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# Symposia

## **Sentientist Politics**

### *A Theory of Global Inter-Species Justice*

*The Interviews / Symposia format acts as a platform for conversations, where participants discuss the original work of an author, practitioner, policy maker, or activist. As such, these entries do not offer an outlet for original research, but instead reflect the personal views of the participants*

**Abstract:** On 10 October 2019, a symposium was held by the University of Sheffield Political Theory Research Group discussing Alasdair Cochrane's book *Sentientist Politics: A Theory of Global Inter-Species Justice*, published October 2019 by Oxford University Press. This forum contains extended versions of the papers at the symposium. Cochrane opens with a synopsis of the book. Siobhan O'Sullivan then reflects upon Cochrane's methodology of ideal theory and his cosmopolitanism, followed by a reply from Cochrane. Next, Josh Milburn explores the place of wild animals in Cochrane's sentientist cosmopolitan democracy, and Cochrane offers a reply.

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## Alasdair Cochrane

### An Outline of *Sentientist Politics: A Theory of Global Inter-Species Justice*

What are the political implications of animal sentience? Interestingly, most states are in agreement that because certain non-human animals possess *sentience*—the capacity to experience the world and their place in it—they have a moral value of their own that must be taken into account by policy makers when formulating and implementing legislation. Indeed, this is the basic rationale for animal welfare legislation across the world. And it is also a norm that increasing numbers of states are choosing to entrench in their constitutions. However, and as many animal advocates have pointed out, if this is the sole political implication of animal sentience, it doesn't do much for the lives and interests of animals themselves. For example, both animal welfare legislation and constitutional provisions have proved perfectly compatible with the horror and brutality of modern industrialized animal agriculture. As such, proponents of *animal rights* have argued that the political implications of animal sentience stretch much further than this conventional position. They have argued that the sentience of animals establishes a set of rights that does not just limit certain harmful practices, but that rules many of them out. For example, animal rights do not just call for animals' interests to be an important consideration when reforming animal agriculture; instead, animal rights demand that industrialized animal agriculture be brought to an end. While I am in broad agreement with this animal rights position, and have defended it elsewhere (Cochrane, 2012), in *Sentientist Politics* I argue that the political implications of animal sentience go still further.

In order to explain, consider the case of human beings. It is of course widely accepted that humans have a moral value of their own that limits the harms that can be perpetrated against them, and a set of rights that demands that certain practices, like torture, slavery, murder and so on, are not visited upon them. All of this is clear enough from states' criminal laws and constitutional provisions. And yet, human worth and human rights have even greater political significance than this. Indeed, it is widely held that the worth and rights of human beings shape the *aims and structure of politics itself*. For example, human rights are commonly thought to provide the *justification* for politics: we need an impartial political authority to protect us in our rights, and to settle disputes when they are violated. They are also held to *constrain* the actions of a political authority: a state that routinely violates human rights, for example, loses its moral authority. Human rights are also widely thought to shape the *decision-making* of a political community, requiring that it be made in an open and democratic fashion. And the worth and rights of humans are also believed by many to set

the *boundaries and membership* of political communities, with rights to self-determination granting peoples the ability to determine their own fates.

But if sentient animals also have moral worth and rights, as I and many others believe, then it seems as if the worth and rights of *all sentient creatures*—and not just humans—ought to shape the aims and structure of politics. In other words, it seems as though the sentience of animals does not just require us to limit or rule out certain harmful practices; instead, it requires us to transform the nature of politics itself. In *Sentientist Politics*, then, I argue that we have a *moral duty* to create and maintain political institutions dedicated to the interests of all sentient creatures. We have such a duty for at least three reasons. In the first place, we need political institutions in order to live up to our duties to respect the worth and rights of sentient creatures. Taking the interests of animals seriously places important and burdensome demands upon us. None of us individually could possibly live up to such demands on our own: for example, giving due consideration to the suffering of all other sentient creatures is simply unmanageable. However, *collectively* we can create institutions whose purpose is to implement and mediate these duties on our behalf (Shue, 1988). Second, political institutions dedicated to the interests of all sentient creatures are required in order that the basic rights of sentient creatures are properly secured. Animals—just like humans—remain extremely vulnerable to harm without proper protection from a political authority. It is perfectly clear that the historical exclusion of animals from state protection—just like the historical exclusion of slaves, the propertyless, the working class, women, blacks, and so on—has been absolutely disastrous for them. It means that animals have been and are treated as mere resources and with impunity. An impartial political authority is thus vital if animals' rights are to be robustly protected. And the final reason why we have a duty to create political institutions dedicated to the interests of sentient creatures comes down to *determinacy*. Put simply, the precise content of our duties to animals is not always clear. To take just one example, it is often unclear what exact obligations we have regarding those animals wishing to take up residence in our homes. And such conflicts of interest are common in many areas of human and animal relations. Because of uncertainty and reasonable disagreement with regards to our precise duties over such matters, we need an impartial authority to make a decision about the right course of action. Such decision-making provides clarity on the matter and provides assurance to all members of a community concerning the behavior of others.

Of course, if we have a duty to create and maintain political institutions dedicated to the interests of all sentient creatures, we need to have some idea of what this new “sentientist politics” ought to look like. What kinds of political transformations are we required to agitate for? The book does not offer a fine-grained institutional blueprint of these new

political arrangements, in part because it seems that a good deal of institutional innovation and experimentation will be required in order to work out how to best protect the worth and rights of all sentient creatures. Having said that, it is also clear that some forms of institutions will serve sentient creatures better than others. The book argues that sentient creatures are best protected by *democratic* institutions. Democratic institutions are required, the book argues, because showing respect to the interests of all sentient creatures entails having a political system with a close understanding of what those interests are. As such, there need to be mechanisms through which individuals can articulate their interests, have them discussed, and have them represented. Moreover, there also need to be mechanisms by which policy-makers can be challenged and held to account for their effectiveness in protecting the worth and rights of those over whom they rule. In other words, then, a sentientist politics demands institutions that are participative, deliberative, and representative, as well as underpinned by a set of entrenched “sentient rights.” However, the book also claims that these democratic institutions should contain *dedicated animal representatives*. This is because leaving the representation of animals to legislators who are also charged with representing humans is likely to lead to the neglect of animals, for three reasons: animals’ historical exclusion from our political systems; their inability to participate directly in systems of policy-making; and the fact that we cannot make legislators directly accountable to them. As such, if animal interests are to be heard, considered, and weighed fairly in our political system, they must be represented by officials who are dedicated to identifying those interests and speaking on their behalf.

Of course, representing the interests of animals in this way comes with considerable challenges. The book argues that, in order to be attentive to their complex interests, the animals’ representatives must be trained in the art of “good listening” (Dobson, 2014), and be required to spend time, and communicate, with their constituents. The book further argues that these representatives ought to be selected in periodic elections, so that they can be held accountable. While the electorate charged with selecting these animal representatives will inevitably be made up of humans, the book proposes that deliberative citizen assemblies may provide a useful means to overcome humans’ self-interest when making such selections. Such fora would allow voters to hear from and question candidates, evaluate the evidence in relation to their performance, and discuss with others as to who will act as the best available trustee for animals.

