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# THE MORAL STATUS OF ANIMALS: DEGREES OF MORAL STATUS AND THE INTEREST-BASED APPROACH

**ABSTRACT**
This paper addresses the issue of the moral status of non-human animals, or the question whether sentient animals are morally considerable. The arguments for and against the moral status of animals are discussed, above all the argument from marginal cases. It is argued that sentient animals have moral status based on their having interests in their experiential well-being, but that there are degrees of moral status. Two interest-based approaches are presented and discussed: DeGrazia's view that sentient animals have interests in continuing to live, and that their interests should be granted moral weight; and McMahan's TRIA which similarly postulates that animals have interests and that in a given situation we should compare the human and animal interests at stake. Finally, the paper concludes that the anthropocentric approach to animal ethics should be abandoned in favour of the biocentric ethics.

**KEYWORDS**
animal, sentient, moral status, well-being, interest, human, person

## Introduction: Arguments for and against the Moral Status of Animals

The purpose of this paper is to question the view that non-human animals do not have moral status, and to provide compelling arguments for their moral considerability. Specifically, it is argued that sentient animals should be morally considerable based on their having interests in their experiential well-being. Even though sentient animals have interests that should be granted moral weight, there are morally relevant differences among different animals, so there seem to be different degrees of moral status. These differences should be taken into account when comparing the interests of humans and animals in a specific situation, as suggested by the interest-based approach that will be discussed below.

The problem of moral status of non-human animals and the question whether humans as moral agents have duties to animals is examined in a branch of ethics called animal ethics. The central issue discussed in this field is whether (at

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least some) animals are beings that are due moral consideration, and whether humans should take into account their interests or well-being when making moral decisions. Different ethical theories vary in terms of their answers to this question and arguments they provide to support their theses. The traditional view is that animals, unlike humans, do not have moral status (or have slight moral status) because they have no characteristic features of moral beings – rationality, autonomy, self-consciousness, use of language – and thus humans do not have moral duties to animals.

One of the most convincing arguments for moral considerability of animals is *the argument from marginal cases* or marginal humans (the AMC), which challenges the traditional view that animals do not have moral status. The term 'marginal humans' refers to humans who lack some of the characteristics that are traditionally considered relevant to moral status (rationality, etc.), which is why they are not full members of the moral community. Some philosophers distinguish among three subtypes of marginal humans: 'pre-moral' humans (infants) – potential moral beings who will become moral or full members of the moral community if they develop normally; 'post-moral' – human adults who used to be moral but are no longer so because of their old age or illness (dementia); lastly, 'non-moral' human adults who have never been nor will they ever be members of the moral community due to serious mental illness or accident (Scruton 2000: 42).

The main problem pointed out by the argument from marginal cases is that not all humans are completely rational, autonomous, etc., and that so-called marginal humans do not have these morally relevant characteristics to a degree that is sufficient for moral status, while some animals have these capacities more developed than some humans. The point of this argument is that if marginal humans are morally considerable, then animals that have similar morally relevant capacities should be morally considerable too. Accordingly, in order to be consistent, we have to admit either that marginal humans have slight moral status like animals, or that animals have the same moral status as marginal humans. In other words, the moral status of animals should be, for the sake of consistency, same as the moral status of marginal humans. Therefore, if marginal humans are thought to be morally considerable, then moral considerability of relevantly similar animals cannot be denied; on the other hand, if animals are not morally considerable, then neither are marginal humans (Tanner 2006: 50).

The view that animals have moral standing and that they should have the same moral status as marginal humans is challenged by contesting the argument from marginal cases. One of the attempts to counter this argument is with *the argument from kinds*: it is argued that humans are such a kind of beings that are usually morally considerable, which does not depend on the characteristics of an individual being but on the characteristic features of its kind. In normal circumstances, human beings are members of the moral community and the fact that some humans, such as marginal cases, lack some capacities (e.g. rationality) does not cancel their moral considerability. Unlike human beings,

animals do not belong to the moral community, nor do they have the potential for belonging to it, because they are not that *kind of thing* (Scruton 2000: 43).

