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On Responsible Knowledge Making and the Moral Standing of Animals: Questioning What Matters and Why about Animal Minds

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One of the long-standing presuppositions of moral theory about animals is that our moral relations with them depend on our sharing some fundamental characteristic or capacity. Daniel Dennett's influential paper, *Animal Consciousness: What Matters and Why* (1995) is a good example of how philosophers might go on in discussions that takes seriously this kind of reasoning as well as a comment on what responsible knowledge making amounts to in relation to it. In this paper my aim is to question this kind of theorizing and suggest another way that philosophers might approach the animal question.

Mind-havers and the moral community

There are a number of reasons why the kinds of minds that exist and how we come to know them are important considerations for Daniel Dennett. One of these reasons concerns the moral community.^[1] Dennett explains (*Kinds of Minds* 5-7):

Membership in the class of things that have minds provides an all-important guarantee: the guarantee of a certain sort of moral standing. Only mind-havers can care; only mind-havers can mind what happens. If I do something to you that you don't want me to do, this has moral significance. It matters because it matters to you...it takes no special pleading at all to get most people to agree that something with a mind has interests that matter. That's why people are so concerned, morally, about the question of what has a mind: any proposed adjustment in the boundary of the class of mind-havers has major ethical significance.

In *Animal Consciousness: What Matters and Why* (1995) the debate over mind-havers is framed in terms of animal consciousness. Entities that are conscious – entities that we know are conscious – are those that are deserving of moral consideration and this is the basis for their being counted as members of the moral community: consciousness is their guarantee of a certain kind of moral standing. The problem as Dennett sees it is that current thinking about animal consciousness is a mess, for ‘hidden and not so hidden agendas distort discussion and impede research’ (Dennett 691). If we really want to know whether or not animals are conscious (and so on Dennett’s reading, have moral standing) then, says Dennett (691), we must stop pursuing any further the ‘pathetic course upon which many are now embarked’. The root problem as he sees it is an epistemological one, or framed differently, the root problem is how researchers should go about making knowledge about animal minds responsibly.

Current discussions, like some historical ones, Dennett believes, are plagued by a tolerance of obvious inconsistency and bizarre one-sidedness. Dennett (692) cites Elizabeth Marshall Thomas’ work as an example. He accuses her of mixing ‘acute observation and imaginative hypothesis-formulation with sheer fantasy’ when it comes to the minds of dogs and few critics, he says, have pointed out that it is ‘irresponsible’ of her to do so. She has ‘polluted her potentially valuable evidence with well-meant romantic declarations that she could not have any defensible grounds for believing’. In terms of knowing whether or not dogs are conscious, her answers are *not to be trusted*. Marshall Thomas’ knowledge making is irresponsible because it is not objective: she has compromised her position as a judging observer of the evidence through her personal bias toward dogs; she has not set aside her feelings, commitments and connections with her subjects in order that she might know that they (the dogs) are conscious.

Like that of Marshall-Thomas, the work of Thomas Nagel also falls into the category of irresponsible knowledge making about animal minds: his paper “What is it Like to be a Bat?” (1974) is another striking example of the one-sided use of evidence according to Dennett.

For Nagel, consciousness is at the heart of the mind/body problemⁱⁱⁱ and current discussions of the problem ignore it or get it wrong. He identifies consciousness in this way: an organism is conscious (has conscious mental states), be it human or otherwise, if and only if there is *something it is like* to be that organism, something *it is like* for that organism (Nagel 435). Nagel refers to this as ‘the subjective character of experience’. In his view, an objective, physical theory will abandon the very thing it aims to offer an account of: the single point of view connected with subjective phenomena. While he could have used any one of the creatures from the philosophical zoo to illustrate his point, he chose bat consciousness.

I assume we all believe that bats have experience. After all, they are mammals, and there is no more doubt that they have experience than that mice or pigeons or whales have experience...travel too far down the phylogenetic tree, people gradually shed their faith that there is experience there at all. ...Even without the benefit of

philosophical reflection, anyone who has spent some time in an enclosed space with an excited bat knows what it is to encounter a fundamentally *alien* form of life. (Nagel 436)

At best we will only ever know what it is like for us to behave as bats behave, we cannot know what it is like for a bat to be a bat. Bat consciousness is beyond our knowing.

