



## The political dimension of animal ethics in the context of bioethics: problems of integration and future challenges

La dimensión política de las éticas animales en el contexto de la bioética: problemas de integración y desafíos futuros



**Carlos R. Tirado**

PhD in Philosophy. Instructor of International Humanitarian Law for the American Red Cross.  
E-mail: [sandokant2003@yahoo.es](mailto:sandokant2003@yahoo.es)



## Abstract

*Animal ethics has reached a new phase with the development of animal ethical thinking. Topics and problems previously discussed in terms of moral theories and ethical concepts are now being reformulated in terms of political theory and political action. This constitutes a paradigm shift for Animal Ethics. It indicates the transition from a field focused on relations between individuals (humans and animals) to a new viewpoint that incorporates the political dimensions of the relationships between human communities and non-human animals. Animals are no longer seen as a heterogeneous group of sentient beings or simply as species, but as part of a common good that is simultaneously human and animal. In order to participate in this new phase, bioethics will have to face a series of challenges that have hindered the integration of animal ethics within its field. It will also need the development of a new theoretical framework based on relations between communities of individuals. This framework will be able to highlight the ethical and political dimensions that arise from interactions between human communities, non-human animals and the ecosystem.*

## Resumen

Las éticas animales se encuentran en una nueva fase del desarrollo del pensamiento ético animal. Los temas y problemas que antes se barajaban principalmente en términos de teorías, conceptos y paradigmas éticos están siendo reformulados en perspectivas y acercamientos propios de la teoría y la acción políticas. Se trata de la transición de una visión de la ética como una disciplina centrada en las relaciones entre individuos (humanos y animales) a otra que añade una dimensión social y política de las relaciones entre las comunidades humanas y los animales no humanos. En ella, éstos ya no son vistos sólo como un colectivo heterogéneo de seres vivos (sintientes o conscientes) o como especies, sino como parte de un bien común que es al mismo tiempo humano y animal. Para poder participar de esta nueva fase e incorporar la discusión de esta temática, la bioética debe afrontar una serie de problemas que han dificultado la integración de las éticas animales en su seno. Para ello es necesario el desarrollo de un nuevo marco de análisis relacional y comunitario, capaz de poner de manifiesto la dimensión política de los problemas que surgen de las relaciones entre las comunidades humanas, los animales no humanos y el ecosistema.

## Keywords

Animal Ethics, non-human animals, human communities.

*Ética animal, animales no humanos, comunidades humanas.*

## Fechas

Recibido: 13/3/2016. Aceptado: 27/3/2016.



## 1. A brief outline of animal ethics and its political dimension

If someone were to ask us what is our relationship with animals, we would probably reply that we like them, that they amuse us or even that we love them. Yet, as a society, that line of argument is difficult to maintain. Human communities routinely exploit billions of nonhuman animals in a vast network of profit. We killed them to make coats and wallets or for meat to overfeed us; we kill them even for fun and then we call that sport. Some of them are used in scientific experiments in which the line between research and suffering is so thin that in some cases it makes it tantamount to torture.

However, some uses of animals are vital to human communities. Animal research is considered the pillar of biological science. We depend on it for the development of new vaccines, for the study of zoonotic diseases and for countless medical applications for our health.

This dichotomy between moral conscience and cost-benefit raises two key questions: what kind of relations do we have with other animals and what kind of relations should we have. The field of animal ethics was created to deal with these issues.

This dichotomy between moral conscience and cost-benefit raises two key questions: what kind of relations do we have with other animals and what kind of relations *should* we have. The field of animal ethics was created to deal with these issues.

Animal ethics is a broad field. From a practical perspective, it evaluates the moral legitimacy and the ways in which human communities exploit other animals for their benefit. It covers topics such as the breeding and mass slaughter of animals for human consumption, the environmental impact of animal farming; hunting and blood sports or the use of animals for entertainment and for biomedical research. It also deals with questions related to the protection of endangered species, the impact of human activities on wild habitats and its effects on the environment. Unlike environmental ethics, which also addresses some of these

issues, the focus of animal ethics is not species or ecosystems, but the wellbeing of animals as individuals and as communities.

