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Animality and Morality: Human Reason as an Animal Activity

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ABSTRACT

Those in animal and environmental ethics wishing to extend moral considerability beyond the human community have at some point all had to counter the claim that it is reason that makes human distinct. Detailed arguments against the significance of reason have been rare due to the lack of any good empirical accounts of what reason actually is. Contemporary studies of the embodied mind are now able to fill this gap and show why reason is a poor choice for a criterion to distinguish us from non-human animals. I use studies of the embodied mind to show that rationality is integrally connected to our animal and animate nature and hence not a significant point of departure between human and non-human animals.

KEYWORDS

Rationality, embodied mind, animacy, moral considerability, language

RATIONALITY AND MORAL CONSIDERABILITY

One of the first questions to address in progressive moral theory is the question of who or what warrants moral considerability. G.J. Warnock phrased this central ethical question as 'what is the condition of having a claim to be considered?' (Warnock 1971: 148). During the 1970s and 1980s, an emerging generation of animal and environmental ethicists saw it as their task to first find an innovative answer to Warnock's question and then to use that answer to redraw the boundaries of the moral community. Just to give a well-known example, several theorists chose sentience. Moral extensionists such as Peter Singer determined that the capacity to suffer was the appropriate condition for

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establishing an organism's moral considerability. After running through a variety of arguments to support his claim that sentience is the appropriate criterion, Singer significantly extended the scope of moral considerability by concluding that '[I]f a being suffers, there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration' (Singer 1976: 154).

Before moral extensionism, ethical theorists had reserved moral considerability for humans alone. The way that they justified this kind of chauvinism was to posit some unique capacity allegedly possessed only by humans and to suggest that this capacity was the necessary condition for having a claim to be considered. Candidates for that unique capacity over time included being created in God's image, possessing a soul, and having the capacity to reason. Of all these candidates, none cropped up more often and none seemed more compelling than the last of these, the capacity to reason. Philosophers and non-philosophers alike have widely held that it is reason that sets humans apart from non-human nature. For Aristotle, it was the possession of a rational part of the soul that alone enabled humans to shape themselves into virtuous characters. For Kant, it was the possession of a rational will that made it possible for humans to act on principles that could consistently be universalised. And even for Benthamite utilitarians, it was the possession of this same rational capacity that made possible the hedonic calculus that informed them whether they were indeed maximising happiness in their actions. Moreover, this emphasis on reason does not end with formal ethical theory. Outside of the confines of academic philosophy, it has been popularly held that it is rationality that enables people to figure out the potential consequences of their actions, rationality that allows them to compare proposed courses of action to the expectations of their society, and rationality that illuminates the motives and intentions that lie behind particular decisions about how to behave. Reason, in short, appears to count in ethics.

In the face of all this emphasis on reason, progressive moral extensionists have tried – as indeed they are compelled to do – to counter the claim that reason is what makes humans unique. But what is surprising given how much is at stake in this claim, is just how thin these counter-arguments against reason have been. While theorists such as Singer have carefully explained why they think sentience *is* the morally relevant criterion for determining considerability, they have not often devoted much energy to showing why its most formidable competitor, reason, *is not*. Often the arguments against reason have amounted to nothing more than a series of rhetorical questions that attempt to convey the absurdity of anyone ever imagining that reason alone could do the necessary moral work. Jeremy Bentham, for example, asked rhetorically '[t]he question is not, Can they reason? Nor Can they talk? But, Can they Suffer?'(Bentham [1789] 1907: 311). And Singer offered little more of substance when he asserted that '[t]o mark this boundary by some characteristic like intelligence or rationality would be to mark it in an arbitrary way. Why not choose some other characteristic, like skin colour?' (Singer 1974: 154). One is left with the impression that a willing moral

extensionist should simply be able to intuit that rationality cannot mark an effective moral boundary between the morally considerable and the morally non-considerable.

There are some good reasons why the moral extensionist's counter-arguments against rationality have rarely been very impressive or extensive. Until recently, scientific studies into the nature of mind had not been advanced enough to show exactly what reason is. In the absence of a good science of the mind, it was impossible for moral extensionists to show exactly why rationality is a poor choice for marking off the morally considerable. Lacking anything persuasive to say, moral extensionists had no option but to rely largely on shaky intuitions and rhetorical bluster. Fortunately, this is no longer the case. Contemporary studies of human and non-human cognition increasingly offer clues into the nature of reason itself. It is now possible for cognitive science to speak much more directly than it ever has before to the question of just what sort of phenomenon rationality really is. The story that it tells has considerable bearing on how we view the moral standing of both human and non-human animals.