But *which* animals should these representatives be acting on behalf of? Kimberly Smith (2012) has also recently advocated for the representation of animals within our political systems. Interestingly, however, she limits that representation to *domesticated animals*. Domesticated animals, she claims, merit representation on the basis that they can be

*members* of our political communities. Wild animals, on the other hand, cannot be members because they do not (usually) exist within “entangled relationships” of care and dependency with us. *Sentientist Politics* takes issue with this claim, however, and points to the profound ways in which humans affect the lives of wild animals, and wild animals affect humans. For example, wild animals are dependent on humans in myriad ways, from decisions we make regarding the development of wilderness, “harvesting” fish from the ocean, burning fossil fuels, intensive farming, and so on. And humans are dependent on wild animals in myriad ways, whether it be pollinating crops, aerating soil, controlling ‘pests’, and much more. For these reasons, the book argues that we exist in entangled “communities of fate” (Held, 2004) with wild animals, meaning not only that they are legitimate *members* of our political communities, but also members whose interests ought to be *represented* and counted in our formulation of the public good.

One important challenge to including wild animals’ interests in our formulation of the public good is the fact that many of those interests are different and in conflict. Indeed, can there be a public good for a community whose members predate on, kill, and eat each other? I argue that there can, and, to understand why, it helps to consider the role of representatives in formulating the public good. To explain, the job of political representatives ought to be to ensure that the interests of their constituents are represented when formulating policy in line with the public good. That does not mean that the raw preferences of members are counted and aggregated. Instead, it means “listening for” the various and disparate interests at stake, weighing them impartially, before translating them into a policy decision. The public good of a community, then, is not that which satisfies all members; there will always be those who lose out given the different and conflicting interests of members. And nor is it necessarily that which is in line with the preferences of a simple majority. Rather, the public good is that which is constructed from a fair and impartial process of deliberation that has attended carefully to the interests of all members (Benn, 1959, as cited in Mansbridge, 2013).

But when we say that the public good should attend to the interests of all in the political community, the question is raised, *which* political community? What are these political communities, how are their borders to be determined, and what powers ought they to have? We could just take the borders of *existing states* as given; furthermore, and continuing the statist approach, we could also grant states final authority over a full range of policy domains. The book argues, however, that taking this statist line would be problematic for at least three reasons. First, some of the threats to the interests and rights of sentient creatures—such as climate change and plastic waste, for example—require international coordinated action above the level of the state. Second, a statist order leaves sentient creatures

vulnerable to the policy decisions and actions of those *outside* of their community. And as we know, no community takes only actions that do not have some impact beyond its own borders. Finally, states have a tendency to show unjustified partiality to their own members, neglecting the harms suffered by outsiders. This book thus defends a “sentientist cosmopolitan democracy” comprised of overlapping local, national, regional, and global communities. Crucially, the powers of each of these communities ought to be determined by who is likely to be affected by policy-making in that area. This means that some existing powers of states should be devolved up to international communities, and some should be devolved down to more local ones. This remodeling of political communities should close the gap between those who make policy decisions and those who are affected by them, thus enhancing the political system’s ability to respect the worth and rights of sentient creatures around the world.

But within this political order, should all these political communities be comprised of humans and animals? Or is there a case, as Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka (2011) have argued, for granting groups of wild animals *their own* political communities? Indeed, Donaldson and Kymlicka argue that recognizing wild animals as having *sovereignty* over their territories is necessary on the basis that it allows them to flourish and be protected from destructive human expansion into their habitats. This book evaluates these claims and ultimately denies them. In terms of flourishing, a norm of non-intervention actually leaves wild animals to suffer and die when we could protect them. And in terms of protection, human expansion could be restricted through a system of robust habitat rights that falls short of sovereignty. Indeed, the book argues that the best way of protecting the basic rights of wild animals is not through treating them as foreign and distant outsiders, but through recognizing them as equal members of shared mixed human–animal communities.

Of course, a potential problem with regarding wild animals as equal members of our political communities is that it seems to lead to our having positive duties of assistance to wild animals. Given the levels of suffering and premature death that wild animals endure, such duties would be both incredibly extensive and demanding. For many, not only is such an idea radically counter-intuitive and burdensome, but also extremely dangerous, raising as it does the possibility of humans’ complete domination of nature. In response, *Sentientist Politics* argues that we do in fact have positive duties of assistance to wild animals, but only when such assistance can reasonably be expected to be effective and proportionate. Crucially, of course, putative attempts at assistance will often be ineffective and disproportionate. For example, in present and foreseeable circumstances, any attempt to bring to an end the very real harms caused by predation are likely to cause more harm than benefits overall. Attempting to remove predators from ecosystems through translocation or sterilization

would, in most cases, lead to huge increases in the populations of the prey they feed on. This would have seriously deleterious effects on other animals in those areas, such as the scavenging animals who depend on the corpses of the prey for sustenance, and animals who compete with the prey for food and habitat. Of course, the fact that many interventions will be harmful overall does not mean that all of them would be. So where smaller interventions can be reasonably expected to improve the lives of wild animals—say, for example, in ecosystems that are less sensitive to change or that have already been massively altered by human activity—we ought to undertake them. After all, we no longer regard the suffering of distant humans to be “natural,” “inevitable,” and “of no concern to us.” It is my contention that we should not make similar judgements about the suffering of wild animals. Put simply, a political system dedicated to the interests of all sentient creatures should not be prepared to sit on its hands in the face of the very real harms endured by wild animals.

But what if political communities do want to sit on their hands? After all, it is perfectly clear that individual and group attitudes in relation to animals differ enormously. So how much difference should a sentientist political order tolerate? And what should it do when any individual or political community acts outside “the bounds of toleration”? The book answers this question by arguing that “sentient rights”—like the more familiar notion of human rights—are minimal norms of justice that set limits on pluralism. Political communities should not tolerate individuals who violate the basic rights of sentient creatures; and the global political order should not tolerate communities who violate the basic rights of sentient creatures. This does not mean that all political communities must have identical political institutions, policies, and norms. But it does mean that when a community refuses to uphold its obligations to the individuals over whom it rules, the “responsibility to protect” falls on the wider group of communities. What that duty to intervene amounts to in practical terms will of course depend on what would be effective and proportionate. However, what is clear is that within a sentientist cosmopolitan democracy, the routine violation of the rights of sentient creatures cannot be tolerated for the sake of pluralism and diversity.

But how is this sentientist cosmopolitan democracy to be brought about and maintained? It is true that the nature of the proposals in this book are incredibly radical and ambitious. The purpose of this book is to sketch what a political system dedicated to the interests of all sentient creatures might look like. In other words, its focus is on what is just, rather than what we are able to achieve here and now. Nonetheless, while the book is utopian in spirit, it also aims to sketch a realistic utopia (Rawls, 2001)—that is, a system that it is at least *possible* for us to create. After all, if the prescriptions offered were completely fanciful, it is hard to see how they could motivate us to make efforts to try to take steps in their di-

rection. While the book does not offer a list of all the necessary prerequisites of a sentientist political order, then, it does conclude by offering some reasons to believe that the proposals are possible. In so doing, it provides a sketch of some of the necessary (but not sufficient) means by which a sentientist politics might be created and maintained. In the first place, the book argues that it is vital that our sentientist political system is underpinned by a civil society with *sentientist solidarity*; that is, a citizenry with feelings of shared affiliation with sentient non-human animals, as well as a commitment to the institutions designed for their protection. It also argues that such solidarity is achievable and points to previous schemes of “nation building” to show how it might be supported. Indeed, solidarity can be cultivated in a number of ways. For example, arts funding is crucial so as to broaden our moral and political imaginations (Cooke, 2017). Working for institutional change is also vital, as our political structures are not just simple reflection of social attitudes, but themselves serve to shape those attitudes (Ulas, 2015). Indeed, one important institutional change to bolster sentientist solidarity is in the education system—and the book explores how a “sentientist civic education” could be created to inculcate shared feelings of affiliation across the species barrier.