But this argument is clearly speciesism[1] – all humans are thought to deserve moral consideration while no animals do, because they are not of *the right kind* – the human kind, regardless of the fact that some animals have similar capacities as marginal humans. However, it is not clear why belonging to the human kind should be morally relevant; humans belong to different natural kinds, for example, mammals, living being, etc. Besides, the human kind could have evolved quite differently and humans could have been less rational, etc. than other species, and yet they would still be morally considerable while members of other species would not, which is contradictory (Tanner 2006: 55).

A more appropriate criterion of moral considerability would be possession of some characteristic or capacity, which is the basis for ascribing moral considerability to a being. However, scientific evidence currently available indicates that all the characteristics and capacities that human beings have can be found to some degree in non-human animals too. Many scientists point out that the difference between humans and other animals is only a difference in degree and not in kind, which also applies to mental capacities (Darwin 1871/1981; Panksepp 2011). The differences between humans and non-human animals are not sufficient grounds for denying non-human animals moral consideration. With this in mind, those who argue that only humans have moral standing should show that all humans, including marginal cases, have some morally relevant characteristic or characteristics that no animals have, which is why they are not morally considerable. Only in this way could the argument from marginal cases be refuted and that is precisely its strength, because it requires taking a consistent attitude towards animals, thereby effectively shifting the burden of proof to proponents of the view that animals are not morally considerable.

## The Moral Status of Sentient Animals: Are there Degrees of Moral Status?

First of all, the concept of moral considerability or moral status should be clarified. In DeGrazia's view, to have moral status means to have independent or direct moral importance, and the moral importance of a being with moral status is closely related to interests or well-being of that being. A being X has moral status if: "(1) moral agents have obligations regarding X, (2) X has interests, and (3) the obligations are based (at least partly) on X's interests" (DeGrazia 2008: 183).

When discussing the moral status of animals, it seems crucial to examine their mental life more thoroughly, in order to understand what their interests

1 Speciesism is a term coined by analogy with other forms of discrimination, such as racism or sexism. The term became widespread after Singer used it in his book (Singer 1975), although, by his own admission, he did not coin it but a British psychologist Richard Ryder in 1970.

are and what it really means to take their interests into account. Our attitude about how we should treat animals depends on what kind of mental capacities we attribute to them; thus we can differentiate between animals that are *not sentient*, those that are *sentient nonpersons*, and animals that could qualify as borderline cases of *persons* - such as great apes and dolphins (DeGrazia 2016: 511). Sentience can be defined as the capacity to feel or experience feelings – sensations, emotions, and moods, which implies the existence of conscious experience. Many scientists believe that the capacity to feel pain is sufficient for sentience. DeGrazia points out that the available evidence supports the thesis that mammals and birds are typically sentient beings, while there is convincing evidence that all vertebrates are mostly sentient beings too, and among invertebrates at least cephalopods. Examples of sentient nonpersons to keep in mind when discussing the moral status of animals are cats, dogs, cows, rodents, eagles, etc.; this category also includes some human beings, such as infants and people in advanced stages of Alzheimer's disease, which are so-called 'marginal' or contested cases, as DeGrazia calls them.

Sentient animals by definition have an *experiential well-being* or *welfare*, which is common to all sentient beings, as well as interests in their experiential welfare. Interests are understood as a component of one's well-being (*welfare interests*) and not something a being is interested in. Since they have interests, animals can be harmed, because the basic interest as regards one's well-being is in not suffering. Of course, we refer here to sentient animals, which also applies below when we discuss the interests of animals and their moral status. DeGrazia argues that sentient animals have moral status (at least some degree of moral status) since they can be treated cruelly, because that can be the only plausible explanation why it is wrong, and this thesis is supported by most of the leading studies in animal ethics (DeGrazia 1996: 43). Instead of the moral status of animals, we could talk about our obligations to them, such as the obligation not to harm them needlessly, which is grounded in their interests in their own experiential welfare.

However, there are different views about whether animals have the same moral status as humans or they differ in moral status, and whether we should extend equal consideration to their interests. The view that we should give equal consideration to interests of human persons and sentient animals (Equal Consideration View) grants *equal moral importance to their comparable interests* (DeGrazia 2008: 189). The example of such an interest shared by many different species is in the above experiential well-being. This really means that it is equally wrong to cause suffering to a sentient animal and a human person, which is certainly contrary to our usual everyday treatment of animals. Within this approach, it can be argued that although all sentient beings deserve to be granted equal moral consideration to their comparable interests, many of their interests are not comparable, which justifies different moral protections (Unequal Interests Model). Thus, the interests of persons and animals when it comes to life are not equal because persons have a greater interest in staying alive, so it is worse to kill a human person than a sentient animal.