Contemporary cognitive science has two potential points of entry into the debate about where moral considerability begins and ends. The first and by far the most popular point of entry is to look at non-human animals and to show that the capacity alleged to belong uniquely to humans is in fact also found in some parts of the non-human world. In other words, cognitive scientists might attempt to show that some non-human animals can also reason. To follow this path is to employ a form of moral extensionism that uses reason, rather than Singer's criterion of sentience, as the morally relevant criterion. There is a growing field of study, cognitive ethology, devoted to the task of showing that rationality does indeed exist in nature beyond the human realm. An excellent place to start in this field is with Colin Allen and Marc Bekoff's book *Species of Mind*.

The alternative strategy is not extensionist at all. This other point of entry involves looking scientifically at human cognition and showing that its nature is such that rationality alone could not possibly be used to mark a moral boundary between human and non-human animals. Due to philosophy's *a priori* and generally unquestioned assumption that rationality *is* something special to humans and gods, this second strategy has been the least popular of the two. But it is this second point of entry that I choose in this paper. Rather than start with the assumption of human superiority based in reason and then extend rationality outwards towards a privileged few, I will show why rationality is a poor starting point for moral considerability in the first place. In a strategy designed more for dissolving rather than extending moral boundaries, I will argue here that human rationality and understanding is not a distinctive human activity at all but is in fact an activity tied intimately into our animal and animate being. These ties confound any attempt to base moral considerability on rationality *per se*. Towards the end of the article I will also very briefly consider language use – believed by some in this debate to be an appropriate surrogate for rationality –

in order to show why, for similar reasons, it too is an inadequate criterion for marking off the morally considerable. At the same time, I will point out that there is some relevance of language use in this context; namely, that it marks the distinction between moral agents and moral patients. The contemporary position in cognitive science I will use to support these claims is the position articulated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Philosophy in the Flesh.*

THE EMBODIED MIND

Philosophy in the Flesh revolves around three empirical findings of recent cognitive science; that the mind is embodied, that thought is mostly unconscious, and that abstract concepts are largely metaphorical.[1] Johnson and Lakoff suggest that these three findings demand a dramatic rethinking of some of the central assumptions of western philosophy. Particularly pertinent to the question of whether reason can be used to demarcate a suitable moral boundary between the human and the non-human world is their central claim that:

> 'reason is not disembodied, as the tradition has largely held but arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experience...The same neural and cognitive mechanisms that allow us to perceive and to move around also create our conceptual systems and modes of reason ... [reason] is shaped crucially by the peculiarities of our human bodies ... and by the specifics of our everyday functioning in the world ... [it] makes use of, rather than transcends, our animal nature' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 4).

According to this account of the mind, reason is not a transcendent phenomenon but a capacity given shape by the particularities of the human situation. It does not lift us out of our bodies and separate us from our embodied, animal situation, rather our animate nature is an essential and integrated part of our rationality. Lakoff and Johnson point out at least three different aspects of our rational abilities that are firmly tied to the sensory and motor functions of our bodies. They start with categorisation.

As neural beings, beings that operate by continually making selective neuronal connections between different areas of activity in our central nervous systems, humans are among those animals that are compelled by their biology to categorise. Categorising means selecting a limited number of synaptic connections in the presence of a much larger number of neuronal activations. A categorisation has occurred when two or more different sets of activated neurones cause the same synaptic connection to be made. It is likely that most categorisations occur in the cognitive unconscious without any conscious input from the animal doing the categorising. However, understanding the way that these sub-conscious categorisations occur is an important part of understanding

rationality. Empirical research into the nature of these categorisations has revealed some strong connections between the way humans categorise and the operation of our sensory and motor function.

