

BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Review of *Animals, Ethics and Us: A Veterinarian's View of Human- Animal Interactions*

Dr. Madeleine L.H. Campbell
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ABSTRACT

In *Animals, Ethic and Us*, Dr. Madeleine L.H. Campbell offers insight into the moral landscape of human-animal relations through a specific ethical framework that rejects the rights of non-human animals, opting instead for a “qualified utilitarian approach” (2019, 9). For Campbell, animal ethics should not be bound to animal rights or the autonomy of individual animals; she asserts that animal rights should not factor into the moral consideration of animals at all. Since she does not confer animals a moral status or form of rights and instead relies on the utilitarian approach, Campbell attempts to locate the justifying logic of necessity (or non-necessity) in each of these issues and demonstrate how the human use of animals in a particular situation is, or is not, legitimate. There are some notable issues with this approach: Campbell’s moral framework can essentially justify anything done to animals—if it is ‘beneficial’ to humans in any capacity. In this review, I briefly summarize her argument and its applications, then delve into some criticisms of her views.

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In *Animals, Ethics and Us*, Dr. Madeleine L.H. Campbell offers insight into the moral landscape of human-animal relations through a specific ethical framework that rejects the rights of non-human animals, opting instead for a “qualified utilitarian approach” (2019, 9). After establishing her conception of the moral status of animals (and refuting other notable approaches), Campbell surveys the field of animal ethics and applies her ethical prism to wide-ranging challenges, assumptions, and questions—such as animal abuse, animals in sports, cloning, medical experimentation, and animal welfare legislation, which further delineates her ethical position. Dr. Campbell is a veterinarian, professor, and researcher in animal welfare and ethics—her background and clinical knowledge as a veterinarian dictates many of the animal-welfare issues that she assesses in the book, as well as informs the ethical metric and considerations she makes on those issues. Yet, Campbell does review basic philosophical views on non-human animals and other broad issues—rendering her book an accessible and potentially insightful text for many readers outside of veterinary studies.

Qualified Utilitarianism: Campbell’s View of Animal’s Moral Status

Campbell’s positions and policy prescriptions on the issues mentioned throughout the book are predicated on her view of qualified utilitarianism—which she spends the beginning of the book differentially defining against other popular views (such as Regan’s ‘absolutist’ views of animal rights, Beauchamp’s non-absolutist view of animal rights, and Singer’s anti-speciesist utilitarianism). For Campbell, animal ethics should not be bound to animal rights or the autonomy of individual animals; she asserts that animal rights should not factor into the moral consideration of animals at all. Campbell posits that animals do not have rights because they do not have the cognitive capacity

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to envision a future beyond the now: she claims that contemporary research demonstrates that animals are instead in a perpetual present, and although they can anticipate “events in the near future” (2019, 2) she maintains that animals cannot have a sense of the future the same way humans experience it.

Due to this view of animal rights and welfare, Campbell argues that animals can be ethically ‘used’ for the sake of (potentially) maximizing the quality of human life—though she qualifies this position by noting that, albeit animals do not have inherent rights, humans “ought to do everything we can to minimize the harms to [animals] and maximize their positive experiences” (2019, 8). Campbell gives a tautological explanation for our obligations to animals: we should treat animals virtuously because it is the virtuous thing to do, “we should treat animals with consideration, compassion, and sensitivity because...consideration, compassion, and sensitivity are virtuous attributes in themselves” (2019, 7). Animals don’t deserve to be treated ethically because of a certain moral-status or because they are imbued with innate rights, but rather because humans distinguish between right and wrong and engaging in a wrong action is designated as ‘wrong.’ Additionally, Campbell claims that our treatment of animals is ‘relational’: the mode of relationship and proximity that we have to an animal ultimately defines our moral obligation to that animal. For Campbell, while animals are sentient and should have their “five freedoms” (2019, 8) respected and upheld, human capacity for a ‘sense of the future’ renders us ontologically more valuable in a utilitarian equation and thusly our needs (or anything that may contribute to the quality of our lives in some way) supersede the value of an animal’s life.