Although moral reasoning about animals can be traced back more than two thousand years in the Oriental and Western traditions, the contemporary discussion of animal ethics emerged during the 1970's in the U.S. Since then, the debate has evolved through various phases or stages. They could be categorized by their emphasis on a series of topics and approaches that have generated a wide range of works or profoundly influenced the field. Viewed this way, the development of animal ethics can be roughly divided into three overlapping, but clearly distinguishable junctures: a theoretical phase, a pragmatic phase and a political phase.

The first phase is characterized by a strong focus on ethical theory and on the foundations of moral action, hence the name theoretical. The most influential approaches at this stage were Peter Singer's utilitarianism and Tom Regan's deontology. Singer (1975) emphasized animal suffering and based its approach on the principle of "equal consideration of interests" for all sentient beings. Meanwhile, Regan (1983) focused on animal dignity and defended animal rights based on the notion of a "subject of a life". Whi-



le much of the philosophical debate centered around the works of these two authors, other approaches were also discussed (e.g. ecological holism, care-ethics, empathy, etc). Concepts such as moral status, interests, rights, animal welfare and compassion became the canonical vocabulary of the field. Although this trend dominated much of the debate of animal ethics since the 1970's, its intensity has very much diminished in the last decades.

By the 1990's animal activism had very much distanced itself from previous academic debates. Its interests have shifted from theoretical discussions to practical matters such as public policy and animals. This phase can be characterized as pragmatic because it involves the taking of a practical stance within a wide spectrum of theoretical approaches. What differs from the preceding phase is that, regardless of theoretical frameworks, each author is expected to answer a strategic question: what is the goal they want to achieve and what kind of change is needed in order to achieve it. All of them favor the establishment of legal protections for non-human animals, what differs is the level of ideological or practical commitment involved in it. In opposite sides of the spectrum we find a polarization between two competing approaches: abolitionism and welfarism.

The debate between abolitionism and welfarism constitutes a tentative first step from theory to praxis and foreshadows the transition from ethics to politics in animal ethics.

Welfarism endorses the progressive reform of existing animal protection laws. Its objective is to extend the moral and legal protections to non-human animals and change the animal welfare laws without radically altering the status quo. Meanwhile, abolitionism rejects the strategy of gradual reform and believes that the whole system of animal welfare is flawed because it treats non-human animals as property. In its place, it defends the abolition of all exploitative practices against non-human animals. This entails granting legal personhood to non-human animals and the transformation of society towards a vegan lifestyle. It also implies a series of radical changes at the legal, economic, socio-political and cultural levels. The debate between abolitionism and welfarism constitutes a tentative first step from theory to praxis and foreshadows the transition from ethics to politics in animal ethics.

Currently, we find ourselves is in a new phase, which can be properly called political. Topics and problems previously discussed in terms of moral theories and ethical concepts are now being reformulated in terms of political theory and political action. Some authors have coined the term "political turn" in order to describe this new phase of animal ethics (Milligan, 2015). However, this description is inaccurate.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, it is never clear who started this "turn" or when. For some authors, it can be found in the works of Martha Nussbaum (2006), for others, in the contributions of Robert Garner and Alasdair Cochrane (Cochrane, 2010; Garner, 2005, 2013). On the other hand, there is

Currently, we find ourselves is in a new phase, which can be properly called political. Topics and problems previously discussed in terms of moral theories and ethical concepts are now being reformulated in terms of political theory and political action. Some authors have coined the term "political turn" in order to describe this new phase of animal ethics (Milligan, 2015). However, this description is inaccurate.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, it is never clear who started this "turn" or when. For some authors, it can be found in the works of Martha Nussbaum (2006), for others, in the contributions of Robert Garner and Alasdair Cochrane (Cochrane, 2010; Garner, 2005, 2013). On the other hand, there is

<sup>1</sup> The term "political turn" appears to be the result of a very common tradition in Anglo-American philosophy, in which the term "turn" is often used as an stylistic device that describes all kind of new academic phenomena and trends. Some of these phenomena turn out to be real paradigmatic changes, while others end up being just fashions.



ample evidence that the political dimension of animal ethics was already present in the writings of seminal authors in the field like Peter Singer and Tom Regan (Tirado, 2016).