This view is consistent with the intuitions of most people, including animal lovers and animal rights activists. In cases of conflict, when one has to decide whether to save a person or an animal, people would generally agree that a person should be saved and not an animal. A well-known example of such a case is a lifeboat scenario, in which either a man or a dog has to be tossed overboard, otherwise the boat would sink and everyone aboard would drown. Another example is when one has to choose whom to rescue from a burning building – a person or a dog[2]. This approach clearly implies that human persons have higher moral status than sentient animals. Contrary to this view, some theorists who argue for equal consideration given to human persons and sentient animals believe that there are no degrees of moral status and that a being either has moral status or lacks it (Harman 2003: 183). Their explanation of the common belief that it is worse to kill a person than an animal is that death harms persons more than animals, and it is generally worse to cause more harm.

Another model of positing the difference in moral status between humans and animals are theories that give unequal consideration to persons and sentient animals (Unequal Consideration Model). According to these theories, even though sentient animals have moral status and we should give moral weight to their interests (such as the interests in their experiential well-being), *animals' interests have less moral importance than persons' comparable interests*. This means that it is morally worse to cause suffering to a person than to cause equal suffering to a sentient animal because, even though their interests in not suffering are comparable, the person's interests have greater moral importance than those of a sentient nonperson.

There are two different versions of the view that humans have higher moral status than animals, which asserts degrees of moral status. The "two-tier model" attributes one level of moral status to persons and another, lower level of moral status to sentient nonpersons. The "sliding-scale model" posits that there is a scale of degrees of moral status, depending on the degree of cognitive, affective, and social complexity of a being; while all persons have equal moral status, sentient nonpersons vary in degrees of their moral status (DeGrazia 2008: 192). According to this model, persons have the highest moral status, followed by great apes and dolphins, then other monkeys and elephants, other mammals, and so on down the phylogenetic scale all the way to barely sentient beings.

Various arguments could be provided in favour of the sliding-scale view that there are degrees of moral status. It could be said that persons are special in their moral status because they are moral agents – beings who have moral obligations and responsibilities, which justifies their higher moral status. Animals are not moral agents but, as sentient beings, they have moral status. Furthermore, if sentience is considered to be the fundamental criterion of moral status, and different kinds of sentient beings have different degrees of sentience, this supports the thesis that there is a scale of degrees of moral

2 Also, we can think of a version of the well-known trolley problem, so that a person is standing on one track, and on the other there is a sentient animal or even a couple of them.

status. Additional arguments refer to our common sense beliefs that humans and animals do not have the same level of moral status, and that sentient animals differ among themselves in terms of their moral importance or the degree of moral status.[3]

## Animals' Moral Status Grounded in Their Interests

A rather nuanced view about the moral status of animals has been elaborated by the above-mentioned David DeGrazia. DeGrazia agrees with the view that animals are due moral consideration and that we have obligations to them based on their interests or welfare. He believes that many animals have moral status, but there are morally relevant differences among different animals; thus we can speak of degrees of moral status, depending on whether animals could qualify as borderline cases of persons like great apes and dolphins, or sentient nonpersons such as other mammals and birds, or they are not sentient beings at all.

Since many animals are sentient beings – even if they are not persons – who have moral status and whose interests should be granted moral weight, DeGrazia questions whether it is morally justified to kill them, for example after their use as laboratory animals in experiments. If sentient animals have moral status, humans as moral agents have obligations to them, not to harm them needlessly. DeGrazia points out that death harms not only persons by depriving them of the net good their lives would have contained, but it also harms sentient nonpersons for the same reason, because it deprives them of lives that contain prudential goods[4] or would have contained them. Having conscious experiences is a precondition for an animal's life to contain prudential goods, which makes life worth continuing for that animal (DeGrazia 2016: 512). Accordingly, if lives of sentient animals (and other sentient nonpersons) are worth continuing and if they have interests in continuing to live, death harms them by depriving them of the goods or the net good within their lives.