Animal Use and Abuse: Utility and Exploitation

Throughout the remainder of the book, Campbell deploys her relational qualified utilitarian framework to examine significant ethical issues in animal welfare. Since she does not confer animals a moral status or form of rights and instead relies on the utilitarian approach, Campbell spends these chapters trying to locate the justifying logic of necessity (or non-necessity) in each of these issues and demonstrate how the human use of animals in a particular situation is, or is not, legitimate. Essentially, she must explicate the human utility of using animals in certain instances and attempt to outline when use merges into abuse (and where exactly that logically tabulated ethical line emerges from).

In chapter three, after demonstrating the putative necessity of animals within sports, Campbell notably uncovers that line: “use becomes abuse if risk and suffering have not been minimized as much as possible” (2019, 46). She argues that the use of non-human animals in sports is ethically permissible since it contributes to human-life in a substantive way through the economic benefits that a country and individual may derive from the sport and the spectator’s “enjoyment” (2019, 37). This kind of ‘non-trivial’ contribution to human life is what renders animal use ‘necessary’: it’s not that humans would not survive without the use, but rather that the use is justified through a form of utility.

Campbell’s position on sports is indicative of her other positions such as meat-eating and medical testing on non-human animals—both of which she perceives as ethically acceptable and justified due to her utilitarian metric. Meat and medical experimentation on animals are acceptable because of the harm:benefit analysis that Campbell employs. Much like her

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argument regarding sports, because there is a human benefit deemed significant enough, the use of the animals does not, in her view, constitute abuse or exploitation. But, as Campbell acknowledges, meat and medical experimentation are distinct from sports because they necessarily result in animal death. Campbell confronts the issue of animal death by asserting that the “humane death of an animal is not a harm comparable to the death of a human, due to animal’s (presumed) lack of sense of future” (2019, 55). She does note that animals’ capacity to potentially derive enjoyment, happiness, or satisfaction from the continuation of their life, renders it unacceptable to kill an animal without a higher-tier of concern or human benefit—animal death ethically necessitates a higher benefit-threshold than mere animal use.

In the case of meat, Campbell quickly addresses this by citing the benefits humans derive from meat (namely sustenance) supersede the animal’s life-value—this is why one does not need to worry about the minimization of pain in the instance of meat. Yet, as Campbell lays out in chapter four, medical experimentation is distinct from meat because there is not always a clear link between the conducted research (involving an animal that is later euthanized) and human benefits—this is unlike meat where the benefit of sustenance is clear. As Campbell writes, it is “recognized that a significant proportion of drugs (about 90%) that work in animal trials fail when their use is tested in humans” (2019, 54). Despite this, Campbell argues that there are other times when there is a genuine benefit to using animals in scientific and medical experimentation, and that oftentimes, these tests do materially make human’s lives better (such as the 10% of drugs that do work). Therefore, animal experimentation is also permitted in her ethical framework given that there is some benefit in humans that overrides the value

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of the animal life. Later in the book, she does note that animal cloning (in its current iteration) is not ethically permissible due to lack of medical necessity (for humans) and because of the adverse effects on the animal's welfare.

Evaluation of Ethical Claims: Potential (and Actual) Criticisms

While Campbell brings an interesting, reasonable, and well-informed opinion as a clinical veterinarian and an animal welfare researcher—many logical sites could be ethically contested within her book. The main site of contention is the originary source of all her many claims and staked positions throughout the text, namely, her ethical framework of relational utilitarianism. I will work through some of the primary issues and potential criticisms, then I will briefly apply them to a few of her claims and prescriptions.

Firstly, Campbell dispenses with the other major ethical frameworks that she discusses in the start of the book. Of course, it is not practical, nor is it expected, to substantively address the entire field of animal ethics in a 136-page text—yet, because her ensuing arguments are predicated on the framework that is constructed in opposition to those other views, she should provide detailed clarification before discarding them as non-applicable. For instance, she dismisses Tom Regan's 'absolutist' view of animal rights by pointing out that animals do not have a 'sense of the future' that is equivalent to humans. This is not a reasonable foundation to discard his views because Regan never asserts that the future-sense of non-human animals is the same as humans—and because Campbell neglects the other facets of Regan's subject-of-life ontological category (desire, memory, etc). Some of these oversights also transfer to her evaluation of Peter Singer. When writing about Singer's idea