A more detailed study of the development of moral reasoning about animals demonstrates that the political dimension was very much present since its beginnings more than 2,000 years ago. From its origins in eastern and western antiquity until today, all approaches on this subject have always been discussed within the framework of a larger question: what kind of relations should human communities have with non-human animals. The answer to this question includes both ethical and political dimensions. Hence, instead of talking about a 'turn', we should rather speak of a 'return'. It is the re-appearance of an age-old discussion about a problem that has always been ethical and political at the same time (Tirado, 2016).

What non-human animals need is justice. Nussbaum believes that utilitarianism and social contract theories cannot achieve this. Instead, she develops her own version of the capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2006) in order to include animals in the sphere of justice.

What this new phase illustrates is the transition from a one-to-one ethical viewpoint to a relational and communitarian vision of ethics. Animals are no longer seen as a heterogeneous group of sentient beings or simply as species, but as part of a common good that is simultaneously human and animal. The beginnings of this viewpoint can be found in the contributions of Martha Nussbaum (2006), but it takes its current form, mainly, with the works of Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka (2011).

Nussbaum recognizes that the general public confuses most of the debate in animal ethics, as well as the political discussion on animal protection laws, with the issue of animal cruelty. For most of them, cruelty and compassion are two sides of the same coin. A person is compassionate when he or she is not cruel or indifferent to the suffering of other beings. However, cruelty is merely the component that adds maleficence to the equation of inten-

tional harm. Neither the condemnation of cruelty to animals nor compassion is enough to do justice to beings from other species that are treated abusively or undeservingly. What non-human animals need is justice. Nussbaum believes that utilitarianism and social contract theories cannot achieve this. Instead, she develops her own version of the capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2006) in order to include animals in the sphere of justice.

Nussbaum is one of the first authors to realize that we need to develop a political framework in order to include the variety of our morally relevant interactions with other animals. After Nussbaum, a series of political frameworks have been proposed in order to integrate non-human animals within a political theory. These include Robert Garner's *A Theory of Justice for Animals* (2013), Kymberly Smith's *Governing Animals* (2012) and, above all, the political proposal of Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka in *Zoopolis* (2011). From all of them, *Zoopolis* stands out as the book that has caused the greatest impact in the field of animal ethics in recent years.

Donaldson and Kymlicka propose a new political framework in which they synthesize human and animal rights with sovereign and civil rights. All of them are encompassed under the fundamental principles of national and international justice. In order to eluci-



date our relations with nonhuman animals, the authors use three broad categories of animals, classified by their relation with human communities: domestic, wild and liminal animals. To guide our ethical and political decisions towards them, they apply three concepts of liberal political theory to each category of animals, namely: citizenship, sovereignty and denizenship. Donaldson and Kymlicka use this framework to clarify the protections and safeguards that must be implemented if we want to base our relations with other animals on liberal principles.<sup>2</sup>

Donaldson and Kymlicka propose a new political framework in which they synthesize human and animal rights with sovereign and civil rights... In order to elucidate our relations with nonhuman animals, the authors use three broad categories of animals, classified by their relation with human communities: domestic, wild and liminal animals.

One of the virtues of Donaldson and Kymlicka's analysis is that it shows the limitations of an approach focused on the moral status of animals. If we focus on the rights or interests of non-human animals based on their sentience, consciousness or other capabilities such as empathy; we make the mistake of forgetting that many of their problems can not be solved from an individual point of view. For example, in the case of wild animals, the proper question is not *what are our moral obligations towards non-human animals*. Rather, it should be: *what kind of relations should there be between human communities and wild animal communities within a framework of justice*. This will determine our moral and political obligations, not to each individual animal, but to the whole of their communities.