The next relevant question that is raised is whether death in fact harms sentient animals less than it harms persons, which is a common opinion of most people. DeGrazia discusses the theoretical basis of this view and its arguments. Objective theories are based on the claim that persons have certain capacities (cognitive and emotional) that sentient animals lack, which enable them activities and experiences that are highly valued in assessing one's well-being; this explains why a person has a higher quality of life than a sentient animal.

3 This can be illustrated in the following way; most people would agree that it would be acceptable to kill an animal (which would involve some degree of suffering), if it would save a person's life or if it was necessary to preserve a person's health. When it comes to our beliefs about different moral status of different animals, a good example would be killing rats as part of pest control, which most people would find acceptable, even if it causes their suffering.

4 The term 'prudential goods' is used to refer to the goods that subject's life has to contain in order to be worth living. It relates to what is *good for someone* whose life it is and not in itself (Sumner 1995: 769–770; Višak, Garner 2016: 5).

DeGrazia challenges the explanation that uses an objective account of well-being, pointing out that the *subjective quality of life* of a sentient animal who is faring well (for example a dog) does not have to be lower than the quality of life of a person who is faring well. There is an implicitly made distinction here between *well-being* or welfare and *faring well* or being well-off, which will be discussed further in the next section (McMahan 1996: 9–10).

In DeGrazia's view, it would be wrong to assume that persons' lives are more valuable than lives of sentient animals on the grounds that persons have certain capacities that sentient animals lack. This would imply attaching greater value to typically human capacities and associated activities or experiences, while undervaluing animals' capacities and experiences that are less developed in humans or that humans lack. In fact, some animals have more developed senses than humans, such as the auditory and olfactory senses, so they are likely to have richer sensory experiences than humans, which contribute to their well-being and faring well. Thus, DeGrazia believes that the well-being of a being is determined by the type of functioning characteristic of that kind of being. There is no objective list of values that applies to all kinds of beings, and the assessment of the value of life is relative to the kind of being in question and the innate capacities of such being.

DeGrazia's approach is clearly on the right track in that he rejects an objective account of well-being and asserts that the subjective quality of life of a sentient animal is not necessarily lower than a person's quality of life, which also applies to the value of life. The loss of life that is worth living harms sentient animals, since it deprives them of the goods their future lives would have contained. Also, DeGrazia points out that humans as moral agents have obligations to sentient animals because they have moral status. However, if different sorts of sentient animals have varying degrees of moral status, does that mean there are varying degrees of obligations that humans have to different animal species? In a specific situation, how could we assess what our obligations to a particular sentient animal are?

The theory that, in DeGrazia's opinion, explains satisfactorily the assertion that death harms persons more than sentient animals is Jeff McMahan's *Time-Relative Interest Account* or TRIA.[5]

> The basic idea of the TRIA, applied to the harm of death, is that in determining how harmful a particular death is to the individual who dies, we must take into account not only (1) the value of the life that the individual would have had, had he not died at that point – what I've here called the net good of the life – but also (2) the extent to which the subject is psychologically related to his possible future life at the time he dies. (DeGrazia 2016: 515)

According to this account, the value of the life lost is a function of the quality of that life and its quantity. Quantity is measured in the length of time of

5 DeGrazia points out that some McMahan's ideas come from Derek Parfit, including the concept of psychological connectedness or relatedness.

life lost, while quality is a function of the subjective quality of life that is experienced and the psychological connectedness of the subject at the time of death to herself in the possible future. The concept of psychological connectedness refers to a feeling of connection to oneself in the past and the future, and it could also be called psychological unity or psychological continuity over time. The value of the life lost or the harm of death could be assessed using the following formula: "HoD[6] = [(Subjective q. of life[7] x Time) of life lost] x Psychological unity" (ibid.: 516).

