Universität Basel

Publication

Animal Vulnerability and its Ethical Implications: An Exploration

While human vulnerability has been discussed for some time in the contemporary philosophy and bioethics literature, animal vulnerability has received less attention. In this article, I investigate whether the concept of vulnerability, as it is currently used in bioethics, can be meaningfully extended to animals. Furthermore, I discuss the ethical implications of ascribing vulnerability to animals and I show what vulnerability discourse can add to debates on animal ethics. In a first step, I analyse the conditions of vulnerability ascription. By taking as my basis the definition of vulnerability presented by Martin, Tavaglione and Hurst, I demonstrate that some animals fulfil the conditions of vulnerability ascription. I explore the ethical implications of vulnerability ascriptions in three domains: livestock farming, animal experimentation, and animals living in the wild. I argue that many groups of animals currently qualify as particularly vulnerable and should be afforded special protection so that they receive what they are due. I conclude by outlining the differences between vulnerability and sentience ascriptions: while sentience is a sufficient reason to ascribe moral status to a being, vulnerability draws our attention to those who are more likely to be denied what they are due.