Regardless of the evaluation of Donaldson and Kymlicka's proposal, the merit of *Zoopolis* is that their analysis practically covers all relations between nonhuman animals and human communities. This includes their ethical, political and ecological dimensions. The key to the success of Donaldson and Kymlicka's

approach is to focus on communities and not just individuals. This allows them to address issues that could not have been solved from the classical approaches of animal and environmental ethics. These and other virtues make of *Zoopolis* a step in the right direction to address the complex problems that occur between human communities and non-human animals.

## 2. Animal ethics in the context of bioethics: a problematic affair

Although animal ethics is nowadays considered a sub-discipline of bioethics, at the beginning it did not deal with those topics. The only part of bioethics that dealt with non-human animals was focused in the treatment of animals used for research. Bioethics was seen as a field of practical philosophy dedicated to the moral debate of biomedical issues related to humans. This narrow vision of bioethics is still prevalent in many academic circles. It is the result of the identification of bioethics with only one of its areas: biomedical ethics and its applications to the field of health sciences.

<sup>2</sup> Some of them are classical liberal values, such as liberty, equality and justice. However, their model also includes solidarity as a political value, as well as the respect for other forms of life and the environment.



This trend can still be seen in the definition of bioethics used in most textbooks. For example, in the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, Warren Thomas Reich defines bioethics as:

... the systematic study of the moral dimensions – including moral vision, decisions, conduct, and policies – of the life sciences and health care, employing a variety of ethical methodologies in an interdisciplinary setting. (Reich, 1995)

Although Reich mentions the moral dimensions of the life sciences, he immediately adds a reference to health care. This is one of the reasons why, despite Reich's broad characterization of the field, bioethics has been usually interpreted in a less broad manner.

Most bioethicists understand Reich's definition as the study of the moral dimensions of the life sciences and health care, but only to the extent that they affect the wellbeing of humans. Under this interpretation, non-human animals play a very small part in it, if negligible. To understand this trend we must go back to the origins of modern bioethics.

The traditional account of bioethics traces its origins to the last decades of the twentieth century in the U.S. It also portrays the dual origin of the discipline as being conceived by two fathers: the American biochemist Van Rensselaer Potter (1911-2001) and the Dutch obstetrician André Hellegers (1926-1979). From this perspective, there would be two foundational trends in bioethics, an ecological and a biomedical one. Still, none of them is able to encompass the field of animal ethics.

Still, none of them is able to encompass the field of animal ethics.

The ecological trend of Bioethics is the result of Van Rensselaer Potter, who used the term for the first time in the United States between 1970-1971 and enshrined it in his book *Bioethics: Bridge to the Future* (1971). His perspective on bioethics reflects a growing concern for the future of humanity amidst the progress of technology and the ecological crisis. Potter talks about the necessity of a discipline that takes into consideration the interactions between the life sciences and the humanities from a global perspective. Bioethics would be a new discipline that examines technology and scientific progress from an ethical point of view. Potter called it "The science of survival" (1970) and visualized it as "a bridge" between the values of the humanities and the facts of science whose aim was to ensure the survival of humans on earth. Within it, he proposed to develop a land ethics; a wildlife ethics; a population ethics and the moral aspects of the use of natural resources (consumption ethics). As it can be seen, Potter's bioethics is concerned with the survival of one species on Earth. All other species and the ecosystem are considered only insofar as they promote this objective.