The example of education reveals how part of our efforts to move towards a sentientist political system can and should involve transforming many of our *existing* institutions. But won't some institutions need to be abolished, rather than transformed? Moreover, in order to do that, given the powerful interests involved, won't we need to circumvent existing political channels and use radical direct action? The book argues that while meaningful change can and does occur through existing channels, more radical forms of agitation can also sometimes be justified. However, in order to be justified, such means must be reasonably expected to realise those reforms in a proportionate manner. And under present conditions, attempting to promote such changes through violent revolutionary struggle would be ineffective and wrongheaded.

In sum, then, *Sentientist Politics* seeks to make the case that the sentience of animals has incredibly far-reaching implications: simply put, we need to transform our system of politics so that it is dedicated to the worth and rights of all sentient animals. Moreover, the book also aims to sketch out what such a political system might look like: a sentientist cosmopolitan democracy comprised of mixed human–animal “communities of fate.” In making these claims, the book also calls for political scholarship and political activism to take animal seriously. This involves a call to scholars of institutions, democracy, governance, political economy, and so on to incorporate animals into their enquiries—to view them as the subjects of political power that they are, and the agents of political change that they might be. And it also involves a call to animal activists to take politics more seriously. A small part of

that involves moving beyond questions of individual lifestyle change to consider how the levers of existing governing structures might be used to more robustly protect animals. But more importantly, it also means devising strategies to *transform* our political system so that it respects the worth and rights of all sentient creatures, and realizes inter-species justice on a global scale.

## Siobhan O’Sullivan

### *Sentientist Politics, a Worthwhile Utopia*

It is no understatement to say that I have read everything Alasdair Cochrane has ever written (on animals). Cochrane is prolific and clever, and does not shy away from big ideas. His latest contribution, *Sentientist Politics: A Theory of Global Inter-Species Justice*, is no exception.

As is often the case with Cochrane’s work, he starts by looking to the human paradigm for inspiration. For the purposes of his latest book, Cochrane opens the discussion by boldly asserting that the worth and rights of humans

shape *the aims and structure of politics itself*. [They]...provide the *justification* for the exercise of political power; indeed, a state which systematically violates human rights loses its moral authority. Human worth and rights are also believed to frame the *structure* of our political institutions...The worth and rights of humans are also thought to set the *goals* of our political institutions...And human worth and rights are also understood to shape the *boundaries* and *membership* of our political communities. (2018, 3, emphasis in original)

If political institutions and practice does this for humans, Cochrane wants to suggest that they should do likewise for non-human animals. Cochrane’s end game is a transformation of “the very nature of politics itself ... so that it serves all sentient creatures” (2018, p. 3). That is no small task.

If non-human animals matter, as Cochrane believes they do, then the question is not merely how the existing state might be harnessed such that it takes the interests of non-human animals seriously. The question is, if we are to take the interests of non-human animals seriously, how might we develop a political model that is informed by the gravitas of those interests? This is, of course, a complex intellectual agenda. In Cochrane’s mind, if a political value, approach, or principle is fit for purpose it demonstrably advances the well-being of all sentient individuals. In this book, he aims to identify those values, and then defend their inclusion. What follows is a 55,000 word reflection on what a pro-animal political model might look like, if we were to take the best of what we have, apply the best of what we might have, and then check that all the principles/models proposed serve the interests of non-human animals.

In short, Cochrane argues in favor of a “*sentientist cosmopolitan democracy*” (2018, p. 3, emphasis in original). The sentientist aspect incorporates the interests of all those who

experience pleasure and pain. The cosmopolitan aspect avoids what Cochrane describes as a “differentiated rights’ approach” (2018, p. 5), meaning that the interest protection afforded individual non-humans is not linked to the manner in which that animal relates to (or serves) humans. Cosmopolitanism also allows Cochrane’s theorization to be global in nature, moving beyond the nation-state and responding to the needs of all sentient life on planet Earth. Finally, democracy affords a level of transparency, accountability, and representation that Cochrane believes will benefit non-human animals.

The book is not a handy “how to” guide for animal advocates and it does not show us how to systematically move from the *status quo* to a political system of justice for animals. Cochrane is aware of this (arguable) limitation, and flags it at the start: “Of course, it can legitimately be asked whether this theory of ‘sentientist politics’—or indeed any other theory of justice incorporating animals—has any realistic prospect of being enacted” (2018, p. 9). As such, the book is perhaps unlikely to find a readership among animal advocates or those with limited interest in abstracted political or philosophical ideas. Nonetheless, *Sentientist Politics* is sure to be an instant classic with Animal Studies scholars generally, and essential reading for so-called “political turn” scholars, among whom Cochrane is already a leading figure. Cochrane’s approach of sketching the ideal political model is deeply thought out, beautifully articulated, and carefully constructed in relation to the existing literature, yet it is also new, refreshing, innovative, and boundary breaking.

Importantly, to my mind, the book also points to a maturing of the field. Not so long ago it was thrilling to think that any politically trained scholar might turn their attention to animal questions. With the publication of *Sentientist Politics*, we see so-called political turn scholars beginning the gradual process of specialization, with some focusing on political philosophy and others turning their attention to more applied, policy-driven puzzles. Cochrane has clearly nailed his colors to the mast. If this was not the case before, he has now established himself as one of the world’s leading political theorists working on justice, rights, and non-human animals. In the remainder of this brief article, I will defend Cochrane’s decision to be boldly utopian in his response to animal suffering. Then I will play Devil’s advocate, questioning the utility of what Cochrane has offered readers on this occasion.

In *Sentientist Politics*, Cochrane tells us that his objective is to “outline and reveal *what justice demands*, as opposed to what might be achievable here and now” (2018, p. 10, emphasis in original). He also posits that there are two broad approaches to political scholarship. There are “theories which seek to immerse themselves in existing debates, facts, and constraints in order to promote incremental change, say by influencing some specific aspect of current policy-making” and those that make “an important and crucial place for

more utopian theories: theories which use philosophical reflection to search for the truth of the matter about how things ought to be ideally” (2018, p. 10). Cochrane locates himself closer to the latter; “The theory defended in this book certainly veers towards the more ideal and utopian end of the spectrum” (2018, p. 10), but he also claims that it is “deliberately and unashamedly so” (2018, p. 11), yet that what he offers up is a “realistic utopia” (2018, p. 11). That is, the theorization is not fantastical or fundamentally impossible. As Cochrane himself has pointed out, it does not violate the laws of physics. If we decided we wanted to, we *could* in fact set about transforming our political institutions such that they eventually resemble what Cochrane outlines in his book.

As such, Cochrane is inviting readers to join him in a thought experiment; what *might* the world look like if the lives of animals were taken seriously? If animals matter, perhaps even as much as humans, and we decided to respond to that moral significance by formulating political institutions that take that moral status seriously, what *might* that mean? This is yet to be tried. We are yet to formulate a political society using political principles selected explicitly because they serve the interests of animals. If we are ever given the opportunity to do so, Cochrane has started the process of identifying the principles that those with a pro-animal sentiment should select. At the very least, he offers up candidates for our consideration. Moreover, even if we never actually have the chance to hand-pick political principles from scratch, by understanding what approaches work best for non-human animals and why, at the very least, we are well placed to start asking the question of what political institution *X* means for non-human animals. Answering that question will always be useful.

