

Jeff Sebo, *Saving Animals, Saving Ourselves: Why Animals Matter for Pandemics, Climate Change, and other Catastrophes*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) 288 pages. ISBN: 9780190861018. Hardback: £22.99

The COVID-19 pandemic affected nonhuman animals in numerous ways. Lockdowns led to nonhumans reclaiming parks, roads and wild spaces (p. 54). But preventing infections also involved the culling of minks in Denmark (p. 191), as well as numerous other negative impacts on nonhumans. In his book, Jeff Sebo uses the pandemic as a platform from which to consider questions of why and how animals matter for global catastrophes. To date, philosophers have focused largely on the question of whether (and in what way) nonhuman animals should be included in moral theories. Outside this, discussion of animals takes place at the margins of moral philosophy. Sebo's book shows us why this is a mistake and why nearly all philosophers, social scientists and policymakers should consider them. As he puts it, his aim 'is not to get to the bottom of any particular issue, but rather to explore a wide range of issues, show how they interact and show why they matter' (p. 12).

Throughout the book, Sebo lives up to that task. He does not provide a *specific* theory of how in practice we ought to include nonhumans. Indeed, doing so would likely contradict one of the core aims of his book: to address the above issues in a pluralistic way. In the first substantive chapter, Sebo demonstrates that whether you are a consequentialist or a non-consequentialist, you have 'reason to at least partly converge on a shared moral framework in practice', wherein 'we should aspire to help animals as much as reasonably possible, and we should aspire to harm animals only when necessary' (p. 15).

By demonstrating how and why apparently separate issues are interlinked, it is the generality of Sebo's book which lends his arguments persuasiveness. Sebo draws on a wealth of empirical data to survey the connections between contemporary global catastrophes and our exploitation of and lack of concern for animals (chapter 3). He therefore establishes a convincing case for 'reducing our use of animals as part of our pandemic and climate change mitigation efforts' (p. 40). For instance, Sebo argues that consideration for nonhumans should be included in the kind of systemic policies typified by the Green New Deal (p. 58-63).

Not only, but he is responsive to the challenges that would be raised by greater inclusion of animals (chapter 4) and imaginative about the ways that such challenges could be met (chapter 5). Sebo argues for a strategic approach in keeping with his pluralistic strategy. For instance, he concedes that even if our actions carry the risk of harm, we should perform them in any case due to the risks of inaction (p. 72). Rights-theorists may be uncomfortable with this but, as Sebo argues, if we want to make progress in the *practical* cause of promoting and achieving animal rights, this kind of thinking might be necessary. In a similar vein, Sebo argues that it is 'holistic and structural' change which will help to reduce the challenges of including animals (p. 120-121), e.g. if we fund more research into nonhuman animal issues, then those issues will likely be easier to address (p. 92-94).

In chapter 7, the moral framework underpinning these arguments is further developed. There, Sebo argues against the conventional idea that *until* we have sufficient proof that a particular creature on the margins of sentience (such as a bee) has sentience, we need not necessarily treat them as if they really do. Sebo's reverse argument relies on our weighing up the probability that they are sentient, given epistemic constraints, against the risk of believing they are not, if in fact they are. Sebo is aware that there is a threshold problem in determining when this argument for inclusion kicks in, but he argues that the threshold should be set fairly low, because the cost of doing so – to us – is far lower than the cost of *not* doing so would be to the animals whose sentience is under question. For example, if you are

in doubt about whether shrimps have sentience, you should refrain from killing and eating them according to Sebo, just in case they do. Thus, because false positives in this domain are far less risky than false negatives, we should radically expand our moral circles.

This argument impacts almost every debate in moral philosophy. For instance, in chapter 8, Sebo takes some paradigmatic cases from the literature on welfare and population ethics and applies them to a multispecies context. He turns the *Repugnant Conclusion* into the *Rebugnant Conclusion* (p. 175) and the *Non-Identity problem* into the *Swan Identity Problem* (p. 178). This hammers home the extent to which philosophers can and should consider nonhumans in their theories. In doing so, Sebo argues that even though ‘we have no idea what kind of world to build for nonhuman animals’ because there is so much uncertainty (p. 183), ‘we should start building it anyway’ – with a view to empowering ‘our successors to be both able and willing to help humans and nonhumans alike in the future’ (p. 186).

However, the generality of the book is also to its detriment at times. Two matters make Sebo’s otherwise astute arguments somewhat weaker than they could be.

The first is that Sebo’s pluralistic approach is lost from sight as the book progresses and could, in and of itself, do with development. I had the sense that Sebo’s focus was largely with consequentialist concerns about the *welfare* of nonhuman animals. While he does consider some other factors of a largely *practical* sort such as demandingness and futility (chapter 4), and often makes gestures towards considering rights (especially towards the end of chapter 6), little developed consideration is given to the non-consequentialist concerns that he was also appealing to in chapter 2. Where these concerns are considered, it often seems to be solely as the means to achieving the end of protecting against harm. But, in addition to and sometimes as opposed to harm, rights theorists are more often concerned with wronging, amongst numerous other factors of non-consequentialist value, such as relationships or the use of our agency. Thus, Sebo’s pluralistic approach is not quite as pluralistic as it purports to be. Considering welfare and harm alongside further non-consequentialist factors would have been a very fruitful development to address this issue.

The second matter is that Sebo fails to fully consider the radical consequences of accepting or denying the fairly standard idea in moral philosophy, as typified by Shelly Kagan’s book (*How to Count Animals: More or Less*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), that there is a hierarchy of moral status among nonhumans, but equality between humans, who occupy the top of this hierarchy. Whether we accept or deny this view in favour of an alternative is pivotal, because it can affect how we make trade-offs and moral judgements down the line. But while Sebo’s book considers these questions, it doesn’t seem to do justice to them.

With regards to trade-offs, Sebo argues for a proportional approach to resolving conflicts (chapter 6). However, his arguments here are quite vague – a lot depends on specific considerations that Sebo’s general perspective cannot address. While it may or may not be true that ‘there are no simple or universal answers to these questions’ about conflicts (p. 116), it is not enough to simply explain that ‘much will depend on related changes’ that will help us to make trade-offs better (p. 124), because this offers little moral guidance.

With regards to hierarchy and equality, Sebo is similarly vague (chapter 7). He reiterates ‘that any reasonable view... will imply that *many* animals count *a lot*’ (p. 163) and claims that we can weigh the value of nonhuman lives in line with how we currently make comparative assessments in the human case (e.g. using quality-adjusted life-years) (p. 142-145). Both of these are salient points. However, simply admitting that there is uncertainty is unsatisfactory. That uncertainty needs exploring and

discussing further, because our position on the question of hierarchy and equality is pivotal. For instance, if the Hierarchy view of moral status should be abandoned, then does this mean we should divert resources away from needy humans towards needy nonhumans? Are humans and other animals' moral equals, and what would this mean for trade-offs? Alternatively, if Hierarchy should be maintained, how should it feature? Does it make Sebo's arguments less radical than they initially appear?

Nonetheless, these are drawbacks that simply left me wishing Sebo had said more. His otherwise remarkably insightful book is a rallying call for more work to be done in this area. It sets the table for a broader discussion about how, in practice, to include nonhuman animals in moral and political philosophy – one where animals are *at* the table, rather than served *on it*.

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