

Robert Garner and Siobhan O’Sullivan, eds. *The Political Turn in Animal Ethics*. Rowman & Littlefield 2016. 226 pp. \$126.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781783487240); \$42.00 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781783487257).

The Political Turn in Animal Ethics, edited by Robert Garner and Siobhan O’Sullivan, is an anthology of previously unpublished essays concerning a range of topics that lie at the intersection of political science, political philosophy, and animal ethics. Traditionally, animal ethics has focused on questions about the moral status of animals and on the implications of this moral status for our personal obligations. Work in this volume, as well as in the general ‘political turn’ literature, is unique because it goes beyond questions of moral status and personal ethics.

A feature that distinguishes the contents of this book from other work in the political turn is that it is not only *in* the political turn but also *about* the political turn. A central issue addressed by both the editors and some of the authors, is how best to define the turn. What feature both unifies work in the political turn and distinguishes it from other work in the broader animal ethics literature? According to the editors, the defining feature of work in the political turn is its concern with political power (13-4). This definition is thought to be more inclusive of the full range of political turn work than, say, one which identifies the defining feature to be a concern with including animals in the political community (13). Certainly, some of the work in the political turn is about grounds for and means of including (some) animals in the political community, but there’s work on other topics, too, e.g., work on whether illegal animal rescue efforts are best understood as civil disobedience or as militant resistance (chapter 8).

Though a definition focused on political power arguably does a good job of including both work on inclusion and work on other political topics, it doesn’t sharply distinguish work in the political turn from other work in animal ethics. Traditional animal ethics often associates the question of moral status with the question of whether or not animals have rights, and rights, even basic moral rights, are political concepts. Though possessing a right such as the right to life has ethical implications for the conduct of individuals, it also has implications for what the state may legitimately do. Rights are held against the state, and thus the state *may not* legitimately deprive an individual of life if that individual possesses a right to life. Furthermore, the state *may* legitimately restrict the liberty of other individuals in order to protect the life of one who possesses a right to life. In light of the conceptual relationship between rights and legitimacy, it would seem that animal ethics has always been about political power. That said, it is perhaps fair to claim that traditional animal ethics has not generally focused on the relationship between rights and political power, so much as on the relationship between rights and the ethical obligations of uncoerced individuals. Perhaps the difference between the political turn and the rest of animal ethics is a matter of emphasis, rather than a sharp conceptual difference.

A major question running through the book concerns the manner in which public disagreement about the moral and political status of animals should be handled. For a number of authors, the fact that many people don’t think moral equality extends to animals is something that should be taken for granted and, to some extent, accommodated. For example, O’Sullivan and Smith argue that animal advocates and ethicists should, when arguing for legal reform, focus on *internal* consistency instead of *external* consistency (63-4 and 69-72). External consistency pertains to consistency (or the lack thereof) between the moral attitude we have toward human beings and the moral attitude we have toward animals, e.g., between the attitude we have toward humans who lack full agency, such

as young children, and the attitude we have toward cognitively analogous animals. Internal consistency, by contrast, pertains to consistency between the moral attitudes we have toward different animals, e.g., between the attitude we have toward companion animals and the attitude we have toward animals raised for agricultural purposes. The authors note that arguments appealing to internal consistency have more political traction because such arguments don't conflict with a deeply ingrained view that many people hold, namely the view that human beings are morally superior to animals. The fact that most people have been socialized to believe in human supremacy means that it's easier to (persuasively) argue against the abuse of farm animals on the ground we would not tolerate such abuse in the case of companion animals, and harder to argue against it on the ground that we would not tolerate such abuse in the case of young children or adults with severe dementia.

Other authors, by contrast, seem less willing to accommodate disagreement about the moral and political status of animals. Schmitz, for example, argues that questions about the scope of the moral and political communities are prior to, and to some extent determine the boundaries of, reasonable pluralism (42-3). After all, the claim that certain views must be respected in public discourse assumes that those who hold those views are members of the moral and political community. Furthermore, it is a condition upon the reasonableness of a view that it be respectful of other members of the moral and political community. A view that, for example, considers women to be inferior beings not worthy of a right to political participation, is not a view that should be respected in public discourse. From this perspective, it seems that questions about the moral and political status of animals must be resolved before the boundaries of reasonable pluralism can be established, and thus before serious democratic discourse about how to collectively treat animals can begin. If animals have a right to be included in the democratic process, as well as moral rights (such as a right to life) that ought to serve as constitutional constraints, then democratic procedures will only produce legitimate outcomes once these rights are respected. We should thus determine whether animals have these rights before we democratically address other, animal-related matters.

It may be worth noting that there is space for agreement about the strategic value of accommodating human supremacism. Animal rights theorists who think that human supremacism is an unreasonable view, the prevalence of which undermines democratic legitimacy, might nonetheless concede that animal rights advocates should use arguments that a human supremacist would be inclined to accept, e.g., arguments focused on internal consistency or on mutually accepted ideas like the importance of preventing cruelty to animals (chapter 6). Arguments acceptable from the perspective of human supremacism are perhaps more likely to succeed at securing legal reforms. The strategic value of such arguments aside, though, the issue of whether disagreement about animals' moral and political status is part of, or prior to, reasonable pluralism, remains an important one for any theorist interested in democratic legitimacy.

An additional theme worth commenting upon is that many of the authors in the volume situate their views against, and are attempting to offer alternatives to, views defended by Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka in their book *Zoopolis* (arguably the most significant and influential contribution to the political turn literature). Among other things, Donaldson and Kymlicka defend the claim that domesticated animals should be thought of as our co-citizens. In support of their claim, they argue that democratic theorists often exaggerate the capacities necessary for political participation, and that the extent to which domesticated animals actually do possess such capacities is often underappreciated by both animal ethicists and political theorists (*Zoopolis*, 103-5).

In response, Alasdair Cochrane and Robert Garner argue that domesticated animals can consistently be thought of as members of our society without also being thought of as citizens. Acknowledging that domesticated animals reside in and are part of our communities, and that their interests

should therefore be taken into consideration and represented in political decision making, is one thing. Considering them to be citizens, with the ability to actively contribute to political decision making, is another.

It's beyond the scope of my review to defend a stance on the above-mentioned issue. I will note, however, that Cochrane's and Garner's alternative conceptions of political membership do the political turn a service. In traditional animal ethics, it's conventional to distinguish between moral agents—those who can be praised, blamed, and held responsible for their behavior, and who can thus *owe* moral duties—and moral patients—those who can be harmed, benefitted, and thus *owed* duties, even though they lack the capacities necessary to *owe* duties themselves. Donaldson and Kymlicka, in claiming that domesticated animals are best thought of as our co-citizens, challenge the traditional view that animals are moral patients. Thinking of domesticated animals as active contributors to political decision making requires ascribing a degree of moral agency to them. By offering a political alternative to citizenship, Cochrane and Garner show that it's possible to consistently include animals in the political community without ascribing moral agency to them. In doing so, they help open up the political turn to animal ethicists who are committed to the view that animals are moral patients.

Overall, *The Political Turn in Animal Ethics* is a fascinating read that sheds light on a number of largely neglected issues in animal ethics. I highly recommend it.

Kyle Johannsen, Trent University