

19.5/25
21.5

Part One: Answer the following questions in 1-2 paragraphs each.

1. What is the mirror test for consciousness? What conclusions do Korsgaard, de Wall, and Wright (who wrote the New Yorker article) each draw about the ability for some animals to pass the mirror test? The mirror test involves marking an animal (with, e.g., paint) & exposing the animal to a mirror. If the animal's behavior indicates understanding of the mirror image as oneself (e.g., by trying to rub off the paint) rather than as another animal (e.g., by trying to fight it), that indicates a level of self-awareness (& understanding what mirrors are).

Korsgaard thinks some animals are probably self-aware without being mirror-test passers: e.g., a tiger chasing prey needs some way to model its relative location in space in order to keep up the chase.

De Wall also thinks the mirror test is a "narrow" measurement, because it relies on the visual modality. Dogs are more attuned to smell & bats to sound than vision, but that itself shouldn't be evidence against their self-awareness!

Wright recounts the history of the mirror test (dating back to Darwin exhibiting a mirror to chimpanzees) & notes that Hapey (although, oddly, not the other elephants at the Bronx Zoo) passed, repeatedly touching the white X excited on her head.

2. Singer discusses the capacity for suffering as a morally relevant characteristic. Why does he privilege this capacity over others like intelligence or language? Give his arguments.

The Capacity for happiness & suffering is what makes an entity have any interests whatsoever. A rock doesn't "mind" being kicked, but a mouse does. Even if an entity has interests, Singer doesn't see any good reason to treat some creatures' interests as mattering more than others. Why discriminate on "intelligence" or "language-using", given that it's not OK to discriminate based on skin color? Singer does not think speciesists have an argument to stand on.

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3. How does Korsgaard argue that valuing our own suffering commits us to valuing the suffering of animals?

Korsgaard points out that our suffering comes from the animal part of us, not the rational part. If pain is bad when it happens to us, it should also be bad when it occurs in creatures that are relevantly similar in their capacity for happiness & suffering. This is not to deny a large difference between humans & nonhuman animals in our capacity for moral reasoning. But unless you adhere to a contractualist theory of morality, other animals not having moral reasoning just means that they don't have moral obligations to each other (lacking the capacity); it doesn't mean we don't have obligations to them.

4. For De Wall, what is the difference between empathy, sympathy, and succorant behavior? Why is the distinction important for understanding animal behavior?

Empathy is the capacity to model & understand the mental states of others.

Sympathy is furthermore caring about the mental states of others.

Succorant behavior is taking action to alleviate the distress or injury of non-offending.

Succorant behavior is a behaviorist operationalization: we don't need to take a position on whether an animal "really feels" sympathy in order to notice dolphins biting harpoon lines when conspecifics are under attack, or apes adapting their play to another's injury.

Operationalization is important, because it's not necessarily obvious what mental mechanisms underlies behavior: animals that change their behavior towards an injured individual might be merely learning from experience, or they might be modeling the other's state empathetically (which is faster than having to gradually learn from experience that the other isn't behaving like a healthy individual).

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5. The New Yorker article describes three different strategies for protecting the interests of animals.

What are the views of Wise, Cupp, and Nussbaum?

Wise thinks animals need rights to protect their interests; the animal welfare approach has failed.

Cupp thinks animal welfare needs to be a human responsibility. Cupp worries that an animal rights approach will undermine the rights of intellectually disabled humans, who may lack some capacities that some animals have.

Nussbaum has a separate "capabilities" approach; she thinks that existing animal welfare law doesn't go far enough (only preventing the most heinous infliction of grievous harm, not protecting animals' needs to exercise their natural capacities), but doesn't think it makes sense to grant rights that rely on human language & social contracts.

Part Two: Answer the following yes/no questions.

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1. De Waal argues that consoling behavior and concern for the injured can be observed in rhesus monkeys as commonly as in chimpanzees. Yes No

2. In de Waal's account, some animals learn to adjust their behavior toward handicapped individuals. Yes No

3. Steven Wise of the NhRP argues that animals like elephants should be considered legal persons because of their cognitive complexity. I think Wise is with Singer on this one? Having interests isn't about being smart. Yes No

4. The Bronx Zoo acknowledged that Happy was being mistreated or abused. Yes No

5. The New Yorker article mentions that U.S. law already considers corporations and ships as legal persons. ships?! (corporations need to be able to sue & be sued, but ships are property) Yes No

6. According to Nussbaum, current welfare laws already offer sufficient legal protection for animals like Happy. Yes No

7. According to Peter Singer, equal consideration of interests requires identical treatment of all beings. don't need to give squirrels the right to vote: if they don't have the capacity, then they don't have the interest. Yes No

8. Singer believes that a being's ability to suffer is the only relevant criterion for moral consideration. Yes No

9. Korsgaard suggests that our moral duties to animals stem in part from our shared capacity for suffering and attachment. Yes No

10. Korsgaard believes that only beings who can make moral demands on others are entitled to moral consideration. Yes No

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OPTIONAL EXTRA CREDIT WORTH 1 POINT

What is the principle of parsimony? How does de Waal use it to give two interpretations of the value anthropomorphism? What does he say about humanity's place in nature?

X The principle of parsimony, or Occam's razor, prefers simpler explanations; it can be formalized as in Solomonoff induction or the minimum description length principle.

De Waal offers two interpretations of parsimony in the theory of animal behavior: you could say that it's simpler to avoid positing "higher" cognitive capabilities when the same behavior could be produced by simpler mechanisms, or you could say that it's simpler to suppose that similar behavior exhibited by evolutionarily related creatures has a similar mechanism.

De Waal knows that humans are animals, too; he accords credence to the view that succorant behavior in other apes is similar to the way in which we care about others.