

# **Our Obligations To The Other Animals Uehiro In Practical Ethics**

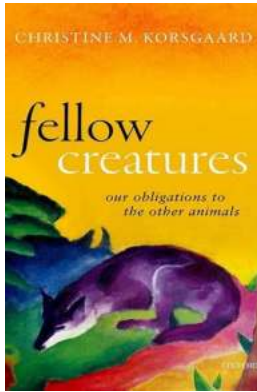
When it comes to discussions about ethics and moral obligations, it's not uncommon for conversations to revolve around human beings and their responsibilities towards each other. However, in recent years, there has been an increasing recognition of our obligations towards other animals and their well-being. This shift in perspective has given rise to a new field of study known as animal ethics, which seeks to explore our moral duties and responsibilities towards non-human creatures.

One prominent scholar in the field of animal ethics is Professor Jeff McMahan, who explores these questions in his essay "Our Obligations To The Other Animals" in the Uehiro series of Practical Ethics. In this thought-provoking essay, McMahan challenges the traditional views of human exceptionalism and argues for a more inclusive approach to ethics that considers the interests and welfare of all sentient beings.

## **The Concept of Sentience**

To understand McMahan's arguments, it is crucial to grasp the concept of sentience. Sentience refers to the capacity to experience pleasure or pain, to have subjective experiences. McMahan highlights that many animals, including mammals, birds, reptiles, and even some invertebrates, share this capacity for sentience. Therefore, according to him, these animals deserve moral consideration and protection from unnecessary suffering.

**Fellow Creatures: Our Obligations to the Other Animals (Uehiro Series in Practical Ethics)**



by Christine M. Korsgaard (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

Language : English

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In the essay, McMahan presents several compelling arguments as to why we should extend our moral concerns to animals. Firstly, he points out that many animals possess cognitive abilities similar to young children or mentally impaired individuals. Just as we feel obligated to care for and protect vulnerable members of our society, it follows that we should also extend this care to non-human beings in similar situations. McMahan asserts that intelligence should not be the sole criterion for moral consideration; instead, it is the capacity to suffer that warrants our attention and action.

Secondly, McMahan makes a case for the inherent value of animals' lives. He challenges the notion that animals are merely means to human ends, arguing that they have their own intrinsic worth as autonomous beings. By recognizing their individual interests and rights, McMahan urges us to reassess our practices and policies that exploit animals for human consumption, entertainment, or experimentation without a valid justification.

## **Animal Rights vs. Animal Welfare**

An important distinction that McMahan addresses is the difference between animal rights and animal welfare. Animal welfare focuses on ensuring the physical and mental well-being of animals within human-dominated settings. This may involve regulating factory farming practices, minimizing animal testing, and securing proper living conditions for domesticated animals.

On the other hand, animal rights advocates argue for a more radical change in our relationship with animals. They believe that animals have inherent rights that should be recognized and protected, similar to the rights granted to humans. These rights may include the right to life, freedom from torture and exploitation, and the right to live in their natural habitats without human interference.

McMahan acknowledges the merits of both approaches but ultimately leans towards a more rights-based framework. He argues that animal welfare reforms are necessary and helpful in the short term, but they may not address the fundamental ethical issues surrounding our treatment of animals as property. By advocating for animal rights, McMahan challenges us to rethink the inherent hierarchies between humans and animals and strive towards a more equitable and compassionate society.

## **The Ethical Implications**

McMahan's arguments have profound implications for various aspects of human-animal interactions. Take, for example, the contentious issue of animal experimentation. While some medical advancements have undoubtedly been made through animal testing, McMahan questions the ethical justifications for subjecting animals to unnecessary suffering and death. He urges researchers to explore alternative methods that do not harm animals and to minimize their use whenever possible.

Similarly, the animal agriculture industry comes under scrutiny. McMahan argues that our current practices of factory farming and mass-production of animals for food are morally indefensible. He encourages individuals to reduce their consumption of animal products or adopt plant-based diets to minimize the suffering and environmental impacts associated with animal agriculture.

The entertainment industry, too, faces ethical challenges. McMahan highlights the exploitation of animals in activities like circuses, where animals are often subjected to unnatural conditions and physical abuse for human entertainment. He urges us to question the necessity and ethics of using animals for our amusement and supports efforts to ban or regulate such practices.

## **The Relevance of McMahan's Essay**

McMahan's essay on our obligations to other animals is particularly relevant today, as society becomes increasingly concerned with issues of animal welfare and the ethical treatment of animals. The rise of social media and access to information has made us more aware of the suffering endured by animals and has triggered public outrage towards practices that exploit and harm them.

Furthermore, increasing scientific evidence reveals the complex emotional lives and cognitive abilities of various animal species. Studies demonstrate that animals can experience joy, fear, and even empathy. These findings challenge the traditional understanding of animals as mere automatons devoid of emotions and reinforce McMahan's call for greater moral consideration towards them.

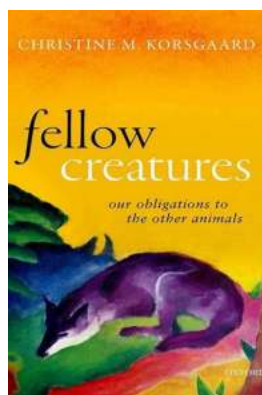
McMahan's essay is a call to action, inviting us to reflect on our own behaviors and choices that impact animals. It invites us to question our assumptions about human superiority and encourages us to strive towards a more compassionate and equitable world.