Research by Eleanor Rosch in the 1970s revealed that categorisation occurs relative to some of the basic facts of our biological experience (Rosch and Lloyd 1978). Certain levels of categories (for example 'bird') are more helpful in our everyday embodied experience than categorisations made at other levels (for example, 'red-cockaded woodpecker' or 'collection of feathers'). Being able to grasp the category 'bird' is much more useful to us than being able to grasp the category 'red-cockaded woodpecker' or 'collection of feathers'. Categories evolved at what Rosch and her colleagues called the 'basic level' because that is the level that best fits the realities of our embodiment. The basic level, according to Johnson, 'permits us to characterise relatively accurately those discontinuities in nature that matter most for our everyday functioning' (Johnson 1993: 208). In addition to basic level categories for objects, there are basic level categories for actions, and basic level categories for emotions. These basic level categories together comprise a collection of prototypes upon which all our conceptual divisions of the world are based. Cross-cultural studies indicate a considerable amount of convergence in how this categorisation of natural objects occurs. [2] This cross-cultural agreement is hardly surprising given that with the embodied mind categories are intimately connected to certain facts of our biological being, such as the kinds of arms and legs we have, the visual systems we employ, and the activities in which our bodies typically engage. The basic level, then, reflects a number of body-based properties (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 27–8). This makes categorisation, an essential component of rationality, into something whose operation depends intimately upon facts about our animal being.

Categories alone do not suffice for rationality. A neural being has to be able to draw inferences from these categories if categorisation is to become the useful tool that we know of as rationality. Embodied experience and facts about animacy come in here for a second time. Lakoff and Johnson show how the inferences that we draw from our categories are rooted in the patterns that we have previously developed to facilitate sensori-motor and perceptual activity. Like Piaget before them, they argue that cognitive abilities emerge from the sensori-motor structures that the humans use to negotiate their way around the world. In his earlier work *The Body in The Mind*, Johnson described these structures as 'recurring dynamic patterns of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience' (Johnson 1993: xiv). These sensori-motor structures, which both Johnson and Piaget call 'schemas,' are developed initially to make possible locomotion and perception. Later they also become integral components of rationality. 'The locus of reason,' Lakoff and Johnson claim, turns out to be 'the same as the locus of sensori-motor

control' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 20). The rational is accordingly not distinct from the sensitive and the motor, rather it employs some of the same structure and puts it to a different use.

Of particular importance for giving cognition its structure are those sensori-motor schemas that are directly connected to spatial relations and movement. These are the schemas useful in experiences such as locomoting oneself from one point to another in space, causing an object to move by exerting a force on it, and surrounding something by placing it inside a container. The schemas that govern these kinds of sensori-motor experiences in space are significant because they come to capture in an embodied form the physical logic that those spaces demand. For example, the 'container schema' captures the physical logic of being surrounded by a boundary marking inside off from outside. The 'source-path-goal schema' captures the physical logic of a path between where you currently are and where you want to end up. It is the physical logic present in these sensori-motor domains that becomes the source of the logic employed in cognitive life.[3] The container schema, for example, captures the law of excluded middle since there are no other options other than being inside or outside of the container. According to Lakoff and Johnson, such connections imply that 'much of conceptual inference…is sensori-motor inference'(Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 20). Once again rationality turns out to be tied closely to animacy. The logic employed by rational beings is a logic that finds its origins in physically embodied sensori-motor schemas.

Embodiment appears in Lakoff and Johnson's theory for a third time in the form of metaphor. Metaphor is the crucial tool that allows the translation between the physical logic embodied in the schemas and the logic of cognitive life. It extends what is learned in sensori-motor life into cognition. These metaphors first arise in the cognitive unconscious through associations between a particular physical experience and a particular subjective experience. In early childhood, physical experiences and subjective experiences are often conflated with each other. Later the child learns how to separate the two experiences but the association between the two different domains lingers on, embodied as a conceptual metaphor. A few examples help to illustrate how this works. The feeling of warmth that a baby often experiences is initially conflated with the experience of being held closely by a parent. The two phenomena, which are initially experienced as identical, lead to the metaphor that *States (e.g. of warmth)* are *Locations (e.g. closeness to parent)*. The infant eventually learns to separate the two phenomena as she grows older but the metaphor remains. What starts out appearing to be literally true for the infant, ends up being used to describe figurative truths in cognitive life. Subjective states are treated as if they have the physical properties of actual locations. The metaphor s*tates are locations* is later responsible for descriptions of oneself as being *in* a rage or being *on the edge of* despair. In another example, the child learns that big things such as a parent, a table, or a bus can exert major forces on her and/or dominate

her visual experience. Out of this learning experience, the primary metaphor *Important is Big* is established. This metaphor lies at the heart of descriptions of events as being of *enormous* importance or decisions being *huge*. Though many of the primary metaphors are closely connected to spatial relations, others, such as *Difficulties are Burdens*, are connected less to locomotion and more to different types of physical experience. Further examples of primary metaphors include; *Actions are Self-Propelled Motions*, *Purposes are Destinations*, *Causes are Physical Forces*, *Knowing is Seeing*, *Categories are Containers*, and *Understanding is Grasping*. Lakoff and Johnson believe that there are several hundred primary metaphors that lie at the structural heart of cognitive experience.[4]