The biomedical trend is the result of Hellegers' vision. His legacy consists of introducing the usage of the term in the academia and, indirectly, in public administration and mass media. As founder of the first academic center dedicated to the study of bioethics (the *Kennedy Institute of Ethics*), his efforts helped to institutionalize the new discipline. Unlike Potter, Hellegers saw bioethics as a continuation of the western philosophical tra-

As it can be seen, Potter's bioethics is concerned with the survival of one species on Earth. All other species and the ecosystem are considered only insofar as they promote this objective.



dition and not as a new discipline that required a paradigm shift. Bioethics would be an extension of practical ethics applied to the field of biomedicine. There were new topics and problems, but their analysis, concepts and terminology could easily be framed within western traditional philosophy. Part of its success was that it dealt with issues of great contemporary interest, such as the doctor-patient relation, the ethics of research with human subjects, procured abortion and ethical issues at the end of life. Besides the relevance of the issues, its success was due in no small part to the institutional and financial support of the Kennedy Foundation, strategically located in the capital of the U.S. Thus, Hellegers' view of bioethics became the standard version in the academic field.

The prevailing trend in bioethics has been, without a doubt, hellegarian and biomedical. This is the branch that produces the largest number of publications, research, and discussion forums. Potter concerns have not disappeared. They have been integrated into the discussion of environmental ethics. Despite the strong influence of Hellegers' view,

bioethics has reclaimed significant aspects of both tendencies. Both environmental and biomedical ethics are more or less well integrated in the field. The incorporation of animal ethics, however, is a whole different story.

Not all authors have seen its integration in the field of bioethics in the same way. For many decades the publications in these areas have remained separated. In practice, they function as separate disciplines that are developed in parallel fashion and interact in a weakly manner. Most journals and textbooks in bioethics include animal ethics as a relatively minor topic regarding the use of animals in research. This leaves out most of the problems that occupy the bulk of the debates in animal ethics. Its topics are

usually presented in a very limited way, as if they were somewhat outside the scope of the field. Although there are some exceptions, bioethics remains primarily focused on ethical issues related to the area of human health.<sup>3</sup>

The main subject matters of animal ethics have been incorporated in the field only slowly and belatedly. This outcome is not surprising. Having seen the official story of the development of bioethics, it rather gives the impression that this is the result of a natural process. The fact that animal ethics has been integrated gradually and belatedly seems to be a logical and expected result of the development of bioethics, for such concern did not exist at the origin of the discipline. However this would be an incorrect analysis, since the notion of bioethics and its term, "Bioethik", was originally intended

The fact that animal ethics has been integrated gradually and belatedly seems to be a logical and expected result of the development of bioethics, for such concern did not exist at the origin of the discipline.

3 Some notable exceptions include *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*, edited by Tom L. Beauchamp and R. G. Frey. (2011) and the last editions of the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*. These anthologies include many of the topics regularly discussed within animal ethics. However, they all suffer from various problems of integration. For example, Beauchamp's anthology does not intend to incorporate animal ethics within bioethics or to subsume it as a sub-discipline of the field. Animal ethics is rather viewed as a distinct area of applied ethics. On the other hand, the latest editions of the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics* do include animal ethics within bioethics. However, the comprehensive scope of the Encyclopedias reveals a lack of consistency in the treatment of the issues. The only attempt to remedy this problem consists of complementing the classic category of *Animal Research* with the broad category of *Animal Welfare & Rights*. While the editors' effort to encompass the major contemporary issues of animal ethics is remarkable, there is no equivalent effort to provide them with a systematic unity, beyond trying to unite the main categories of animal ethics with the common adjective *animal*.





to include, among other things, the ethical study of the relations between human beings and non-human animals.

We could talk about a triple origin of bioethics if, instead of the two fathers of the official story we add a third who is even older and more relevant to our subject than Potter and Hellegers. We are talking about the German philosopher Fritz Jahr (1895-1953). Jahr, has the merit, not just of being the first person to use the term 'bioethics', but also to

be the first to envision its current areas of application. He had already realized that the different moral problems identified over millennia by the Western tradition and its subsequent moral duties could be analyzed from a broader ethical point of view.

It was modeled on Kant's categorical imperative, but he modified it to in order to incorporate a new worldview that included animals in the realm of ethics.

It reads: "Respect every living being and treat it, in principle, as an end in itself, whenever this may be possible".

