept that has been used and discussed only for people from past to present. As a matter of fact, the concept of moral status is mentioned many times in the thesis, both in theoretical discussions and in relation to the use of animals in the tourism sector. Therefore, it should be stated that this concept is used not only for humans but also for non-human creatures, and at this point, a similar approach was adopted with Francione. Francione says that the moral status of a human or animal cannot be determined by those who gave birth to that animal or human, and the application of a moral concept cannot be determined by those who designed it. He argues, however, that if moral rights apply only to those who conceived them, a large part of humanity should be excluded from the moral community. In this context, he makes a historical analysis of an understanding contrary to the principle of equality by stating that the concept of right, as used today, was originally developed only to protect the interests of wealthy, white, male landlords, and in fact, many of the moral concepts were historically created for the benefit of privileged men. However, he

states that in the historical process, in accordance with the principle of equal consideration, it has emerged that similar situations should be handled similarly, and thus, the necessity of expanding the rights and moral status to include other people has arisen. At this point, Francione emphasizes that applying the principle of equal consideration to non-human animals perceived as other can eliminate the long-standing understanding of treating animals as resources, and thus animals can have a moral status (Francione, 2008, p.302). The moral status mentioned by Francione is discussed in the thesis within the framework of this view. In other words, to say that a cat, dog or a dolphin has moral status and to defend it is to say that that creature has a moral value and status not only in terms of its relations with humans but also in terms of itself (Degrezia, 2006, p.29). In short, regardless of how the welfare of that creature affects people's interests, it should be argued that it should have moral status purely for its own sake, and should be treated well for its own sake.

4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The common feature of traditional ethical theories is that they think of man not only as a moral agent, but also as the sole object of our moral behavior. In this respect, in general, being a moral agent and having a right, that is, being the subject of our moral behavior, are considered equal. Thus, other living things could not have rights because they could not show the characteristic of being moral agents (Yaşar, 2018). Therefore, there are often no meaningful and radical changes/changes in people's perspectives towards animals.

From a religious point of view, most religious teachings are universal. While it has the principle of respecting the animals in particular (Turan, 2020) and all living things in general, it does not advocate the equal treatment of humans and animals. In other words, while religions generally say that animals should not be tortured, they also emphasize that animals were created for humans. Considering that religion is one of the social institutions from a sociological point of view, it is clear that religion is one of the most important elements in the formation of cultural codes (Göçer, 2012). In this context, religious teachings or discourses towards animals also affect the cultural perspective and are effective in the perspective towards animals.

Although the perspective towards animals has changed from society to society under the influence of philosophical, religious and cultural approaches/discourses in the historical process, the struggle for animal rights still continues. The fact that the capitalist system sees only animals as commodities and that people do not see animals as souls within this system is, of course, one of the biggest obstacles to the expansion of the field of struggle. However, a philosophical, religious and cultural inquiry is an important way to reveal our conscientious and moral responsibility towards animals that capitalism has ignored or wants us to ignore, and to change our perspective. This way is through a person's ability to give honest answers to himself through his own inner journey. As Rabindranath Tagore said: “Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark” (Leenaert, 2017).

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