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of ‘speciesism,’ she states: “Speciesism is not actually morally wrong. In fact, my view of the responsibilities that humans have to animals is based on speciesism” (2019, 7). Singer does not posit that there are *no* distinguishable differences, but rather that these species-based differences do not divest non-human animals of a moral-status. Further, Singer agrees that humans do have certain morally obligatory “responsibilities” towards animals—and even that the needs of a human can negate the needs of an animal. Speciesism is not merely the capacity to make discriminatory (discriminatory meaning ‘distinguishing between’) choices: rather the concept describes when these discriminatory choices favor one species *merely on the fact of their species alone*.

Secondly, Campbell’s conception of relational utilitarianism is morally inconsistent and frequently dismisses individual animal’s subjectivity. There are times where the individual animal’s life is taken into account—her utilitarian metric relies on the “five domains” (8) of individual animals, which she identifies as being, “nutrition, environment, health, behavior, and mental state” (2019, 8). However, the ‘relational’ aspect of this directly defies any sort of individual-animal based moral calculations. To Campbell, “it is perfectly acceptable for a farmer to take his lambs to slaughter because of the nature of the relationship” (2019, 8): the relation of farmer-lamb justifies the dismissal of the individual lamb’s five domains. The fundamental question is: Why does the relation that a human has to an animal alter the degree to which that animal has a right-to-life? Of course, implicitly, Campbell is deploying the utilitarian-based assessment that she uses for all meat: the sustenance provided by animal-meat for humans supersedes the animal’s inherent life-value (the human benefit outweighs the animal detriment). Yet, later in the book, when discussing cloning, she

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concedes that “we do not actually need to eat meat or animal products at all” (2019, 88). This concession undermines Campbell’s utilitarian metric—if the basic pre-condition for the use of animals is predicated on ‘necessity’ then the fact that animal-meat is not needed by humans means that meat devolves from legitimate ‘use’ into illegitimate ‘abuse.’ Campbell’s idea of ‘necessary’ is necessity-without-the-necessary—since meat ‘benefits’ humans, she views the killing of animals as ‘necessary.’ The human-derived utility of meat meets Campbell’s definition of necessary—but it is not completely clear how she measures the human benefit against the animal death. If meat is acceptable for convenience and gastronomic pleasure, then what would be the lowest human-benefit threshold that justifies animal experimentation and death? In all of these calculations, the individual animal’s sense of pain, and overall subjectivity, is never truly taken into account (given that there is *some* minimum threshold of human benefit met).

These same criticisms (her unjustified dismissal of major animal ethics theories and her oftentimes inconsistent logic) is applicable to other prescriptive areas of her arguments. Because human ‘need’ is determined on a “case-by-case” (2019, 67) basis, animals can be ‘ethically’ subjected to all kinds of maltreatment—like many things she posits as ethically ‘necessary,’ such as animals being slaughtered for meat, horses being whipped by their jockey, and apes (potentially) being exposed to medical experimentation (if there was human benefit). This is how Campbell concludes that, “there is no necessary (unavoidable) harm which it is unacceptable for humans to inflict upon animals” (2019, 67). What is most dubious about this statement—and her ethical framework—is the manner in which so many human inflicted harms are deemed as “unavoidable” for truly non-necessary reasons. Campbell’s moral

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framework can essentially justify anything done to animals—as long as it is ‘beneficial’ to humans in any capacity. This is why, for instance, she believes that the whipping of competitive horses is morally acceptable (when the horses refuse to run)—because of the spectator’s derived enjoyment and the capital gain in horse racing.

Conclusion

Campbell does, again, have some very interesting insights into the nuances of animal health and veterinarian research. She also accomplishes a lot in this short book without seeming to elide over too much imperative information—and is oftentimes detailed and diligent in her research. But, since the entirety of the book relies on her qualified relational utilitarian approach (aside from the final chapter that covers animal welfare legislation), some major ethical and theoretical issues do emerge throughout many of her claims.

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References

Campbell, Madeleine. *Animals, Ethics and Us: A Veterinary's View of Human-Animal Interactions*. 5m Books Ltd, 2019.