When this formula is applied to a sentient animal, for example a dog, it can be explained why death harms an animal less than it harms a person (with the exception of animals that are persons, if there are any). If we compare the harm of death of a pet dog and a grandmother, who both die five years earlier than they would otherwise have died, the quantity of life lost would be the same, and it could be said that their subjective quality of life would be similar; only the psychological connectedness would be different – grandma would have much more psychological unity, assuming she is not demented. DeGrazia points out that most of the animals we come across every day – pets, domestic animals, most animals in zoos and laboratories – are sentient animals who have some psychological unity to a greater or lesser degree, because they have the capacity to feel pain, but also a lasting desire not to feel pain, which brings about psychological connectedness to oneself over time. Accordingly, although killing those animals is less harmful than it would be in the case of persons, death still deprives them of lives that would have been worth continuing. In DeGrazia's view, our current practice of using animals is largely morally unacceptable, and he argues for discontinuing at least the practice of routine killing of animals after their use in experiments.

## Comparing Relative Interests of Sentient Beings

Another elaborate view on the degrees of moral status has been developed by Jeff McMahan, whose Time-Relative Interest Account (TRIA) was already introduced in the previous section. Like DeGrazia, McMahan believes that moral status is not 'all-or-nothing' phenomenon, and that there is a range of degrees of moral status. Sentient beings or individuals that have basic consciousness, on the basis of which they have interests, have a minimal moral status and our treatment of them should be guided simply by our concern for their interests. Animals are such sentient beings that are capable of physical suffering like human beings, but they are not self-conscious – or their self-consciousness is only rudimentary. They have no desires or intentions concerning the future and are incapable of making plans, which is why they are weakly psychologically connected to themselves in the future (McMahan 2008: 67).

6 HoD - Harm of death
7 Subjective quality of life

There are various degrees of psychological connectedness of animals – weaker and stronger psychological connectedness, as well as psychological unconnectedness, but McMahan suggests that only some lowest forms of animals are totally unconnected (McMahan 2015: 84–85). Weakly connected animals have consciousness but a low degree of self-consciousness, and they can experience suffering and pleasure but have no memory of it. More strongly connected animals, such as great apes, have a higher degree of self-consciousness, but even those animals are weakly connected to themselves compared with psychological connectedness of human persons. Whether it is permissible to kill an animal or not depends on the degree to which it is psychologically connected to itself, because even though they are not persons and they have lower moral status than persons, they have interests and it would be against their interests to be killed.

The common belief of most people that it is worse to kill a human being than an animal and that in cases of conflict, a human should be saved and not an animal, is explained by asserting that human beings have a higher level of well-being than animals. In McMahan's view, the level and form of well-being that an individual can have is determined by his or her cognitive and emotional capacities and potentials. Since animals do not have many of the capacities that humans have, they have a lower level of well-being than (normal) human beings, and certain dimensions of well-being are not accessible to them. Nevertheless, an animal (for example a dog), even though it has a relatively low level of well-being compared to a normal human adult, can be well-off and have a good life. McMahan distinguishes between the level of *well-being* and being *well-off* or fortunate, a distinction that was already mentioned in the previous section. This notion of *fortune*, or how an individual's life is going, is "a relation between an individual's level of well-being and a standard against which well-being is assessed" (McMahan 1996: 9). Specifically, how well-off a being is depends on the relation between its level of well-being and the levels of well-being accessible to beings with the (highest possible) cognitive and emotional capacities that are characteristics of its species.

McMahan's account of why death is bad for an individual who dies is based on the magnitude of the loss suffered by the individual. When a person dies, it involves the loss of a great deal of future good, and the person would have been strongly connected to the subject of the good that is lost (McMahan 2002: 171). Unlike human beings, most animals live mainly in the present and are largely psychologically unconnected to themselves in the future, like human beings in the early stages of their lives. The strength of an animal's interest in continuing to live depends not only on the amount of future goods it is deprived of through death, but also on the degree of its psychological connectedness to itself in the future. Although the loss of future goods contributes to the badness of death, animals are very weakly psychologically connected to themselves in the future so they have no desire for the future goods at the time of death. The weaker psychological connectedness to oneself in the future, the

weaker one's interests in continuing to live, and less bad death is. This is the above-mentioned Time-Relative Interest Account:

> [...] the extent to which death is a misfortune for an individual is a function primarily of two independent factors: (1) the amount of good life of which the individual is deprived by death and (2) the extent to which the individual at the time of death would have been psychologically connected to himself at those times in the future when the good things in his life would have occurred. (McMahan 2015: 70)