It would be easy to dismiss *Sentientist Politics* as fanciful. But on that point, we must check ourselves. Today we take for granted the notion that a legitimate role for the state is to intervene in human/non-human animal relations, for the animals’ sake. But in the early 1800s, that idea was ridiculed, mocked, and derided. The world’s first contemporary animal welfare bill was brought before the British parliament in 1800. It was the *Bill for Preventing the Practice of Bull-baiting and Bull-running*. It did not become law. A further three attempts were made to create the world’s first modern animal welfare statute, before the successful passage of the *Act to Prevent Cruel and Improper Treatment of Cattle*, commonly known as *Martin’s Act*, in 1822. Hansard tells us quite a bit about animal welfare debates in the early nineteenth century. Reports such as this attest to the sheer audacity of the ideas:

When Alderman C. Smith suggested protection should be given to asses, there were such howls of laughter that *The Times* reporter could hear little of what was said. When the Chairman repeated this proposal, the laughter was intensified. Another member said Martin would be legislating for dogs next, which caused a further roar

of mirth, and a cry 'And cats!' sent the house into convulsions. (cited in Turner, 1964, p. 127)

Needless to say, those deriders were on the wrong side of history. We do of course legislate for dogs. Indeed, dogs are among the species of non-human animal most heavily subject to legislative intervention (O'Sullivan, 2011).

It would be a logical fallacy to suggest that because that nineteenth century ridicule turned out to be misplaced, anyone who ridicules current thought about politics and animals is also necessarily in the wrong. Clearly one does not have to follow the other. But perhaps history can serve as a warning in this case. The nineteenth century animal welfare paradigm began with bold thinking, became commonplace, and is now the subject of serious critique. Every country in the western world has animal welfare laws, yet the harm done to the welfare of animals is immense in scale, brutal in nature, and seemingly intractable with regards to social acceptability. Perhaps it is time to do something new.

With *Sentientist Politics*, Cochrane not only encourages, but arguably enables readers to shift their thinking away from a narrow nineteenth century animal welfare frame. By heading in such an *avant-garde* direction, Cochrane invites readers to expand their own thinking. His theorization sketches a new, futuristic, as-yet unexperienced political paradigm. In 'Imagined Utopias: Animals Rights and the Moral Imagination', Steve Cooke argues that "one of the reasons so few people accept that animals have rights, and indeed why so few are even prepared to entertain the possibility that they might, is down to failings and limits of the imagination" (2017, p. e4). In the same article, Cooke claims that "enlarged imagination makes moral progress more likely" (p. e11). If Cooke is right in his analysis, we all owe Cochrane a debt of gratitude. None of us need be constrained by a lack of imagination anymore. Cochrane has done the imagining for us. Despite the embryonic nature of just political institutions for animals, with the publication of this book, we can no longer claim that we do not know what a globally just political regime *might* look like. We now have one very coherent suggestion available to us. But while Cochrane's contribution is very much appreciated, it is legitimate to ask whether it points us in the optimal direction.

In 2007, I argued that "from a political perspective, animals face two problems: one will be referred to as the 'external inconsistency' and the other will be called the 'internal inconsistency'" (O'Sullivan, 2007, p. 5). I defined the external inconsistency as an inconsistency in the way we treat non-human animals compared to humans and the internal inconsistency as an inconsistency in the way we treat non-human animals compared to other non-human animals. I reasoned that

both are problematic for animals, but until now theorists working within the liberal tradition have focused their efforts on addressing the external inconsistency, while

addressing the internal inconsistency only as a side issue ... however ... the internal inconsistency should be the central concern of those engaged in the task of conceptualising animal protection issues. Arguably, the external inconsistency has the most significant impact on animal well-being. However, as attempts to challenge the external inconsistency have so far failed to sway the mainstream, addressing the problem of the internal inconsistency provides an opportunity to achieve positive change for animals in a manner which sits more comfortably with dominant attitudes. (O'Sullivan, 2007, p. 5)

With the benefit of hindsight, I wonder if I was too risk averse. Perhaps the past decade of “political turn in animal ethics” scholarship and activism, not to mention the growth in people committing to a vegan diet (at least in the western world), attests to some people’s willingness to stare down the external inconsistency and therefore address the single biggest obstacle to improving the level and type of protection available to non-human animals.

But my purpose in advocating an internal inconsistency approach to pro-animal political change was to find a way to link a strong theory of justice for animals to existing and already accepted political principles. The rationale for this is simple; it seems to me that tying the wellbeing of non-human animals to a distant future, that very few agree with theoretically, and that has never existed in practice (or in the case of Marxism, where it has been implemented, its applied form has resulted in large-scale harms, both against the human and non-human populations), seems “wrong” in some important sense. At best, it would seem ineffective. At worst, it would seem to be a serious disservice to the animals. If *A* can only occur following *B*, and we have no reason to believe that *B* will be forthcoming, then we must either abandon any hope for *A*, or we might look for other ways in which *A* may be brought into existence. In some cases, we may even decide that *A-1* is acceptable, because *A* can only follow *B* and *B* is just so unlikely to eventuate.

Of course, none of this is new; it is the reform-versus-revolution argument. Animal Studies scholars will know that much ink has already been spilt over this issue (for example, see Francione & Garner, 2010).

For some, it may be that the establishment of *B* is an absolute precondition for *A*. I suspect this is the case for some Marxist theorists. For such scholars, often working under the rubric of Critical Animal Studies (CAS), capitalism is the absolute central cause of animal suffering. For those who hold such a view, a shift towards *A* is only possible once we have established *B*, because, to their mind, justice for animals is only possible once capitalism has been overturned. If they sincerely see capitalism as the root cause of animal suffering, they have little intellectual wriggle room.

But it is not clear that Cochrane is in that position. For Marxists, the end of capitalism comes first, then good things follow. For abolitionists (of the animal rights variety), the property status of non-human animals is repudiated, then good things follow. For Cochrane, the inclusion of cosmopolitanism among the suit of political values that will protect animals from harm is not *absolutely essential*. Rather, it is a logical inclusion based on an examination of what cosmopolitan theorists seek to achieve. As such, Cochrane is not beholden to cosmopolitanism; he selected it, and could have selected something else. To me, that raises a question: is it responsible, ideal, or wise to make cosmopolitanism a pre-condition for animal wellbeing? An estimated 150 billion animals are purposefully slaughtered globally each year (The Vegan Calculator, n.d.). Is it fair for those individuals to be made to wait for utopian futures, when practical solutions could ease their suffering in the here and now?

There is little to no reason to see cosmopolitanism in our short-, mid-, or even long-term political future. But of even greater concern, cosmopolitans don't even want "us." By this, I mean that theorists working within the cosmopolitan tradition have made it abundantly clear that they do not care about non-human animals. The 2014 edition of *The Cosmopolitanism Reader* does not list the words "animal" or "non-human" in the index, and of the 26 chapter-length contributions, not a single one gives non-human animals so much as a passing thought. The inclusion of chapters by Martha C. Nussbaum and Will Kymlicka suggests that the situation is not entirely despairing. At least two of the authors have thought about non-human animals in a political context (see Nussbaum, 2006; Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011). But more than anything, this is human-centric pie in the sky. That prompts the following question: if cosmopolitans do prevail, do we have good reason to believe that they will bring non-humans along with them? After all, "in its most basic form, cosmopolitanism maintains that there are moral obligations owed to all human beings based solely on our humanity alone" (Brown & Held 2014, p. 1). This human-centric, untested, utopian political framework takes as its starting point the very principles we are trying (for the sake of the animals) to leave behind.