Dennett argues that there is an inconsistency in Nagel's argument. Dennett claims that science, which seeks an objective, impartial, and universal description of animal consciousness cannot capture what it is like to be an animal yet it is scientific facts, which Nagel relies on to, tell him something about bat consciousness. According to Dennett (693):

the rhetorical peculiarity – if not outright inconsistency – of his treatment of the issue can be captured by an obvious question: if a few such facts can establish something about bat consciousness, would more such facts not establish more? He has already relied on “objective, third-person” scientific investigation to establish the hypothesis that bats are conscious, but not in just the way we are. Why wouldn't further such facts be able to tell us in exactly what ways bats' consciousness isn't like ours, thereby telling us what it is like to be a bat? What kind of fact is it that only works for one side of an empirical question?

The Nagelian position, Dennett argues, is untenable because it combines the assertion of consciousness with a lack of curiosity about what the assertion amounts to and how it might be investigated. Witness, he says, the attribution of consciousness to animals by various theorists: Peter Singer draws the line somewhere between shrimp and oysters, Stephen Clarke at sponges and Nagel himself possibly at flounders and wasps. Indeed, Nagel admits to not knowing where to draw the line on the phylogenetic scale, and it is precisely this not knowing, this presumption of consciousness that Dennett argues requires analysis. What does the 'obviousness' that there is something it is like to be a dog or a cat, or a bat, or the 'obviousness' that there isn't something it is like to be a brick, or the indecision as to whether fish or spiders are conscious amount to? 'What does it mean to say that it is or it isn't?' (Dennett 699).

Dennett's argument ultimately leads him to the position that what has passed for good 'philosophical form' – that is, to accept Nagel's definition of consciousness as “there is something it is like to be an entity” and that we may never know what it is like to be that entity, yet at the same time claim to know the entity to be conscious – can no longer hold. We can no longer ‘invoke mutual agreement that we know what we're talking about even if we can't explain it yet’ (Dennett 699). Nagel begins with the assumption that bats are conscious entities, yet provides a seemingly compelling argument that we cannot at this stage or possibly at any stage know bat consciousness. What Nagel presents is a circular argument. Dennett's argument holds against Nagel.

Nevertheless, while Dennett's argument on the issue of animal consciousness is challenging and insightful his rendering of the connection between animal mentality and animal ethics is not. The view that the moral standing of animals is primarily dependent upon their being conscious is claiming too much. Dennett himself is guilty of a 'curious asymmetry', of taking it as 'obvious' that animal mentality is the fundamental grounds upon which human-animal moral relations are to be determined. In an article of the same special issue journal in which Dennett's work appears, Cora Diamond (*Sameness and Difference* 689) asks a particularly poignant and relevant question: 'Do we not need to examine the idea that our moral relation to animals depends on whether they share some fundamental property?'. To illustrate her point she says that some people have concluded that mentally challenged infants are not objects of moral concern on the basis of this assumption, whereas many others would regard this conclusion as horrific, and so reject the assumption upon which it is based. I flag this example as one that I will return to in due course.

For now I want to discuss the example upon which this discussion turns: the example of Rene Descartes. In the course of developing some of his major works, Descartes wrote extensively on human and animal nature. It is through an examination of what I see as a misreading of Descartes that I wish to challenge Dennett's fundamental assumption about the primary relation that animal mentality has to an understanding of the moral standing of animals.

The "misrepresentation" of Descartes?

'I am not known for my spirited defences of Rene Descartes,' Dennett (692) writes, 'but I find I have to sympathize with an honest scientist who was apparently the first victim of the wild misrepresentations of the lunatic fringe of the animal rights movement'. It is a myth, he says, spread by theorists such as Peter Singer and Mary Midgley, that 'Descartes was a callous vivisector, completely indifferent to animal suffering because of his view that animals (unlike people) were mere automata'. Rather, Descartes was an *honest* scientist, and we can read this as meaning 'a responsible knowledge maker', because, says Dennett (692), he did not take animal mentality at face value, rather he wanted to find out how animals actually work. Dennett cites Justin Leiber's re-examination of the supposed evidence for Descartes' experimentation on animals in *Cartesian" Linguistics?* (1988) to support his claims of unfair representation. What is interesting is that neither Descartes *nor* Leiber thinks animals to be conscious, yet they nevertheless think them worthy of moral consideration. Or so it seems. If this is indeed the case, then those theorists Dennett cites as responsible knowledge makers because of their commitment to objectivity concerning the nature of animal minds have other reasons for believing animals to be morally considerable, or signal other ways of answering moral questions about animals: the relation between animal mentality and moral considerability may not be as obvious or informed as Dennett assumes.

