Universität Basel

Research Project
Beastly Politics

Third-party funded project

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There is broad consensus in contemporary animal ethics that sentient nonhuman animals matter morally in their own right. As a consequence, it is widely recognized that humans have negative duties (that is, duties of non-interference and non-maleficence) towards them. In other words, humans should not inflict unnecessary harms upon animals. Less attention, however, has been paid to the question of whether humans have positive duties (that is, duties of assistance) towards animals, and if so, what those duties encompass, whether those duties vary according to the type of animal under consideration, and what should be done if those duties are in conflict with others that we hold. Additionally, it is unclear who bears such duties and responsibilities: is it merely individuals, or are these collective duties all members of a society share? If the latter is the case, do these duties have to be implemented on a political level? Do animals have a claim for having their interests represented on a political level, and should their interests thus be taken into consideration in the process of political decision-making? However, since animals cannot voice their interests themselves in political deliberations (similar to future generations, young children and cognitively disabled individuals), new ways have to be found to represent their interests. Furthermore, the project will explore how such positive duties might be appropriately balanced and prioritized given scarce resources and the pressing existing obligations towards humans, and how these duties can be institutionalized on a political level.

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