When I defined the internal inconsistency, I did so with an eye to the practical because "[t]he notion that the state may actively discriminate against some individuals is not a recognisable element of liberal thought" (O'Sullivan 2007, p. 11). Far from perfect, liberalism does have a couple of hundred years of track record that suggests that, while its commitment to equitable treatment often falls seriously short in practice, it can nonetheless bend, respond, and reform to argument and political pressure that illuminates its failings. Women's liberation, the vote for the non-property-owning poor, and the abolition of slavery are all testament to that capacity. Change is frustratingly slow. But "[g]iven the liberal

commitment to equity,” there is reason to believe that political mobilisation may generate “equity among animals and animals only” (O’Sullivan, 2007, p. 11). At this point, it is not clear that there is good reason to push for a cosmopolitan polity, and then, if that is ever achieved, once again start down the long road of trying to persuade proponents of yet another human-centric political order that they should include non-human animals in their utopian endeavors.

Of course, I may be wrong. Cosmopolitanism may be perfectly suited to strongly protecting the interests of non-human animals. But we have no way of knowing that now, and I suspect we are unlikely to be able to answer that question using empirical methods any time soon. Therefore, for now at least, I thank Cochrane for his intellectual insights and for providing us with another way to conceptualize justice for animals. But I am going to keep plugging away in the here and now. I believe that liberalism provides us with enough tools to challenge speciesism, and I will continue to work with those tools until such a time as I am confident that they will be replaced with a different set of instruments. But that time is not now.

## Alasdair Cochrane

### Cosmopolitanism for Animals: Response to O’Sullivan

*Sentientist Politics* is a contribution to the so-called “political turn” in animal ethics. Like other recent work in the area, it assumes that the worth and rights of animals cannot be robustly protected if left solely to individuals; instead, appropriate *political* structures, institutions, norms, and policies are vital for their protection. Several recent contributions (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011; Smith, 2012; Valentini, 2014) have argued that a political order that takes animals seriously must pay due regard to our *relations* with animals. In other words, they argue that what a particular animal is owed depends not just on the animal’s interests, but also on whether the animal is wild or domesticated, whether the animal happens to live in human society or in the wilderness, whether the animal can cooperate with human projects, and so on. *Sentientist Politics*, on the other hand, offers a much more “cosmopolitan” account of inter-species justice. It claims that what a sentient creature is entitled to ultimately comes down to the individual’s interests, as opposed to their relational position. So, while their relational position might affect an individual’s interests in some circumstances, such relations should not provide a basis for carving up individuals into discrete groups, each of whom is owed “differentiated” rights. Such a focus on relations, so the book argues, can lead to a dangerous and problematic neglect of “outsiders”: that is, a neglect of those who are not close to us through no fault of their own, and yet who nevertheless have important interests in how their lives fare. *Sentientist Politics*, as a book offering a cosmopolitan theory, seeks to develop an account of a political system that places the individual and their interests at its center, not the groups in which they happen to exist.

Siobhan O’Sullivan criticizes the cosmopolitan approach in the book in two ways. First, she argues that cosmopolitanism is simply too utopian. She argues that “tying the well-being of non-human animals to a distant future ... seems ‘wrong’ in some important sense.” And, for that reason, she prefers to work with “existing and already accepted political principles,” such as the liberal value of equality (see O’Sullivan, 2011). Second, she argues that cosmopolitanism is not just flawed because it is utopian, but also because it is anthropocentric: “This human-centric, untested, utopian political framework takes as its starting point the very principles we are trying (for the sake of the animals) to leave behind.” Put simply, cosmopolitanism is ill-suited to protecting animals because of the exalted status it gives to human beings.

While both of these critiques are understandable, I believe that they miss the mark. Let us start with the charge that the cosmopolitan theory advanced in the book is simply too utopian. I certainly have sympathy with where this argument is coming from. For those

of us concerned with the immense suffering that billions of animals are enduring around the world, a book outlining a series of “abstracted political or philosophical ideas” may seem of little use, or perhaps even frivolous. Nevertheless, we obviously do need reflection on ideas and principles to tell us why such suffering is wrong, what we can do to meaningfully stop it, and how more benign human–animal relations might be fostered. Indeed, one of the most important claims of the “political turn” is that proper protection of animals requires more than putting an end to individual “cruelty” and implementing policies that are more “humane”; for much of the suffering that animals endure is *structural* in nature and derived from the political and economic systems we have constructed around them. For this reason, we need to think about new structures and systems that can serve animals (and humans) better. O’Sullivan, of course, accepts all this. However, she might argue that we ought to think about structures and systems that are derived from *what is already accepted*. My proposed cosmopolitan democratic order, then, is simply too far removed from the conventional.

There are three reasons to be wary of this critique. First, and as I explain in the book, we ought to reject the idea that there is only one way of making normative claims concerning our relations with animals. There are a number of valid ways of making such claims—just as there are number of valid ways of doing political theory. There is an important place for theories that seek to immerse themselves in existing debates, facts, and constraints in order to promote incremental change. There is also a crucial place for more utopian theories: theories that use philosophical reflection to search for the truth of the matter about how things ought to be ideally. And, of course, there is a vital place for theorizing that takes place between these two poles. *Sentientist Politics* is certainly at the more utopian end of this spectrum. But I think such theorizing is necessary for two reasons: so that we have a clear picture of where it is we want to head; and so that we can rank the different feasible alternatives available to us here and now (Stemplowska, 2008; Swift, 2008). Moreover, *Sentientist Politics* is not solely devoted to abstract theorizing; indeed, a whole chapter is dedicated to thinking about how we might bring about and maintain this new political system.

Secondly, there is also reason to question just how utopian cosmopolitan principles actually are. After all, and as I point out in the book, cosmopolitan ideals are widely accepted. The ideas that individuals are of ultimate moral worth and that enjoyment of one’s basic entitlements should not be impeded by where one happens to be born or live are neither fantastical nor particularly radical. Furthermore, we can also see the real-world institutionalization of such ideals in the form of international human rights law, international prohibitions on crimes against humanity, the emergence of the “responsibility to protect,” and so on. It is of course perfectly true that this institutionalization is partial and imperfect;

these developments are embryonic, controversial, and contested. But what political institutions and principles aren't? Indeed, and this is the third point, O'Sullivan's call to work with "already accepted political principles" overlooks the contested nature of *all* political ideas. For example, in her own work O'Sullivan seeks to apply the liberal principle of equality to our treatment of animals. But what is this shared and accepted principle of equality? There are fierce debates amongst political theorists, liberal scholars, and indeed policymakers about the meaning and value of equality. To take just one issue, by way of example, what is it that we are trying to equalize when we promote equality—opportunities, resources, happiness, respect, or something else (Arneson, 2013)? Such contestation reveals that we cannot just use and apply "accepted principles," but instead have to make *choices* about the principles we endorse. And those choices should of course be justified by the best reasons available to us. In *Sentientist Politics*, I argue that we ought to choose to organize our political system along the lines of a cosmopolitan democracy. This is on the basis that a series of overlapping "communities of fate" is best at aligning the exercise of power with those who feel its effects. A sentientist cosmopolitan democracy thus allows affected sentient individuals to inform and shape the policies they will live by.