Justin Leiber on Descartes and Animal Consciousness

For Leiber, influenced by Descartes, animal consciousness does not much matter in terms of responsible knowledge making about the moral standing of animals. And so to link

this claim back to Dennett's characterisation of the issue we might say that the having of a mind, understood in terms of consciousness as the defining feature, is not according to Leiber, a guarantee of moral standing. Animals are morally considerable, but not necessarily *because* they are conscious entities. Of course, the temptation here is to say they are morally considerable according to Leiber *because* of something else, some other capacity, but it is wise to hold off on the "becausal" story until Leiber's views are more fully considered for it is likely that he is pointing to, or hinting at, other ways of answering the animal question.

'There is simply not a line in Descartes,' Leiber (315) says, 'to suggest that he thought we are free to smash animals at will or free to do so *because* their behaviour can be explained mechanically'. To presume so as Mary Midgley (1980) and Peter Singer (1976) have done, is to presume too much, to argue too strongly Descartes' views on the treatment of animals. He argues that we cannot know precisely Descartes' views on the treatment of animals for unlike Montaigne, Descartes was totally silent on the issue. Consciousness, we might say, is merely presumed by these critics to be the morally salient factor for Descartes in determining the treatment of animals.

The greater part of Leiber's criticism of Midgley's work concerns her references to Montaigne as a cognitive authority in whose work on animal consciousness and their moral considerability we can trust; she argues that we cannot trust Descartes because he, along with other 'convinced excluders' simply find the issue of the treatment of animals obvious. In being automata, Midgley says, claims on their behalf 'are not just excessive but downright nonsensical, as meaningless as claims on the behalf of stones or machines or plastic dolls' (cited by Leiber 311). Leiber's criticisms of Montaigne are a precursor to Dennett's of Nagel; indeed, Leiber describes Nagel as a 'recent Montaignean'. According to Leiber (316), Montaigne believed it obvious that animals are conscious beings despite the fact that we may never, through empirical investigation, be able to substantiate this belief.

For the same reasons that Nagel's work cannot be trusted, one cannot trust Montaigne's. According to Leiber, Midgley is wrong to trust it. One of the major difficulties with it as we saw earlier, is where to draw the line: which animals are conscious and which are not. What is it to say an elephant is but a spider is not, and so by extension what is it to say an elephant has moral standing but a spider does not? On theorists who draw the line somewhere around sponges, or oysters, or flounders, wasps or worms Leiber (319) says:

...all these writers, it seems to me, fumble for reasons to rationalize views that, as Descartes remarks, "we are all accustomed to from our earliest years," such as that it is, for example obvious that dogs are conscious and are not to be eaten, while pigs are not conscious and are perfectly proper food, or the other way around, that it is appalling to club baby seals while meritorious to lay down poisons that subject rats to a slow death from internal bleeding, that bees hives are paragons of happy workers, while ant hills are totalitarian evil empires, that dolphins

are happy, tenderminded sorts, while sharks are consumed by malevolent visions....

I flag Leiber's criticism for now, as it's important to see what he has to say about Peter Singer.

Singer is also guilty of similar generalisations about Descartes. The only evidence Singer provides for Descartes' supposed experimentation on living animals is an extract from Leonora Cohen Rosenfield's *From Beast-Machine to Man-Machine: Animal Soul in French Letters from Descartes to La Mettrie* (1968). As Leiber points out, while Singer is happy to cite some of Rosenfield's research, he studiously leaves out further references which paint a rather different picture. According to Rosenfield (70):

Descartes himself was evidently fond of dogs, and no accusation of personal cruelty to animals was ever levelled against him. Indeed, the leading exponent of the theory of animal automatism kept a pet dog called 'Monsieur Grat.' He apparently prized him, too, for as a gift to his friend in Paris, the Abbé Picot, he sent Monsieur Grat, via his faithful valet Maçon, 'with a little female, in order to give some of this breed to the Abbé.' What strange, potent magic these little machines can work!