Fritz Jahr was a theologian and philosopher who served for most of his life as a pastor and schoolteacher in the German town of Halle. Between 1924 and 1948, Jahr published a series of essays in which he proposed a new discipline that could integrate the facts of the biological sciences with ethics. He called this new discipline *Bioethik*. At his time, a new worldview was emerging. It was the result of the realization of the biological unity among all living beings (revealed by the theory of evolution) combined with the discoveries of the sciences of animal cognition. Having contemplated this, Jahr reasoned that it was time for ethics to extend its reach beyond the human realm. To unify this worldview, Jahr proposed a new ethical principle, which he called the biological imperative. It was modeled on Kant's categorical imperative, but he modified it to in order to incorporate a new worldview that included animals in the realm of ethics. It reads: "Respect every living being and treat it, in principle, as an end in itself, whenever this may be possible" (Jahr, 1926, p. 604).<sup>4</sup>

perative, but he modified it to in order to incorporate a new worldview that included animals in the realm of ethics. It reads: "Respect every living being and treat it, in principle, as an end in itself, whenever this may be possible" (Jahr, 1926, p. 604).<sup>4</sup>

In these essays, Jahr presents a vision of bioethics that subsumes the three dimensions of contemporary bioethics: ecological, biomedical and animalistic. Jahr envisioned bioethics both as science and as wisdom. On the one hand, it is a framework in which to analyze and discuss the moral problems that arise from the interactions among interdependent living beings. On the other, it is a wisdom that promotes respect for other forms of life and makes explicit the moral obligations that stem from it. Jahr's biological imperative applies to each of the areas in which life develops. It covers the study of life in the biological sciences as well as the different relations that we maintain with various forms of life.

From a normative perspective, bioethics examines and promotes a series of ethical obligations of various kinds that differ according to which life form they are applied. For example, reciprocal obligations arise only in the context of full moral agents (e.g. adult beings capable of full moral autonomy). These are the typical relations of reciprocity, traditionally studied and discussed in moral theory. However, Jahr widens the scope of

4 "Achte jedes Lebewesen grundsätzlich als einen Selbstzweck, und behandle es nach Möglichkeit als solchen!" (Translation mine). See Jahr, Fritz, "Wissenschaft vom Leben und Sittenlehre", 1926, p. 604. Reprinted in Jahr, F., & May, A. (2013)



ethics in order to address the relations between full moral agents and other beings who can not be full moral agents. In today's terminology we will call them "moral patients". Towards these beings there are moral obligations of responsibility and care.

For example, mentally incapacitated humans and children are too fragile or too weak to fend for themselves. They do, however, have moral rights that must be respected and guaranteed by full moral agents. Following this line of reasoning, Jahr considers that there are also direct duties to other species, in particular to non-human animals. These

should also be included within the scope of moral consideration. After all, they are moral patients too. The fact that they can not fully exercise the powers that would allow them to enter in mutual relations of rights and obligations does not mean that we do not have direct moral duties towards them.

The extension process also includes other forms of life that must be protected for these and for other reasons. Jahr is talking about those animal species that are part of the ecosystem. There are also moral duties and responsibilities towards them, not only as individuals but also as species. He suggests that there should be moral duties towards the environment. This includes not only the flora and fauna, but also those parts of the ecosystem that are not alive, but that enable the lives of thousands of species

and ourselves. Jahr talks about the conservation of natural environments, the protection of those spaces that might serve as future habitats and the protection of the Earth as a home.

Jahr's moral philosophy traces the outlines of what we might call a *biospheric ethics* that is divided into concentric spheres of interaction. At its core lies human ethics. It, in turn, extends its scope to include other animals, the environment and, ultimately, the rest of the biosphere. Jahr's view of bioethics includes all forms of life, as well as the conditions for the possibility and prosperity of life itself. As we have seen, Jahr identifies each dimension of contemporary bioethics: biomedical, environmental and animalistic. It also reflects the main concerns that define each sub-discipline.

