

Alasdair Cochrane, *Sentientist Politics: A Theory of Inter-Species Justice*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 176 pages. ISBN: 9780198789802. Hardback: £ 55.00.

Alasdair Cochrane's recent monograph *Sentientist Politics: A Theory of Global Inter-Species Justice* (henceforth referred to as *SP*) provides a political, specifically *cosmopolitan* theory of animal rights. Though *SP* is not the first work to argue that cosmopolitan political thinking extends, as a matter of consistency, to animals, it is the first book-length treatment of this subject. As Cochrane notes, much of the so-called 'political turn' in animal ethics takes a specifically relational approach (p. 5). For example, Sue Donaldson's and Will Kymlicka's book *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) – arguably the most influential contribution to the political turn literature – argues that much of the content of an animal's rights depends on what relational category she belongs to. More specifically, Donaldson and Kymlicka argue that citizenship rights should be accorded to domesticated animals, denizenship rights to liminal animals, and sovereignty rights to wild animals. Cochrane makes an important contribution to the political turn literature by offering a theory of animal rights that's simultaneously political, global, and more individual-focused.

According to Cochrane, justice for animals requires that we replace the concept of 'human rights' with the concept of 'sentient rights', or rights that all sentient beings, including sentient animals, possess. The two (prima-facie) sentient rights he identifies are a right to life and a right not to be made to suffer (pp. 28-9). Cochrane claims that respect for sentient rights requires that they both shape and constrain political institutions (p. 30). More concretely, he maintains that a global political order respectful of sentient rights would be characterized by (a) the direct representation of animals' interests in democratic decision-making (pp. 40-9); (b)

political membership for all domesticated and *wild* animals affected by a group's political decisions (pp. 49-56 and pp. 69-78); (c) considerable freedom of movement and robust assistance, for wild animals (pp. 82-98); and (d) the use of sentient rights as a baseline to judge whether a community's practices should be tolerated (Chapter 6).

As I noted above, Cochrane rejects that the relational category to which an animal belongs dictates the content of her rights. In doing so, Cochrane's view may, at first glance, appear anti-contextualist. Relational theorists maintain that basic negative rights, such as a right not to be killed, can plausibly be ascribed merely on the ground that a being has morally considerable interests, but that other rights, especially positive rights, can only be determined in light of contextual features. Of particular importance is the relational context a being occupies. For example, when one brings a being into the world, one in turn incurs a duty to care for her. This is true of what parents owe to their children, and by analogy, similar duties are owed to domesticated animals, since we're responsible for their existence. Wild animals, by contrast, do not owe their existence to us and so do not, according to relational theorists, enjoy the right to care that domesticated animals enjoy (see Clare Palmer, *Animal Ethics in Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 90-5).

To his credit, Cochrane is not insensitive to the importance of context. Quite the opposite: he's critical of relational approaches in part because he thinks that they fail to adequately realize the very contextualism that underpins them. Though Cochrane acknowledges that relational categories do have some bearing on the content of animals' rights, he also maintains that we should be careful to avoid treating each category's membership as if it were homogenous (p. 6). Significant differences can and often do exist between members of the same relational category, and Cochrane thus thinks it's implausible to ascribe an undifferentiated package of *concrete*

rights to all co-members. For example, one of the claims Donaldson and Kymlicka make in *Zoopolis* is that wild animals do not have a right to be protected from natural processes, e.g., from injury caused by predation or from hunger caused by food cycles (see Donaldson and Kymlicka, p. 182). In response, Cochrane argues that whether any particular animal has a right to protection depends on its individual circumstances. When protection can be provided without too much cost to ourselves and without a high risk of causing excessive harm, then an animals' *prima-facie* rights to life and not to be made to suffer, yield a *concrete* right to protection, even when providing protection requires significant interference with the relevant process. One of the examples Cochrane provides is eliminating predator populations through means such as contraception or sterilization, in areas where predators don't play a significant ecological role (p. 95). Though large-scale intervention in natural processes can be expensive, Cochrane notes that the cost should decrease once enough research and development has been carried out (pp. 97-8).

Its contribution to the contextualist enterprise is only one of *SP's* many virtues. Among other things, the book is well written and well argued, and its discussion of wild animals is interesting. That said, I do have some reservations about Cochrane's understanding of positive duties to wild animals. As I mentioned before, Cochrane argues that all wild animals affected by a group's political decisions are owed membership. Though some wild animals may be too far removed from us to be owed membership in a local or a national community, even distant animals are affected by some decisions that have a transnational impact, and thus any wild animal is owed membership in a to-be-created, transnational community (pp. 73-4 and pp. 96-7). For Cochrane, one of the features of political membership is that it confers significant positive duties. More specifically, co-membership entails that sentient rights yield rights to assistance. Death and suffering must be prevented: it isn't enough to refrain from causing them (p. 89).

I'm all for the claim that wild animals are owed significant positive duties. However, I think it's worth asking whether political membership is necessary to ground such duties. After all, we normally allow that we owe duties of humanitarian assistance to others in need, regardless of whether we share some form of political membership with them. So why not ground positive duties in the simpler and more-easily-justified claim that we owe humanitarian assistance to wild animals?

One possible response is that duties of humanitarian assistance, unlike duties of justice, would be limited to disaster relief, e.g., to assisting wild animal threatened by forest fires, earthquakes, droughts, etc. I don't think that this response is very plausible, however. As Cochrane is aware, the situation that most wild animals face is quite terrible: worse than the situation that even severely impoverished humans face. This is so for a variety of reasons, e.g., predation, the fact that many wild animal species protect their genes by producing huge numbers of uncared-for offspring, etc. As such, the need for humanitarian assistance is quite pervasive, and it supports extensive interventions such as population and disease control.

From the perspective of Cochrane's theory, it seems to me that the main difference between owing humanitarian assistance to wild animals and owing positive duties of justice to wild animals, is whether non-compliance should be tolerated by the global community. As I mentioned earlier, Cochrane maintains that sentient rights should be used as a baseline to judge whether a community's practices are tolerable. When a community fails to respect, for example, animals' right not to be made to suffer, it may be subject to economic or political sanctions (p. 116). In cases involving very severe rights violations, a community may even be subject to military intervention (pp. 117-18). It follows that in cases where wild animals have a concrete right to protection from natural harm, any community which has a duty to fulfill that right but

fails to do so, is subject to interference. What the duty to protect against natural harm might require of a community is a bit unclear, but it would presumably involve financially contributing to transnational interventions, as well as implementing, or at least cooperating with, interventions that can only be carried out at the national or local levels. Here's my question: Do we really want to say that communities which refuse to participate in such interventions are subject to coercive interference? Though it's plausible to claim that a community's right to self-determination is limited by individuals' rights, and that self-determination therefore cannot legitimate harmful human practices such as hunting or factory farming, it's less plausible to say that communities should be forced to intervene in nature. Generally speaking, negative duties are more stringent than positive duties. Furthermore, and all else being equal, a positive duty to a wild animal is weaker than an equivalent positive duty to a domesticated animal, since we caused the latter to come into existence and are thus responsible for her. Though we should certainly express disapproval towards communities that fail to satisfy their positive duties to wild animals, coercing them is another matter entirely.

Notwithstanding my concerns about how positive duties to wild animals should be understood, *Sentientist Politics* is an excellent book that makes a significant contribution to the political turn in animal ethics. I highly recommend it.

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