While reference to Descartes' having a pet that he cared deeply for is a radical thought in itself, and one under represented in the literature, it is Rosenfield's own comment that grabs Leiber's attention, her wondering at the strange potent magic of animal automata. Rosenfield is making the same point that Descartes himself often made, 'that nature produces much more marvellous machines than human can construct' (Leiber 314). What Descartes would add to this Leiber says, is that unlike Montaigne who similarly finds animals wondrous but lacks an interest in understanding them, 'our wonder should increase as we attend to the ingenious way in which mechanism can achieve such efforts'. We have come full circle, for it is here that Leiber comments on there not being a line in Descartes work to suggest that we are free to smash these magical machines. But neither is there a line to say more clearly why; we must look to Leiber's own work to seek such answers.

Where Leiber describes Nagel as a 'recent Montaignean' we might refer to him as a 'recent Cartesian', for he believes animals to be without consciousness. ^[iii] But he is a 'recent Cartesian' to be understood as he understands Descartes: as a Cartesian who does not deny animals' (at least minimal) moral standing because of what they lack mentally. Leiber closes his article with 'remarks of a more personal character', and it is attending to these remarks (and perhaps what they hide as much as what they reveal) that we might answer the dangling question(s) posed thus far.

The primary focus of Leiber's article is to defend Noam Chomsky's use of the label "Cartesian Linguistics" and a claim that there are some useful historical links between

Chomsky's work and Descartes'. On Leiber's rendering, Cartesian Linguistics is made up of four views that stand up fairly well under scrutiny:

1. that there is a distinction in kind between those with minds and animals
2. that there is a test for this distinction which focuses on the intimate relation between language and thought, "between having a language and having a mind"
3. Consciousness has autonomy, freedom, unity, recoverability, indivisibility, transparency and immortality
4. Animals do not think or feel pain as entities with minds do, that is, as conscious, linguistically mediated perceptions of bodily states (Leiber, 1988: 311).

Of the four views of Descartes that Leiber defends, views one, two and four are particularly pertinent to the discussion here. In arguing that these views hold up, Leiber denies consciousness to animals: they, for him, as they were for Descartes, are not of the same kind as humans. What then of his moral and practical commitments to animals? What is left to be said? And, interestingly, why the need to label what is left to be said as 'personal', as something that is private, relating, for the most part, to those parts of his life generally understood to be outside the professional?

On one level, the need to label his comments as 'personal in character' concerns the perceived transgression of philosophical practice: he tells stories, or offers accounts, of his own interactions with various animals and how these interactions affected his life. Stories or accounts such as these lack the same professional authority of objective accounts. As a professional, Leiber is trained in methods of discovering the truth that adhere to principles of objectivity, particularly those that concern the position of knowledge maker and where knowledge makers stand in relation to the animals-as-objects under study, evidenced, by both his and Dennett's criticisms of, for example, Montaigne and Marshall-Thomas. By earmarking his discussion as 'personal', he is, in part, seeking what we might refer to as immunity from those of his profession who would simply criticise his lack of objectivity, the polluting of his position as judging observer and in so doing become blind to those things, feelings, attitudes, actions, commitments, lifestyle choices, beliefs, practices, experiences that matter in his life and which bear weight in the story of his moral and practical commitments to 'mindless' animals.

Having spent time with chimpanzees Leiber remarks: 'while I felt love, awe, affection, and cheer, I cannot say that I was much impressed by the signing abilities of [them]'. Lamenting their lack of language, he cites an equally disappointed researcher who says: 'I know now that I am never going to have a conversation with a chimpanzee' (Leiber 340). To their minds, neither they nor anyone with a mind will ever know what it is like to be a chimpanzee, to know what they think of the jungle, of human life, of what food tastes like for them. But, and this is a big but, this does not mean that he or the disappointed primatologist 'took to eating chimpanzee steaks for breakfast or to nailing chimpanzee limbs foursquare so that a gleeful evisceration might efficiently proceed...nor did the primatologist give up the study of apes or cease to be fascinated and affectionate toward them, any more than an astronomer should lose interest in the sun because he ceases to see it as the face of God' (Leiber 340). Why? The answer is given, in part, in his next account.