Using TRIA, McMahan seeks to explain why death is less bad for animals than for human beings - not only because their future lives would have been less good, but also because of a weaker degree of their psychological connectedness to themselves in the future. This explanation could be used as an argument for 'benign carnivorism' or 'humane omnivorism', which refers to the practice of rearing animals humanely to be used for human consumption. This practice is usually considered humane because animals are raised in humane conditions and killed painlessly, so they do not suffer or experience fear. Unlike intensive animal farming that involves their suffering and unnatural living conditions, it seems that such 'humane' way of raising animals might be good for them, regardless of the fact that the ultimate goal is to use them for human consumption. However, McMahan challenges the justifiability of this practice and questions whether it is morally permissible.

The main argument (the so-called *benefit* argument) put forward in favour of the practice of benign carnivorism is that animals raised in this way would not have existed without this practice, and that these animals have good lives, so it is good for them overall – for these animals it is better to exist and to have lives worth living, even though they are killed later, than never to exist at all. On the other hand, death is bad for them because they are killed much earlier than they would have died of natural causes, so it deprives them of lives that are worth living and the goods they would have had in their future lives. However, the loss suffered by animals and its significance must be discounted for their weak psychological continuity in their lives.

Since animals are not persons, in McMahan's opinion, they do not have rights as human persons, so that cannot be an objection to this practice or used as grounds for its rejection. However, although they have no rights, animals have *interests*, and McMahan believes that this practice should be re-examined by taking into account the interests at stake. In a specific situation, we should compare the interests of beings affected by the situation, and weigh all of them to see whose interests are stronger. These interests should be compared in line with the above TRIA:

> [...] Consider an animal whose flesh could provide one meal each for twenty people. How might the human and animal interests compare? It seems that we have to compare the animal's interest in continuing to live – a function of both the amount of good that its life would contain were it not killed, and the

> degree to which it would be psychologically connected to itself in the future – with twenty people's interests in the pleasure they would get from eating the animal. (McMahan 2008: 70)

In the above example, when the interests of an animal (for example a pig) are compared with the interests of people in that situation, it is obvious that the interest of the animal in continuing to live and all the good it would have in life outweighs the interests of the people in enjoying a meat dish. Even if we only compare the pleasure that twenty people would get from eating the animal, say a pig, with the pleasures that the pig would get from eating several meals a day for several years (which the pig would have were it not killed), it is clear that the pig's pleasures would outweigh the difference in pleasure that twenty people would get from eating that pig instead of eating a vegetarian meal. Of course, the strength of the animal's interests should be discounted for its weak psychological connectedness to its future interests; still, the animal's interests in not being killed – the pig in the above example – would outweigh the people's interests in eating it. Accordingly, McMahan argues that the practice of raising animals "humanely" and killing them painlessly cannot be justified by referring to the interests of everyone affected, because the loss caused by killing animals far outweighs the benefits that "humane" carnivores or omnivores have (McMahan 2015: 85).

But there is a problem with the existing farms where animals are raised this way. Suppose farmers who practice this kind of animal husbandry realise that it is not justifiable to kill animals as part of the practice, because the interests of these animals in continuing to live outweigh the interests of people in eating them. What should they do then? Would they have an obligation to feed them until they die naturally? If not, would it be justifiable to release them, even though it is a well-known fact that domestic animals could not survive in the wild? Keeping this in mind, it seems that it would be better for these animals to be painlessly killed than to suffer and die slowly in the wild. If it would be better for these animals to be euthanized, would in that case be permissible to use their meat, i.e. for people to eat them? This would bring us back to where we started and thus prolong the practice of breeding animals for human consumption. McMahan points out that the problem could lie in the disputable assumption that it is permissible to cause an individual to exist for one's own purposes without acquiring obligations to this individual. In his opinion, if we cause the existence of a being that is dependent and cannot survive on its own, that *makes us responsible* and under an obligation to take care of it (McMahan 2008: 72).