Despite Jahr's visionary notion of bioethics, one of the weaknesses of his approach is that he still views ethical problems within the narrow framework of moral relations among individuals (e.g. the relation between "moral agents" and "moral patients"). While Jahr believes that the environment and even entire species should be taken into account for moral consideration, there is no framework for the transition from individuals to communities of individuals. Moral obligations are determined according to which object or life form they are directed, but their starting point is always the individual. Such individuals can be full moral agents, moral patients or the set of all of them. But they are regarded as an abstract collective, not as a community or a society. There is no room for the analysis of the moral problems that arise in the context of politically organized and self-governing communities. As have seen, this deficiency is particularly important in light of the current state of the debate in animal ethics. This raises particular challenges in order to integrate animal ethics within the realm of bioethics.

While Jahr believes that the environment and even entire species should be taken into account for moral consideration, there is no framework for the transition from individuals to communities of individuals.



### 3. Problems of integration and future challenges

What we are witnessing in animal ethics is nothing less than a paradigm shift that signals the transition from a field focused on the relations between individuals (humans and animals) to a new viewpoint that incorporates the political dimensions of the relations between human communities and non-human animals. Animals are no longer seen as a heterogeneous group of sentient beings or merely as species, but as part of a common good that is simultaneously human and animal. In order to participate in this new phase, Bioethics will have to face a series of challenges that have hindered the integration of animal ethics within its field.

Human communities are much more than a mere group of individuals belonging to the same species (and of course, much more than a set of different ethnic, social or cultural groups).

The first challenge of Bioethics is the integration of its various sub-disciplines in a more coherent way. The standard definition of Warren Thomas Reich is wide, but very imprecise. It also tends to be interpreted in a very restrictive way in which biomedical ethics is identified as the whole field. Bioethics needs to recognize that its current scope and extension goes far beyond human health and the life sciences. A more articulate definition of bioethics is necessary in order to properly and accurately describe its main areas. Fritz Jahr's view of bioethics might be appropriate for this purpose. It covers much of the topics discussed in animal ethics and environmental ethics, as well as the moral interactions among humans. However, an integration of his sort

would incorporate those areas in an incomplete manner. In the case of animal ethics, for example, it could not account for its current transition from ethics to politics, a trend that can also be observed in other areas of applied philosophy.<sup>5</sup> In order to achieve that, bioethics would need more than a simple fine-tuning of its definition; it would also require a paradigm shift.

The second challenge of bioethics is a complex one. It involves the transition from the atomistic individualism of traditional ethical approaches to a more relational and community-oriented account of the good. This transition, however, cannot dispense with our core values, which are a legacy of individualism (e.g. human rights in all its varieties and the liberal principles of justice). This challenge becomes even more daunting when we realize that it also involves the rethinking of what human communities really are and what kind of relations do they maintain with non-human animals.

Human communities are much more than a mere group of individuals belonging to the same species (and of course, much more than a set of different ethnic, social or cultural groups). They are heterogeneous communities, but highly structured and organized in their social, political and economic levels. In democratic liberal societies, their unity and cohesion is determined by a collective project aimed at achieving the common good.

<sup>5</sup> The transition from ethics to politics is particularly noticeable in environmental ethics. This process had already appeared as a theoretical interest in the late 70's, but it became a practical concern in the 90's (Dobson, 1990; Taylor, 1991) and reached its current maturity in the early years of the 21st century (Meyer, 2006).



At the same time, they are organized under a legal framework based on principles of justice, whose aim is to ensure that the fundamental values necessary for a peaceful coexistence are respected.<sup>6</sup>

In these communities, humans also coexist with other social animals. Some of them live, work and flourish with us; others are used for research, food, as entertainment or as economic resources. In addition to sentience and awareness, many of them are also able to understand the social and emotional interactions that determine their membership in a group. They are able to recognize and follow rules, to interpret our feelings and moods, and they are able to do that, not only with humans, but also with other animals. (Bekoff & Pierce, 2009). Those characteristics, combined with the social, economic and familiar relations that many of them maintain with humans lead us to the realization that non-human animals are an integral part of our society, without which human communities could not exist. They are already part of the common good. It is within this context that we can talk about the relations between human communities and non-human animals.