Leiber spent the best part of a year interacting, instructing and playing with a member of the big cat family. Though, he says, he did not believe her to be conscious, he thought her ‘more important to [his] life at that time than any other thing, human, animal, or mineral.’ And to those who would read this and be appalled, he (340) says; ‘I deny and resent the claim that I was inconsistent, a hypocrite, a patronizing sentimentalist, or a selfish exploiter of a free spirit (an Auschwitz guard who enjoys playing with an inmate child)’. Consciousness, recall, does not, for Leiber, determine moral worth. It is not merely humans or thinkers that have moral value. Holding such a view of the ‘intrinsic value’ of inner experience relegates everything else to mere means of conscious beings (including animals’) ends. He, rather, is inclined to the view that ‘anything may have value and to the view that [for example] not only may a mouse be less valuable than the moon or the Grand Canyon, so may a human being, too’ (Leiber 341). But then nor is the value of the latter to be understood as merely instrumental and Leiber cites two reasons. Meaning and value are not wholly to be understood as part of our inner psychological experience: ‘I love Barbara’s face’, he says, ‘rather than the psychological state that it occasions, and if that face is also “Ruby’s”, I love Ruby’s face, though I may not recognize the nickname [and] it is the Grand Canyon that is awesomely beautiful, not my reactions to it’. Secondly, if only inner psychological experiences had intrinsic value then we ought to build or concoct potions that will “ensconce us all in endlessly-varied, vividly-happy “experienced inner worlds”” (Leiber 342).

So what is Leiber arguing? Contrary to Daniel Dennett, Peter Singer, Mary Midgley, Thomas Nagel, and any other theorist who link moral worth, or moral standing to consciousness, Leiber (342) wishes to cast doubt:

on the view that only subjective experience can be genuinely good or intrinsically valuable, all else being but mere means to conjure up such experience. Once we accept this, we can confidently believe that an animal is a beautiful, valuable, and dazzlingly ingenious masterwork of nature without feeling that we also have to believe that it is conscious.

Wonder at the ingenious masterworks of nature is what Descartes felt, and on Leiber’s reading, his casting doubt on the link between consciousness and morality opens the way for understanding Descartes to have thought animals (at least minimally) morally considerable, for nowhere does Descartes himself suggest that his project of describing animal organisms mechanistically is also a moral project.

In offering a way of answering the question of how we should live with non-human animals, Daniel Dennett linked animal consciousness to moral standing and commented on how theorists should go about making knowledge of this kind responsibly. Justin Leiber, who Dennett cites as a source for exposing certain hidden agendas distorting objective research into animal consciousness, himself offers a subjective account for why indeed we might doubt the link between moral standing and the having of a mind. It seems that theorists on both sides of the animal consciousness/moral standing debate

struggle to make sense of and make use of their personal interactions and encounters with animals in order to produce ‘the best knowledge of the day’, or objective knowledge.

I suggested earlier that theorists such as Leiber may be signalling other ways of asking questions about animals, particularly when they concern the idea of moral standing. I now want to address this. Also, I wish to address an earlier quote of Leiber’s concerning the rationalisation of views that ‘we are all accustomed to from our earliest years’.

Throughout this discussion the word “obvious” has been extensively used. It formed the basis of the criticisms made against Marshall-Thomas, Singer, Midgley, Montaigne, and Nagel: that they treat animal consciousness as simply obvious without really questioning what this obviousness amounts to. Similarly, Dennett treats the connection between animal minds (where consciousness is understood as the defining feature) and their moral worth as simply obvious but does not say what this obviousness amounts to either. Leiber says of writers more generally who treat both cases as obvious – for example, that it is ‘obvious that dogs are conscious and are not to be eaten, while pigs are not conscious and are perfectly proper food...’ – that they are merely fumbling for reasons to rationalise views that we have simply become accustomed to.