## The Path Forward

So, what can individuals do to fulfill their obligations to other animals? McMahan argues that small everyday actions can make a significant difference. By supporting local animal shelters, adopting rather than buying pets, and reducing meat consumption, individuals can contribute to the well-being of animals.

Additionally, McMahan emphasizes the importance of education and raising awareness about animal rights and welfare issues. By engaging in conversations, sharing information, and supporting organizations dedicated to animal advocacy, individuals can help bring about broader societal change.

Ultimately, McMahan's essay challenges us to reevaluate our moral compass and recognize the inherent value and dignity of all sentient beings. By accepting our obligations to other animals, we can strive towards a more compassionate and just society, where animals are no longer mere commodities but respected members of our shared ecosystem.



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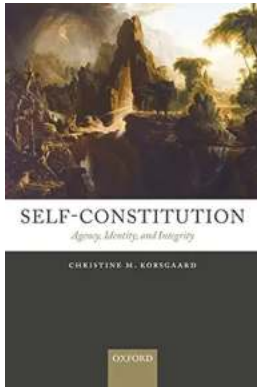


Christine M. Korsgaard presents a compelling new view of humans' moral relationships to the other animals. She defends the claim that we are obligated to treat all sentient beings as what Kant called "ends-in-themselves". Drawing on a theory of the good derived from Aristotle, she offers an explanation of why animals are the sorts of beings for whom things can be good or bad. She then turns to Kant's argument for the value of humanity to show that rationality commits

us to claiming the standing of ends-in-ourselves, in two senses. Kant argued that as autonomous beings, we claim to be ends-in-ourselves when we claim the standing to make laws for ourselves and each other. Korsgaard argues that as beings who have a good, we also claim to be ends-in-ourselves when we take the things that are good for us to be good absolutely and so worthy of pursuit. The first claim commits us to joining with other autonomous beings in relations of moral reciprocity. The second claim commits us to treating the good of every sentient creature as something of absolute importance.

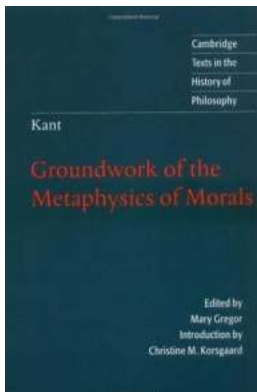
Korsgaard argues that human beings are not more important than the other animals, that our moral nature does not make us superior to the other animals, and that our unique capacities do not make us better off than the other animals. She criticizes the "marginal cases" argument and advances a new view of moral standing as attaching to the atemporal subjects of lives. She criticizes Kant's own view that our duties to animals are indirect, and offers a non-utilitarian account of the relation

between pleasure and the good. She also addresses a number of directly practical questions: whether we have the right to eat animals, experiment on them, make them work for us and fight in our wars, and keep them as pets; and how to understand the wrong that we do when we cause a species to go extinct.



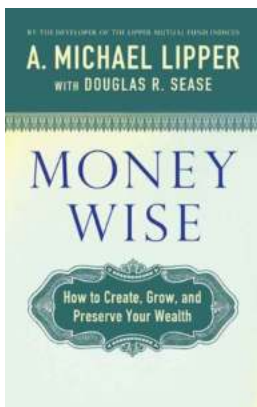
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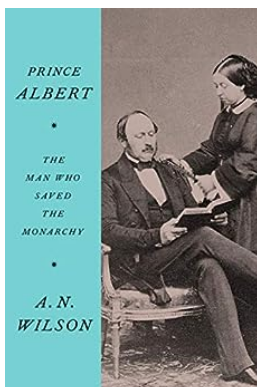
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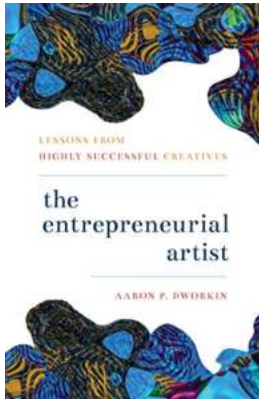
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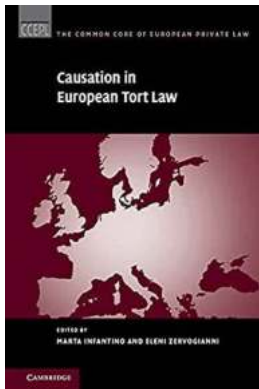
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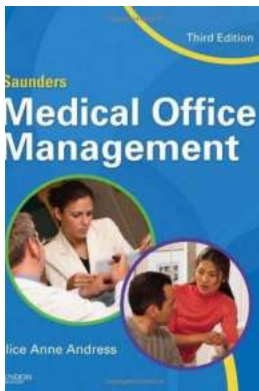
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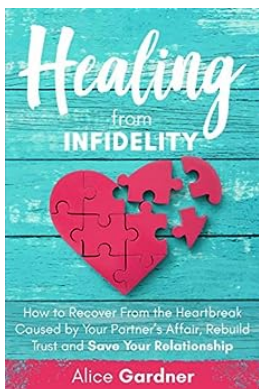
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