This argument against the practice of raising animals and killing them prematurely seems convincing; since human beings started the practice that involves causing animals to exist for human needs and killing them much earlier than they would have died naturally, humans are responsible for these animals and should bear the cost of caring for them, even to the natural end of their lives if this practice is discontinued. This is in fact another option in the event

of discontinuing the practice of 'humane' carnivorism, which McMahan does not really take seriously: there is a choice not only between the option of not bringing animals into existence at all, and the option of causing animals to exist and then killing them; there is also a possibility that these animals are raised and not killed. Given his comparison between the interests of animals and people in the situation, McMahan should take this option into consideration, bearing in mind his view that most animals that are raised for human consumption are psychologically connected to themselves to a greater or lesser degree – pigs more than cows, and cows more than chickens (McMahan 2015: 85). Consequently, their interests in continuing to live would in most cases outweigh the interests of people in eating them. A recent real-life example points precisely to such a possibility of giving up animal breeding for human consumption and continuing to take care of them; at the Larkspur cattle farm in Colorado, the owners quit selling cattle for slaughter, and turned the farm into an animal sanctuary.[8]

Despite some weaknesses in McMahan's account, the advantage of his TRIA is that it enables us to compare the interests of animals and humans on equal terms, which opens a possibility that the interests of animals could outweigh the interests of people in a specific situation. Still, the most important value of his theory is that it recognizes the responsibility of humans and their duties to take care of animals they brought into existence for their own needs, thus paving the way for discontinuing animal husbandry, including the practice of 'humane carnivorism'.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to show why the traditional view that animals do not have moral status is no longer tenable. An alternative view has been put forward that sentient animals are due moral consideration on the basis of their interests. This interest-based approach provides a much better explanation of why it seems wrong to treat animals cruelly and to cause their suffering.

The present-day understanding of morality is extremely anthropocentric – only humans are considered to be moral subjects, while animals are excluded from the moral community. The view that the moral community should be expanded to include other species points to the fact that the boundary of moral considerability does not coincide with the boundary of our species. The boundary of human species is based on mere biological data and is morally irrelevant, and a sound ethic should not be based on bias or arbitrary discrimination that favours our own species - speciesism (Cavalieri, Singer 1993: 304). Evidence shows that some morally relevant characteristics of members of the human species and members of other species overlap, and that many animals have these morally relevant characteristics or capacities. Sentience is generally considered to be a morally relevant characteristic, and different views vary

8 It is The Surf and Turf Animal Sanctuary (Stratostinetskaya, internet).

only in terms of the question whether the moral status of animals is the same as the moral status of humans or not.

An endeavour to overcome the anthropocentric approach and shift towards a biocentric view of the world around us would imply the awareness that man is not the centre of the world and that all living beings have their own value, their *raison d'être*. Taking a different, biocentric approach is especially important when it comes to ethical dilemmas concerning the moral status of animals. Given that scientific findings suggest that a multitude of non-human animals experience emotional feelings, it calls into question the anthropocentric approach to ethics and the exclusion of animals from the moral community. Biocentric ethics respects the life of every sentient being, both human and non-human, because all sentient living beings have an experiential well-being and can fare better or worse. Applying moral principles of biocentrism for the sake of protecting the welfare of non-human animals, assuming that we do care about their welfare and that we deem it important just how we treat other sentient beings even though they do not belong to our species, would enable us to create conditions for a higher level of well-being of all sentient animals.

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## Moralni status životinja: stepeni moralnog statusa i pristup zasnovan na interesima

**Apstrakt:**

Tema ovog rada je problem moralnog statusa ne-ljudskih životinja, tj. pitanje da li osećajne životinje imaju moralni značaj. Razmatraju se argumenti u prilog i protiv moralne relevantnosti životinja, pre svega argument marginalnih slučajeva. Zastupa se tvrdnja da osećajne životinje imaju moralni status na osnovu toga što imaju interese u pogledu svoje iskustvene dobrobiti, ali da postoje različiti stepeni moralnog statusa. Predstavljaju se i razmatraju dva pristupa zasnovana na interesima: Degrasijino gledište da osećajne životinje imaju interes da nastave da žive i da treba pripisati moralni značaj njihovim interesima. i Mekmanova TRIA teorija koja slično tome postulira da životinje imaju interese i da bi u datoj situaciji trebalo uporediti interese ljudi i životinja u pitanju. Najzad, zaključak je da bi trebalo odustati od antropocentričnog pristupa zarad biocentrične etike.

**Ključne reči:** životinja, osećajna, moralni status, dobrobit, interesi, ljudi, osobe