The second problem that O'Sullivan has with cosmopolitanism is its anthropocentrism. How can a theory holding human persons (and only human persons) in such esteem be the basis for a political order which seeks to respect the worth and rights of all sentient creatures? O'Sullivan is certainly correct that the vast majority of existing cosmopolitan scholarship espouses human supremacism. Indeed, the lack of concern traditional cosmopolitan writers have given to non-human animals is quite remarkable. But it is remarkable because of its *inconsistency*. As I argue in the book, at the heart of cosmopolitanism is a commitment to *impartiality* (Barry, 2010). Cosmopolitans are steadfast in the belief that an individual's proper entitlements and life chances should not be affected by factors that are morally arbitrary, such as where one happens to have been born. For this reason, cosmopolitans have argued for a *global* theory of justice that transcends the borders of states. And yet, in spite of these purported commitments to impartiality and global justice, most cosmopolitan thinking has in fact been staunchly *partial* and *parochial*, constructing their theories on the basis of a rather prominent morally arbitrary group-based distinction: species membership.

My claim, then, is that a *consistent* form of cosmopolitanism, one which takes its commitment to impartiality seriously, simply must incorporate non-human animals. Put directly, the call in *Sentientist Politics* is not to use *existing* cosmopolitan theories to further the interests of animals; instead, it is to explore, imagine, and justify a *renewed* cosmopolitan political system that has the interests of all sentient individuals at its heart. And I believe

that this endeavor makes perfect sense. After all, because of their shared commitment to impartiality, cosmopolitanism and theories of animal rights are natural bedfellows. Indeed, this can be seen from the writings of thinkers such as Tom Regan, James Rachels, Jeff McMahan, Peter Singer, Martha Nussbaum, and more. All these writers aim to work out our obligations by focusing on the sentient individual and their interests, and eschewing morally arbitrary contingencies such as nationality, race, sex, or species. In other words, the work of all these animal ethicists is *cosmopolitan* in nature—and, in Singer and Nussbaum’s case, explicitly so. However, none of these ethicists has yet to develop what a *political order* grounded in those principles would look like. My hope is that the system sketched in *Sentientist Politics* offers one such proposal for discussion and debate.

## Josh Milburn

### Sentientist Politics Gone Wild

Alasdair Cochrane's first two books—his 2010 *An Introduction to Animals and Political Theory* and his 2012 *Animal Rights Without Liberation*—are crucial works in the political turn in animal ethics. *An Introduction to Animals and Political Theory* was one of the first books linking animal ethics to political philosophy, while *Animal Rights Without Liberation* has become one of the literature's cornerstone texts.

*Sentientist Politics*, Cochrane's third book, thus has big shoes to fill. In my view, however, it more than fills them. It is tightly argued, provocative, innovative, engaging, and—perhaps most importantly—compelling. I implore all interested in animals and politics to read it. The book opens up a series of discussions that are no doubt going to take place in the pages of academic journals and at conferences for years to come—on animals and cosmopolitanism; on animals and representation; on animals and international intervention; and much more. In this piece, however, I want to talk about the contribution that *Sentientist Politics* makes to one of the thorniest issues in animal ethics: the question of the relationship between humans and wild animals, and, in particular, what (if anything) humans should be doing about the suffering and death of wild animals attributable to starvation, disease, accidents, and—of course—each other. Part of the reason that this is so tricky is that it seems to be a set of problems almost unique to animal ethics, so there are only limited resources in wider normative thought that can be drawn upon to answer these questions.

Traditionally, animal ethicists have endorsed what we might call a “hands-off” approach to wild animals. Tom Regan, in his 1983 landmark book *The Case for Animal Rights*, says that we should simply “let them be” (2004, p. 361). While it was not until 2010, with the publication of Clare Palmer's *Animal Ethics in Context*, that we finally got a book-length defense of this “laissez-faire intuition,” it has undeniably shaped ethical appraisals of wild animals for decades. The prevalence of a (mostly) hands-off approach to wild animals has carried over from work in moral philosophy to work in the political turn in animal ethics, though the idea has been discussed relative to institutions, rather than individual moral duties. So, for example, we see Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka (2011, chap. 6) arguing that wild animals should be considered *sovereign* over their territory, and we see John Hadley (2015) arguing that animals should be considered *owners* of their territory. These are not *completely* non-interventionist stances, but they remain broadly so.

There has been resistance to these non-interventionist arguments in some quarters. A number of philosophers, perhaps most notably Oscar Horta (e.g., Horta, 2013; Horta,

2018), have argued that we should be taking the suffering of wild animals seriously as a moral problem, and doing what we can to alleviate it. Horta has had an influence on an array of academics who have developed a surprising and provocative literature on the importance of intervening in nature to minimize suffering—biting a bullet that some critics have thought unbitable. This has attracted some very notable converts: for example, Jeff McMahan, White’s Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Oxford, has now published multiple excellent pieces advocating the reduction (including eventual elimination) of predation among wild animals (McMahan, 2010; McMahan, 2015). However, it is my view that only one person, to date, has called for serious intervention on behalf of wild animals in *political* philosophy. This is Martha Nussbaum, in her 2006 monograph *Frontiers of Justice*. She offers the notorious—and deeply underdeveloped—call for “the gradual supplanting of the natural by the just” (2006, p. 400).

Based on his comments against intervention in predation in *Animal Rights Without Liberation* (see Cochrane, 2012, pp. 91–5), we might have placed Cochrane firmly in the hands-off camp. In *Sentientist Politics*, however, he has arguably offered the interventionist political theory that those interested in reducing wild-animal suffering have, until now, completely lacked.

Cochrane argues that wild animals are members of our society. We are in entangled relationships of care and dependence with huge numbers of them. And collectively, we are in a shared “community of fate” (2018, pp. 52–3). This membership of wild animals entitles them to political representation. Not only do they have rights that are side-constraints on our actions—rights not to be killed, rights not to be tortured, etc.—but their interests should help frame the structure and goals of our political institutions. They are *co-members* of our community, and their good makes up a part of the public good, and their interests should be represented in state apparatuses. In this sense, wild animals are little different from domestic animals in the theory presented in *Sentientist Politics*. This contrasts strongly with their treatment elsewhere in the political turn in animal ethics—especially in Donaldson and Kymlicka’s framework, where domestic and wild animals have very different political rights.

In chapter 5 of *Sentientist Politics*, Cochrane argues against Donaldson and Kymlicka’s case for animal sovereignty, and, in its place, endorses the cosmopolitan idea of free movement (2018, pp. 79–88). He does, though, nod towards Hadley’s animal property rights by endorsing more localized territory rights for animals (2018, p. 86). It is in the second half of chapter 5 that we start to see why I suggest that *Sentientist Politics* offers a political theory for supporters of intervention in nature. Cochrane argues that co-members of our communities, including wild animals, are owed positive duties of assistance. But the

lives of wild animals are frequently terrible. On one reading, the lucky ones face a quick, violent death shortly after birth. The unlucky ones face a long life full of fear, disease, extremes of temperature, and starvation. If wild animals have positive rights to assistance, as Cochrane holds, it is not hard to see how we can construct arguments in favor of interfering with these natural processes.