How might we understand this inclination on the part of all parties to invoke the “obviousness” of what they are claiming? Leiber touches on something very important in his comments about our rationalising views that we have become accustomed to. What often goes unquestioned in philosophical discussions about animals is the presumption that their moral standing be treated as simply a conceptual problem to be solved – in this case for example, as a dismantling of conceptual boundaries between human and animal natures. Taking on board Leiber’s comment we might begin the questioning from a different place, we might begin by understanding the moral standing of animals as not simply a conceptual problem to be solved, but a problem to be understood in the context of a moral order that is produced. In other words, to begin our discussions by recognising that the moral status of animals is indeed an outcome of what people do together: it is the product of our collective action. The moral standing of animals is constituted through the enactment of shared social practices of which professional academics are a part. In relation to philosophers, formal analytic reasoning about moral standing, whereby our personal and social interactions with animals are glossed over in favour of conceptual simplifications of, for example, the nature of their minds, is treated as the way in which philosophers as cognitive authorities contribute to the production of this order, and the way in which they might challenge it. Leiber’s accounts suggest something else. They suggest something of his contribution to the social and moral order as it relates to animals in ways other than as simply a cognitive authority, while at the same time are suggestive of how he comes to understand through collective interaction something of how he should live with them.

I return briefly to Cora Diamond’s comments regarding mentally challenged children in order to explain something of what I have been saying. To reiterate, she says that many

people would find the claim that such children are not objects of moral concern horrific and so reject the assumption upon which it is based – that is, the assumption that moral considerability is necessarily related to mental capacities. What is horrific about it, in part, is the assumption that conceptual analysis here is enough (or conceptual analysis of a particular form), that theorists can and should ignore the social, moral, and emotional relations that these children and their families and friends already have; that their interactions have no bearing on the moral standing of such children, or worse still, that they say nothing of how, in the development and generation of their interactions, families work out answers to the question of how they ought to live.

I began this chapter questioning Daniel Dennett’s ‘way’ of answering the question of how we ought to live with animals and of how he understood responsible knowledge making. Throughout much of the discussion various writers’ accounts of their interactions with animals were mentioned, whether as evidence of irresponsible knowledge making, or as grounds for offering alternative answers to moral questions about animals. What these accounts signal is a moral order that is produced; an order that professionals contribute to the production of in their capacities as both academics and as ordinary folk. They also offer an insight into ‘slices’ of everyday lives living with animals that theoretical discussions tend to overlook. Questions remain as to how we might take seriously these kinds of insights and more particularly how we might do so as professional knowledge makers doing intellectually and morally responsible work.

Responsible knowledge making on animals: an alternative perspective

I have cited Cora Diamond thus far as one theorist who I believe has begun to make inroads in this regard: her work has a self-reflexive aspect to it that is particularly insightful and which begins to take seriously the idea that the moral standing of animals is something that we produce and enact. In her assessment of work such as that of Dennett’s she asks whether or not the idea of there being some fundamental difference marking humans from animals in morally relevant ways is not itself something we have constructed to rationalize their subordination. Diamond suggests an alternative moral project concerning questions about animals, one of the important features of which I will point to here.

Dennett and others who focus on a particular capacity – in his case consciousness – as the marker of inclusion into the moral community offer a particularly shallow view of what constitutes our moral lives and how we might live them with animals. Sharing Diamond’s view:

...we are never confronted merely with the existence of ‘beings’ with discoverable empirical similarities and differences, towards which we must act, with the aid of general principles about beings with such-and-such properties deserving so-and-so.’ (Diamond, *Experimenting on Animals* 351)

Rather what is important to take into account here is that the ‘modes of life and thought of our ancestors, including their moral thinking, have *made* the differences and similarities which are now available for us to use in our thinking and our emotions and decisions’ (Diamond 351). Facts and truths about animals are collectively made and collectively enacted; we all actively take part in their production and that we are embedded in a social history of this production. What we have available to us, again following Diamond, is a human notion of difference. In essence: the difference may have started out as a biological difference, but it becomes ‘something for human thought through being taken up and made something of—by generations of human beings, in their practices, their art, their literature, their religion, their ethics’ (Diamond 351).

How then might we understand animal nature and how might we show that animals in certain situations ought to be better treated? Diamond again suggests answers to both questions, which takes seriously the point that our similarities and our differences are collectively made in our practices, our art, our literature, etcetera and that we can step outside moral discussions which emphasise biological and psychological facts about humans and animals.

Diamond relates a poem of Walter de la Mare’s *Titmouse*, to make her point.^[iv] The line that Diamond points to particularly is that which refers to the titmouse as a ‘tiny son of life’. Diamond suggests this line as representing the animal as a fellow creature and that this concept of ‘fellow creature’ or ‘living creature’ is not one to be understood in terms biological facts. She says:

It does not mean, biologically an animal, something with *biological life*-it means a being in a certain boat, as it were, of whom it makes sense to say, among other things, that it goes off into Time’s enormous Nought, and which may be sought as *company*. (Diamond, *Eating Meat and Eating People* 329).