Alongside categories and schemas, metaphors form a third type of embodied structure integral to rationality. Like categories and schemas, metaphors emerge out of embodied experience in the world. It is important to note that these metaphors are actual physical structures and not the poetic devices that people normally think of when they think of metaphors. Neuroscientific evidence suggests that the primary metaphors are literally embodied in the brain in sets of neural weightings. Srini Narayanan has found that experiencing the connection between the subjective, conscious experience and the physical, sensori-motor experience leads to particular paths being neurally instantiated through the creation of synaptic weight changes (Narayanan 1997). These physical connections are established through repeated activation. 'Our enormous metaphoric conceptual system,' Lakoff and Johnson suggest, 'is thus built up by a process of neural selection...Certain neural connections...are randomly established at first and then have their synaptic weights increased through their recurrent firing. The more times those connections are activated, the more the weights are increased, until permanent connections are forged' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 57). These stable connections mean that the primary metaphors become actual parts of the brain's wiring and hence continue to play a significant role in cognition during later life.

Categories, schemas, and conceptual metaphors are the cornerstones of Lakoff and Johnson's account of the embodied mind. The important part of this for the current argument is that each of these cornerstones is a pattern or prototype that is initially created out of the demands of sensori-motor life and later goes on to become an integral part of cognitive life. As cognition develops, organisms employ these embodied patterns in more and more creative ways with the help of something that Lakoff and Johnson call 'the projective imagination'. Though the details of how the projective imagination works need not detain us here, clearly it has a central role to play in allowing us to move from the basic embodied structures and prototypes described here to the rich and complex cognitive life that humans enjoy. But even before the projective imagination kicks in, what remains fundamental to this view is that cognitive life is always emergent from and dependent upon embodied, sensori-motor life.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ETHICS

What the strong naturalism of the theory of the embodied mind does is it ties rationality firmly into the biology and the activity of our animal and animate nature. This is a much greater tie-in than simply to suggest the truism that rationality is in some ways a product of the biological brain. It is the much deeper tie-in that sensori-motor life, a life that we share with all animals, is an ineradicable component of our ability to understand our world. The rational is not a whole different category from the sensori-motor, rather it relies on it for its very functioning. In fact, the boundary between the rational and the merely sensory begins to blur for the embodied mind.

From the perspective of cognitive ethology, non-human animals, lacking the possession of a human body and not engaging in all the same kinds of sensori-motor activities that humans engage in, could not share with humans the exact same kind of cognitive life. However, according to this view of embodied rationality, if an animal is a neural being it will have the same need for basic level categories and for sensori-motor schemas. These categorisations and schemas have the potential to structure some form of cognitive life for the animal. Though there will be significant differences in the degree that different animals can create cognitive lives for themselves depending upon the physiology of the animal's central nervous system, the account makes it considerably harder to separate human mental activity from non-human mental activity.

The theory of the embodied mind is reassuringly consistent with evolutionary biology. Reason, Lakoff and Johnson claim, 'builds on and makes use of forms of perceptual and motor inference present in 'lower' animals...[it] makes use of rather than transcends our animal nature' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 4). While Lakoff and Johnson themselves are not particularly concerned with articulating the implications of this view for ethics, they do propose that their theory of the embodied mind 'utterly changes our relation to other animals and changes our conception of human beings as uniquely rational' (ibid.). Connecting reason to sensori-motor patterns in this way enables them to point out that '[r]eason is thus not an essence that separates us from other animals; rather, it places us on a continuum with them' (ibid.). This continuum casts some doubt on all the arguments that have been made since Aristotle that the ability to reason can be used to mark a straightforward moral boundary between the human and the non-human. While Aristotle put the rational and the sensitive into different parts of the soul, Johnson and Lakoff have the former emergent from the latter undercutting any claim that reason is a divine element in us.

An interesting side note to this view is that not only does cognition make use of what is animal and animate in us, it also makes use of the environments in which we are animate.[5] Since categories, schemas, and metaphors emerge out of embodied activities, the kinds of possibilities for action that our environments afford become relevant to our understanding of cognition. This is the same

connection between environment and thought that was anticipated by the late Paul Shepard. Shepard observed that the human mind not only fails to separate us from the animal within us, it also fails to separate us from what is animal around us. In *Thinking Animals: Animals and the Human Intelligence*, Shepard claimed of our relationship to animals that '[w]e are connected to animals not merely in the convenience of figures of speech…but by sinews that link speech to rationality, insight, intuition, and consciousness…[t]he connection is in the act and nature of thought, the working of mind' (Shepard 1978: 2). Non-human animals and non-human environments are, for Shepard, part of the architectonic of thought.