Cochrane holds that the positive rights of animals “do not require or permit immediate massive interventions by humans into nature” (2018, p. 13). But notice the word *immediate*. In *Sentientist Politics*, Cochrane is offering an ideal theory. And for ideal-theoretic political philosophy, the pertinent question is not what we should be doing *immediately*, but what we should be ultimately aiming for. Thus, Cochrane asks, echoing Nussbaum: should we replace the “natural” with the “just”? Here’s his answer:

In my view, such a proposal is extremely hard to argue against, absent an unduly romantic vision of nature. For we no longer regard the suffering of distant humans as ‘inevitable’ and ‘natural’. Instead, most of us believe that we have a duty to assist humans in overcoming the harms caused by predators, disease, famine, and other catastrophes. Indeed, the ways in which humans have ‘managed nature’ in order to overcome such hardships are rightly celebrated and enjoyed everywhere. My contention is that justice demands that we start to explore how we might make similar efforts for the sake of *all* sentient creatures, including wild animals. (2018, pp. 96–7)

What does this mean in practice? Or, to be more precise, what does an ideal theory of human/wild-animal relationships look like? This, I contend, is unclear from *Sentientist Politics*. Cochrane’s theorization of a sentientist cosmopolitan democracy remains incomplete without a clear answer to this question, and, more generally, answering this question is surely one of the tasks of an interventionist political theory. It is a task that has arguably not been taken up by interventionist moral philosophers, but perhaps that is not surprising: it is a task that they might legitimately leave to political theory. I predict that this is a conversation that is going to take place among animal ethicists, and I suggest that it is an important conversation. In dialogue with Cochrane’s work, I propose to now start that conversation by briefly outlining five possible approaches to conceiving of ideal relationships between humans and wild animals.

I’ll call the first the *piecemeal approach*. This would involve making small-scale interventions to limit animal death and suffering when this seems to be achievable without too much cost to our societies, and without too many negative impacts on wild animals. This seems to be the kind of approach that Cochrane is endorsing when he claims we should be making “some carefully managed interventions” in nature (2018, p. 95). So, for example,

Cochrane alludes towards intervention in urban environments, limited control of predator populations, the elimination of predator reintroduction programs, and similar (2018, pp. 95–6). Indeed, it is my view that the piecemeal approach matches the preferred strategy of many of the philosophers and activists presently concerned with the reduction of wild-animal suffering. However, my worry is that it does not seem to match with the explicitly ideal-theoretic approach that Cochrane takes in *Sentientist Politics*. This piecemeal approach seems to be a suitable *non-ideal* approach. Perhaps it is a way to *move towards* absolute justice in our relationships with wild animals, or *alleviate* some of the injustice in the world today. But it does not tell us what just relations with wild animals look like.

Perhaps these just relations will look more like the *natural-zoo approach*. Nature, on this view, could be replaced by something like a zoo. Predators are kept away from prey and fed on *in vitro* meat, prey animals' numbers are controlled through contraception, and so forth. All of this seems to be consistent with Cochrane's wider interest-based rights approach. The natural-zoo approach, I suspect, is generally taken to be so absurd as to be a *reductio* of certain key premises. It is something that critics could present, for example, to justify their rejection of the claim that animals have rights. Now, as Cochrane says in *Sentientist Politics*, the fact that it sounds absurd to replace the natural with the just (or, maybe: that it sounds absurd *to some of us*) is not a particularly compelling argument against the idea (2018, p. 89). That said, I am sure he would be prepared to accept that it sounds extremely strange, and even (*pro tanto*) extremely undesirable: It would amount to the absolute elimination of nature (or, at least, *sentient animals* in nature), and near-complete human control of animal diets and behavior. It would not be hard to come up with clear aesthetic, environmental, and even animal-rights arguments against this. Now, perhaps these objections would not hold up on Cochrane's account, but there are other objections to the natural-zoo approach that seemingly would. One important worry is that the natural-zoo approach would be very, very costly, in terms of time, money, and energy. This is something that would have to be balanced against the supposed benefits that it could deliver.

There are other alternatives. Perhaps ideal justice would resemble what I'm going to here call, in a play on *transhumanism*, the *transanimalist approach*. Cochrane cites Kyle Johannsson (2017), who proposes that we modify the genes of wild animals so that predators eat plants, prey animals have only small numbers of young, all animals are resistant to disease, and so forth. Utopian ideas about the elimination of all suffering through "transhumanist" means have actually been around in animal ethics for decades, but have perhaps not had as much traction as they could. Now, this transanimalist approach does not *quite* result in the "end of nature" of the natural-zoo approach, and nor would it necessarily be as

demanding as the natural-zoo approach—gene drives, once started, can sustain themselves. It would perhaps also be consistent with Cochrane’s interest-based rights approach—at least in the abstract. The problem is that it is not clear if this would provide *all* the help that wild animals would be entitled to on the approach set out in *Sentientist Politics*. Animals would still be extremely vulnerable to natural disasters, exposure, and so forth, meaning that transanimalism could not be the *whole* answer. And we might worry that modifying animals’ genomes like this might involve the infliction of a great deal of suffering, and may necessitate animal testing—things that Cochrane, and likely almost any animal ethicist, is very concerned about. So perhaps this is not a perfect solution, either.

Let me offer yet another possibility. Perhaps we should be talking about what I will call the *extinctionist approach*. The animal-rights theorist Gary Francione—who is a clear target of criticism in Cochrane’s *Animal Rights Without Liberation*—is notorious for advocating for the extinction of *domestic* animals (Francione & Garner, 2010), but one can easily imagine an extinctionist approach to *wild* animals if the reduction of wild-animal suffering is our goal. After all, one of the easiest ways to prevent a million baby fish from suffering is to prevent those million baby fish from being born. It is undeniable that this would solve the problem of wild-animal suffering. But surely, we may want to say, it solves the problem at too high a price. Imagine if this was proposed in the *human* case: a particular demographic of humans is seriously disadvantaged, suffers a great deal, and generally faces an early death. Would we be justified in just making members of that group “extinct,” perhaps through a sterilization program? Of course not. But maybe that is too quick: according to Cochrane, humans have an interest in controlling their own life in a way that animals do not (Cochrane 2012, *passim*)—and he is open to controlling wild populations through sterilization (2012, p. 177; 2018, pp. 95, 97). So maybe the extinctionist approach to wild animals, bizarre though it sounds, is not out of the question.

I think there’s a sense in which all three of these endgames—natural-zoo, postanimalist, and extinctionist—sound like they are wrong. I have a final possible answer. This is the *epistemic approach*. This draws from a puzzle that we sometimes find in the literature on ideal and non-ideal theory. Perhaps we are *so far* from the ideal that we are just not in a position to know what it looks like. In this case, in particular, it *could* be that the ideal is so far removed from our current conceptions that it sounds ludicrous to our 2010s ears. If we take the epistemic approach, then perhaps we can forgive Cochrane for apparently not offering an ideal theory of human/wild-animal relationships. Perhaps we are simply not in a position to know what the right answer looks like—or for the right answer to sound desirable to us. On this picture, maybe the piecemeal approach is not only a non-ideal solution tied to some kind of unspecified ideal future—perhaps the piecemeal approach is the only

approach we can take *to find what the ideal is*. On this view, as we become more concerned with the plight of wild animals in our politics and our everyday lives, and as we become more knowledgeable about wild animals and how to alleviate their suffering, we will become more able to conceive of the ideal relationship between humans and wild animals—or at least more able to accept it, if the ideal does look like one of the approaches I’ve sketched above.