The important clarification that she goes on to make here is that the response to animals as our ‘fellows in mortality’ depends on a conception of *human* life, and an ‘extension of a non-biological notion of what human life is’. If we think of this in terms of our moral lives as passages of creation and discovery where part of what we learn is the meaning of suffering, loss, and death^[v] as well as the meaning of such things as friendship, love and compassion, then what we have learnt in relation to living with other humans – our sense of humanity – is what we ought to extend to fellow creatures. And what we extend is not simply those traditional moral concepts as say justice or charity, but such concepts as friendship or the idea of an independent life, or pity (Diamond 329). Tolstoy provides a useful example here.

In his writings about vegetarianism Tolstoy speaks of extending pity. In *The First Step* (1909) he describes his conversation with a retired soldier and butcher, where in which the moral concept of pity is invoked:

...he, too, was surprised at my assertion that it was a pity to kill, and said the usual things about its being ordained; but afterwards

he agreed with me: “Especially when they are quiet, tame cattle. They come, poor things! Trusting you. It is very pitiful.”

This is dreadful! Not the suffering and death of the animals, but that man suppresses in himself, unnecessarily, the highest spiritual capacity—that of sympathy and pity toward living creatures like himself—and by violating his own feelings becomes cruel. (Tolstoy para. 10)

There is no biological or psychological point of fact being asserted here; there is no argument that one ought not to treat a conscious organism in this way; that one ought not to make the animals suffer. Rather the observation is made in order to draw out a mode of response from the many available that might alter one’s way of seeing the animals, seeing them as fellow creatures worthy of pity. Such a sight, while not compelling for everyone, may nevertheless check or alter one’s actions or treatment of the animals involved (Diamond 333).

Diamond recognises that her form of response does not work for everyone. It requires at the very least that there exists in those listening the possibility of a ‘fellow-creature’ response. But, as she says, her response is no less weak than that given by theorists such as Dennett, who link objective, psychological facts to the moral status of animals, as if pointing out this fact is all that one need do to show people that they have reason to better treat animals:

...if we appeal to people to prevent suffering, and we, in our appeal, try to obliterate the distinction between human beings and animals and just get people to speak or think of ‘different species of animals’, there is no footing left from which to tell us what we ought to do, because it is not members of one among species of animals that have moral obligations to anything. The moral expectations of other human beings demand something of me as other than an animal; and we do something like imaginatively read into animals something like such expectations when we think of vegetarianism as enabling us to meet a cow’s eyes. There is nothing wrong with that; there is something wrong with trying to keep that response and destroy its foundation (Diamond 333).

The foundation that Diamond refers to is that in which questions and answers of how one ought to live with animals are embedded. It is through our collectively produced social worlds that the source of our moral understanding springs and to fracture or ignore these social relations is to produce knowledge about our moral relations with animals that is morally and intellectually irresponsible.

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^[i] Many theorists on the issue of animal moral standing hold this view. Two excellent examples are Colin McGinn's *Animal Minds* (1995), *Animal Morality*, and David DeGrazia's *Taking Animals Seriously* (1996).

^[ii] The problem here is the problem of whether or not mental phenomena are physical and if they are not how they are then related to physical phenomena.

^[iii] Leiber's rendering of consciousness is in Nagelian terms, that is, consciousness understood as phenomenological: there is something *it is like* to be that organism.

^[iv] Walter de la Mare's poem *Titmouse* reads as follows (cited by Diamond 329):

If you would happy company win,
Dangle a palm-nut from a tree,
Idly in green to sway and spin,
Its snow-pulped kernel for bait; and see
 A nimble titmouse enter in.

Out of earth's vast unknown of air,
Out of all summer, from wave to wave,
He'll perch, and prank his feathers fair,
Jangle a glass-clear wildering stave,
 And take his commons there—

This tiny son of life; this spright,
By momentary Human sought,
Clash timbrel enormous Nought,
 Sweet-fed will flit away.

^[v] I have borrowed this concept of a 'moral passage' (without the associated collectivist theory) from Kathryn Pyne Addelson's *Moral Passages: Towards a Collectivist Theory* (1994) 1-2.