The kind of insight that Shepard was exploring in the 1970s is today being articulated with much more sophistication in an area of cognitive science that refers increasingly to 'the extended mind'. Andy Clark, amongst others, has offered numerous examples of environmental structures playing crucial roles in cognitive life. According to Clark, how we move about the world is an important component of how we come to think about it. In *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again*, Clark makes a comprehensive case that cognition should no longer be viewed as the internal algorithmic manipulation of symbolic representations of the world. In its place, he suggests that we regard cognition as primarily a means of engaging with the structure that we find already present in the world. This engagement involves the organism extending the mind through the use of 'active strategies that leave much of the information out in the world, and cannily using iterated, real-time sequences of body-world interactions to solve problems in a robust and flexible way' (Clark 1997: 98). Clark concludes that contemporary directions in robotics and artificial intelligence in turn demand a dramatic rethinking of how we regard the operation of rationality. He asks that we 'abandon the image of ourselves as essentially disembodied reasoning engines... and of environment as simply a source of problem-specifying inputs and an arena for action' (Clark 1997: 273–6). He suggests that we replace it with an image of cognition as an animal activity that is still intimately connected to the way we move about a world that presents us both with certain challenges and with certain structural opportunities. Such a view, Clark suggests, demands of us 'an increasing awareness of the important interpenetration…of perception, thought, and action' (Clark 1998: 260). This interpenetration means literally grounding our capacity to think in our animal and environmental being.

It is perhaps obvious that the foregoing account of an embodied and embedded mind does not provide a complete, knock-down argument against the ethical anthropocentrist's position that *some* aspect of cognitive life might still be used to helpfully mark an important boundary between the morally considerable and the non-morally considerable. One could accept the emergence of cognitive life out of sensori-motor life – as all who believe in evolutionary theory should do – and still maintain that there is a point at which the particular human

capacity to reason crosses a line and becomes morally significant. Daniel Dennett, for one, declares that despite certain commonalities, there still exists 'a huge difference between our minds and the minds of other species, a gulf wide enough even to make a moral difference'(Dennett 1995: 371). It would be hard not to agree with Dennett that humans do possess mental capacities that often appear to exceed a good deal of what is generally accorded to the animal kingdom. But those that try to draw implications about moral considerability from this fact face considerable hurdles if rationality is as closely tied to our animal being as the embodied mind says it is. First, they need to explain exactly why these differences in degree end up being *morally* significant and, second, they need to say something about the point in the animal kingdom at which this moral significance suddenly miraculously emerges. If Warnock was right, both of these tasks require the positing of some kind of meaningful and relevant criterion. It is unclear what this criterion could now be. It is no longer possible to simply assert that 'reason' provides the desired demarcation. Philosophy's traditional *a priori* appeal to rationality looks increasingly problematic thanks to studies of the embodied mind on the one hand and to cognitive ethology on the other.

THE COUNTER-ARGUMENT FROM LANGUAGE

One plausible avenue for counter-argument would be to grant the need to steer away from the increasingly problematic notion of rationality *per se* and focus instead on something that is clearly connected to rationality but appears to offer a more concrete criterion for the separation of species. This move is made by those selecting language use as the criterion needed to distinguish the morally considerable from the morally non-considerable. The ability to use language with all its inferential structure seems like a good alternative candidate partly because it is clearly connected in certain ways to the ability to reason. Moreover, given that language use is something much more easily established than the matter of who or what should be regarded as rational, it seems possible that language might supply a much more workable criterion for separating the morally considerable from the non-considerable. A tenacious ethical anthropocentrist might plausibly suggest that even if rationality is in certain respects connected to our sensori-motor life, there remains unique to humans the ability to use language and this in itself is enough to mark a significant and, ultimately, moral difference between human and non-human animals.