I’ve explored five approaches to thinking about human wild-animal relationships that may be compatible with Cochrane’s sentientist cosmopolitan democracy. I hope it is clear that my intention is not to criticize, but to try to puzzle through these things as a fellow-traveler, or at least a sympathetic critic. But I do hope that I have started (or contributed to) a conversation that, in the shadow of Cochrane’s work, we need to have. According to Cochrane’s arguments in *Sentientist Politics*, we need to take the interests of wild animals seriously in our politics, and this necessitates a much, much greater concern for their death and suffering than we currently find in practical politics, political theory, and even—perhaps—animal ethics. But what an *ideal* theory of our relationship with wild animals would look like remains, even within Cochrane’s framework, hazy. I hope that, in the next few years, we will see some serious consideration of this question, whether that means defending one of my five approaches in detail, or coming up with something entirely new.

## Alasdair Cochrane

### The Place of Wild Animals in a Sentientist Politics: Response to Milburn

*Sentientist Politics* has two primary goals. First, it aims to justify the idea that our political norms, structures, and policies need to be reshaped so that they show proper respect to the equality and rights of all sentient creatures. And, second, it aims to sketch out what a political system with that ambition might look like. The place of wild animals within such a political order is contentious. It is clear that many wild animals are sentient creatures with important interests in how their lives fare. As such, I have claimed that this means they have an intrinsic moral worth equal to that of all other sentient creatures, and a set of basic rights that imposes duties on moral agents. One of those duties is to create and maintain political institutions dedicated to the worth and rights of all sentient creatures—in other words, institutions that would give wild animals their due.

Now, it might be possible to give wild animals their due while *excluding* them from our political communities. It may be the case that wild animals have no interest in co-membership with us, and do not merit representation in our democratic decision-making. This is certainly the position of some authors (Smith, 2012; Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011) who have considered the issue. The view I put forward in *Sentientist Politics*, however, is very different. I argue that the lives of humans and wild animals—and indeed domesticated animals—are interwoven and dependent on each other in complex and important ways. Wild animals are profoundly affected by our policy making and action. Furthermore, political communities rely on the actions of wild animals for a whole host of important functions. As a result, it is only right to regard wild animals as members of what political theorists sometimes refer to as our “shared schemes of social cooperation” (Berkey, 2017): our well-being and flourishing depend on each other in fundamental ways. For this reason, then, giving wild animals their due requires acknowledging that they are members of our communities, whose interests must be represented in formulations of the public good. Such acknowledgement is what *justice* for wild animals demands.

Josh Milburn, in his response to my book, asks, quite reasonably in my view, what this means in practice. What would just relations between humans and wild animals amount to? I argue in the book that it means that we have duties to incorporate the interests of wild animals into our formulations of the public good, duties not to violate their basic rights, and positive duties of assistance when such actions can be shown to be effective and proportionate. But Milburn, again quite reasonably, wants to know more. What do these duties entail in concrete terms? In particular, what would an ideal world where we fulfil our duties

to alleviate the suffering and death of wild animals actually look like? Helpfully, Milburn paints five candidate pictures for us to consider. First, a *piecemeal approach*, where we make limited interventions into nature when we can be sure that they would be effective and proportionate. Second, a *natural-zoo approach* where humans aim to alleviate suffering by taking complete control over animals' diets, behavior, and health. Third, a *transanimalist approach* where we engineer animals so that they are resistant to disease, can survive on plant-based diets, and so on. Fourth, an *extinctionist approach* where animal suffering is eradicated through eliminating them. And finally, an *epistemic approach* where we accept the limits of our knowledge about what a fully just world between humans and wild animals amounts to, and adopt only piecemeal interventions as part of an effort to come to a more reliable understanding of our end goal.

As Milburn predicts, the pictures that are closest to my own are his epistemic and piecemeal approaches. And this should be of little surprise. After all, when it comes to efforts to assist wild animals, I argue explicitly that institutions ought to be guided by a "principle of proportionality": in order for our interventions to be justified, we will need to weigh the various interests at stake, and have compelling reasons to believe that our actions will cause more overall benefit than harm. In other words, we must accept the limits of our knowledge when it comes to the effects of intervention. And it is true that history teaches us that interventions in nature usually have harmful effects that are hard to predict. But as I also say, this gives us reason to be *cautious*, rather than never to intervene at all. For to refuse to intervene in cases where the evidence unambiguously suggests that assistance will do good would be a terrible shirking of our responsibilities.

But epistemic limits do not only apply in the context of our positive duties to assist wild animals. They can also apply in other contexts: when we are working out how not to violate their rights, and how to incorporate their interests into the public good. Moreover, these epistemic limits do not just arise when thinking about what we owe to wild animals, but apply in relation to our obligations to *all sentient creatures*—including humans. For while it may sometimes be clear what the protection of rights entails in any particular situation, that is often not the case. In the book, I give the example of healthcare: while sentient creatures might all plausibly be said to have the right to healthcare, there will be considerable and reasonable disagreement about how far that right ought to extend and what it requires in particular cases. In other words, it can be hard to know what rights entail in concrete terms; hard to paint a picture of what *perfectly just relations* would look like when all rights are protected as they should be. Furthermore, not all policymaking engages with questions of rights; and in these situations, policies must be constructed that are aligned with the public good. And in that construction, institutions must show 'equal consideration' to all of the

relevant interests at stake. Once again, it is rarely obvious what that directive entails in specific contexts; rarely clear what a *perfectly just set of policies* would look like. Because of such indeterminacy—because of our epistemic limitations—I have emphasized in the book the need for representatives to *construct* how rights ought to be interpreted, how interests ought to be balanced, and what the public good amounts to.

Put simply, then, it is impossible to offer a *complete* account of what an ideal theory of just human–wild animal relations looks like. Instead, proper respect for the rights and worth of all sentient creatures must in part be *constructed*: it will emerge from the open, informed, and impartial deliberation of representatives of all members of the political community—including representatives of wild animals. This is not to say that “anything goes” and policymakers can construct whatever they like; for, as I also argue in the book, communities must entrench a set of “sentientist rights” both to guide and hold policymakers to account. Nonetheless, it is abundantly clear that our epistemic limits mean that a complete picture of ideal inter-species justice cannot be predetermined.

Of course, just because a full, detailed, and precise nature of what we owe to wild animals (or anyone else) cannot be predetermined, that does not mean that there is no role for political theorists in offering guidance on what we owe. Indeed, in my view political theorists can play a powerful role in this endeavor in two ways. Firstly, they can offer advice on those procedural and institutional schemes which are *best* able to provide an impartial account of the public good, and hence of our precise obligations. Secondly, theorists can offer their own arguments to policymakers as to how the public good ought to be constructed. In other words, they can act as “democratic underlabourers” (Swift & White, 2008)—proposing to representatives what they think our obligations to wild animals amount to in concrete terms. *Sentientist Politics* offers more detail in relation to the first of these endeavors. Milburn’s response to the book, on the other hand, offers an important contribution to the second. Indeed, the five candidate pictures of just human–wild animal relations he paints provides a very useful starting point for thinking about what extending justice to wild animals requires of us.

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