

# **BETWEEN THE SPECIES**

Review of  
*Animals and African Ethics*

Kai Horsthemke  
Palgrave Macmillan, 2015  
187 pages, paperback

LUIS CORDEIRO-RODRIGUES  
Sun Yat-Sen University  
lccmr1984@gmail.com

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## LUIS CORDEIRO-RODRIGUES

*Animals and African Ethics* is a monograph written by Kai Horsthemke that addresses the treatment of animals in the African context. More precisely, in this book, Horsthemke carries out a moral anthropological and normative project. The moral anthropological project is to provide an overview of African ethical perspectives on the treatment and moral status of animals. The normative project consists of analyzing moral dilemmas regarding animals in an African context and building the groundwork for a non-speciesist Africa. That is, Horsthemke's normative objective in *Animals and African Ethics* is to offer an African theory of animal rights. The main thesis of the book is that African moral and legal thought is largely anthropocentric.

The book is divided into 10 chapters. In chapter 1, by following the typology offered by Henry Odera Orika using African philosophy, Horsthemke discusses the various kinds of African philosophy available. By analyzing this typology, Horsthemke then contends that African philosophy can be divided into the precolonial and the postcolonial. According to him, a key feature that distinguishes these two is that the former is, in general terms, characterized by being an oral tradition and the latter a written tradition. Also in chapter 1, Horsthemke contends that there are some themes central to discussions in African philosophy; namely, the relevance of African indigenous knowledge systems, the concept of ubuntu, the importance of consensus, African communalism, the relevance of the legacy of colonialism, and the capacity and relevance for African philosophy to be ethically responsive. Furthermore, Horsthemke tries to link these topics with the theme of animal rights and discusses the possible contribution that the specificities of African philosophy can give to world philosophy.

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In chapter 2, Horsthemke discusses how religion and culture have influenced African ethical thought. Chapter 3 addresses the African idea of a hierarchy of beings. He says that despite the differences among African religions, there are some common features in this form of ethical thought. In particular, an idea that is rather present in African religious thought is that the hierarchy of beings starts with God, before descending to human beings and finally the rest of animate and inanimate creation. Although this ethical thought places humans in a higher place than animals, Horsthemke contends that humans are understood to have, as a result of their status, a moral responsibility for animals, even though this responsibility is mainly indirect, resulting as it does from the responsibility towards God. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss moral questions that relate to multicultural contexts in the treatment of animals. These address topics where there is a tension between cultural rights and animal rights. Chapters 6 and 7 are dedicated to exploring two key concepts of African philosophy and its application to animals, namely ubuntu and ukama. Horsthemke concludes that, in broad terms, these concepts are anthropocentric and do not offer sufficient protection to animals.

Chapter 8 is a discussion of animal law in East, West and Southern Africa. Here, Horsthemke outlines and critically analyzes the legal provisions made for the welfare and protection of nonhuman animals. Horsthemke concludes that this law is anthropocentric. Chapter 9 is an examination of the idea of environmental justice in Africa. As in previous chapters, Horsthemke concludes that this is driven by an anthropocentric line of thought, which is manifested in environmental policies.

Chapter 10 offers a sketch of a normative approach to the status of animals from an African point of view. Even though

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Horsthemke considers that African morality is, in broad terms, anthropocentric, he thinks that it is possible to build an African-inspired moral theory. However, this chapter is rather short and does not develop a full account of how this could be achieved.

This is a timely book. In the political arena, non-Westerners are often characterized as more cruel to animals than Westerners and the intellectual productions of Africans are routinely classified as inferior. This book, even though Horsthemke believes that African ethical thought is largely anthropocentric, disproves both these ideas by providing evidence that Africans do care about animals, even if accidentally, and that there is the possibility for an African theory of animal rights that deserves merit and consideration.

This is also timely because African philosophy is an emerging area of thought. After the post-war era in Africa, various academics worldwide have engaged in African philosophy and to apply its concepts to various moral dilemmas. Some of these philosophers include Bruce Janz, Thaddeus Metz and Pedro Tabensky. Before that, African philosophy was largely an oral tradition. Hence, this book comes at a time where this kind of philosophy is flourishing.

A way that this monograph could be strengthened is by emphasizing precisely the neglect that African philosophy has received from Western mainstream academia and how this current neglect has become a form of neo-colonialism in Africa. If this were included, it would help us understand how the scapegoating of Africans as being cruel to animals reinforces speciesism in the West. That is, by pointing out the reasons for the neglect by mainstream Western academics of African phi-

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losophy, in particular the African philosophy of animal rights, Horsthemke could demonstrate that this neglect reinforces the incorrect idea that Western standards of the treatment of animals are better than other standards, thereby reinforcing Western practices towards animals.

Another way that the monograph's contribution could be strengthened would be by offering a more detailed normative theory, which is here only lightly suggested in chapter 10 and the Appendix. This could consist of a more charitable understanding of the concepts of ubuntu and ukama and a systematic comparison with competing theories, such as Peter Singer's utilitarianism and Gary Francione's abolitionism.

To conclude, *Animals and African Ethics* is an excellent book that offers a moral anthropological analysis of African values and a normative account of various normative problems regarding animals in an African context. I would add, however, that while African theories of animals are worth consideration and merit when compared with competing approaches to the rights of animals, this was not emphasized in the book.