#### 4. Afterthoughts and recommendations

One of the greatest challenges for bioethics in the coming decades will be the transition from a paradigm centered solely on the individual (or, even more narrowly, in the human person) to one that also takes into account the relations between individuals of different species who belong to the same community. This is imperative for the integration of animal ethics within its realm, but also essential for the field of bioethics. Topics

on public health ethics, social and global justice are already having an indelible effect on the field. In order to confront the complex problems that arise from these areas, bioethics will have to take into account the relations that a community maintains with its members and with other communities (be they human or animal communities). In order to achieve that, it will need the development of a new theoretical framework based on relations between communities of individuals.

As a tool for analysis, this framework will have to be able to highlight the ethical and political dimensions that arise from the interactions between human communities, non-human animals and the ecosystem.

As a tool for analysis, this framework will have to be able to highlight the ethical and political dimensions that arise from the interactions between human communities, non-human animals and the ecosystem. I have proposed a framework of such characteristics elsewhere (Tirado, 2016), although there are other specific proposals addressing various political aspects of the human-animal relation. (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011; Garner, 2013; Smith, 2012)

If the "human-animal" dichotomy has to make any sense, it has to come from the recognition that our humanity is part of our animality. This, far from having a pejorative

<sup>6</sup> Some may think that these refer only to the values of classical liberalism (e.g. liberty, equality, autonomy, property, etc.) but they embody other values as well (e.g. solidarity, social justice, pluralism, toleration, etc.)



connotation, makes humanity a humbler, yet deeper notion. It is not about embracing our aggression, violence and selfishness; such qualities are not desirable in any social community. What this new notion of humanity tells us is that we share with other animals many other aspects in common that characterize us and that we delight in calling human. Vulnerability, solidarity, love, empathy and cooperation are also characteristics that many non-human animals that live in our communities share with us. Therefore, when we think about the common good we aspire as a society, this should also be extended to other beings that are part of our communities and have gone through a process of socialization that enables them to be members of them, even if they belong to other species.

## List of works cited

- Bekoff, M., & Pierce, J. (2009). *Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cochrane, A. (2010). *An Introduction to Animals and Political Theory*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dobson, A. (1990). *Green political thought : an introduction*. London Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- Donaldson, S., & Kymlicka, W. (2011). *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*. Oxford University Press.
- Francione, G., & Garner, R. (2010). *The animal rights debate abolition or regulation*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Garner, R. (2005). *The Political Theory of Animal Rights*. Manchester; Manchester: UP.
- Garner, R. (2013). *A Theory of Justice for Animals*. Oxford University Press.
- Jahr, F. (2013). *Aufsätze zur Bioethik 1924-1948: Werkausgabe*. (A. May, Ed.) (Vol. 14). LIT Verlag Münster.
- Meyer, J. (2006). Political Theory and the Environment. In J. Dryzek, B. Honig, & A. Phillips (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political theory* (pp. 773–791). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Milligan, T. (2015). The Political Turn in Animal Rights. *Politics and Animals*, 1(1).
- Nussbaum, M. (2006). *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*. Harvard University Press.
- Regan, T. (1983). *The Case for Animal Rights*. University of California Press.
- Reich, W. (1995). In W. T. Reich (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Bioethics* (Vol. 2, p. xxi). New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan.
- Singer, P. (1975). *Animal liberation*. New York: Random House.
- Smith, K. (2012). *Governing Animals: Animal Welfare and the Liberal State*. Oxford University: Press.
- Taylor, B. P. (1991). Environmental Ethics & Political Theory. *Polity*, 23(4) 567–583.
- Tirado, C. R. (2016). *La dimensión política como solución al problema de las relaciones entre las sociedades humanas y los animales no humanos: análisis y perspectivas de cambio*. (Tesis doctoral). Universidad Complutense de Madrid, España.