There is probably some truth to the fact that language use *is* connected in important ways to morality. Language use typically indicates a considerably more highly developed set of mental capacities in those animals that employ it than in those animals that do not, capacities that seem like they might be relevant for determining some of the boundaries of the moral community. Language

certainly seems to be a helpful – if not a strictly necessary – tool for those that wish to establish sets of moral rules for how to treat each other. Language use is also no doubt helpful for ascribing moral responsibility or blame. Clearly it is hard to imagine a sophisticated moral community without language. But the real reason why it is particularly important to say something about language use in a paper that is intended to deconstruct certain assumptions about rationality is that the ability to use language has sometimes been literally *identified with* the ability to reason. In its strongest form, such a view insists that language is a necessary condition for the possession of mind. Philosopher of mind Wilfred Sellars took this position, denying that there is 'any awareness of logical space prior to, or independent of, the acquisition of language' (Sellars [1953] 1997: 66). Richard Rorty helpfully characterises Sellars' position as one in which we should regard mind as 'an hypostatisation of language … gradually entering the universe by and through the gradual development of language, as part of a naturalistically explicable evolutionary process' (Sellars 1997: 7). Language use might then usefully be substituted for rationality as the elusive criterion that can be used to mark off the morally considerable from the morally non-considerable. In this way, ethical anthropocentrism might be saved and the extension of moral considerability to non-human animals thwarted by subtly shifting the burden from rationality as the morally relevant criterion to language use.[6] This would significantly reduce, and perhaps entirely erase, the significance of the embodied mind for ethics. Even if their attempts to discredit the moral significant of rationality had been successful, animal and environmental ethicists would now be faced with the realisation that moral anthropocentrists had sold them a dummy on rationality. It is language use that is the real issue.

Though there is space only to give only the barest hint of it here, Lakoff and Johnson's position on the embodied basis of cognition actually closes down the boundary between language users and non-language users is a strikingly similar way to how it closed down the boundary between reasoners and non-reasoners. Lakoff and Johnson add to their account of the embodied mind a cognitive linguistics that connects language and symbolisation to some of the same sensori-motor patterns that they earlier claimed lay at the heart of rationality. They suggest, for example, against Chomsky, that the main syntactic categories are not universal and innate in humans but emerge in their most basic form as neural patterns that link phonemes with some of the basic categories of sensori-motor and perceptual experiences. The syntactic category 'noun,' for example, expresses a relation between certain phonemes and the sensori-motor experiences of coming upon actual persons, places, and things. 'Verb' expresses a relation between other phonemes and the sensori-motor experience of acting and moving. 'Preposition' expresses a relation between further phonemes and the sensori-motor experience of spatial relations. The linguistic grammar they describe in this way connects syntactic categories to embodied, physical experiences.[7]

Once these basic associations between embodied experience and syntactic categories are made, more complex grammatical forms can be extended radially out from these basic syntactic categories through the operation of existing cognitive mechanisms such as schemas and metaphors. The concept of a noun, one that literally refers to bounded physical things, gets extended to cover the much broader conceptual category of 'things'. Lakoff and Johnson claim, for example, that cognitive mechanisms like conceptual metaphors can extend concepts associated with literal persons, places and things to cover 'metaphorical persons, places, and things…[such as]…states (metaphorical locations), activities (metaphorical objects, locations, or paths), ideas (metaphorical objects or locations), institutions (metaphorical persons), and other metaphorically comprehended abstract concepts' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 500). Such extension eventually leads to the complex and sophisticated forms of language that we employ. But despite all the extensions that progressively move us away from the embodied experience, the basic link between syntactic categories and embodied action remains essential. This means that language use – like rationality – remains at heart a product of our animal being rather than a marker of a significantly different human capacity. The anthropocentrist's intention to use this capacity to indicate a moral difference between human and non-human animals is undercut in a similar way to how the earlier argument about the embodied mind undercut the significance of rationality.

The determined ethical anthropocentrist need not give up yet. At this point a similar objection might be raised to the one raised earlier. The anthropocentrist might be willing to go so far as to accept the connection between language use and embodied, sensori-motor life and yet maintain that, despite these connections, language use still offers an important point of departure between those creatures that have it and those that do not. A Dennett-type of argument to the effect that despite similarities there remains a 'huge gulf' between human and non-human animals with regard to language could be made again. Does the committed ethical extensionist have a good reply to this?

The answer to this last question is both yes and no. If the argument to deconstruct the significance of language use works in the same way as the argument to deconstruct the significant of rationality – i.e. by showing that neither indicate a special capacity rather both are a product of our animacy – the extensionist's first inclination should be to confidently claim that the burden of proof now lies with those that wish to maintain the significance of language use rather than with those that wish to deny it. It is now incumbent upon the ethical anthropocentrist to show why and when language use becomes morally significant. Perhaps this is an adequate answer and the burden of proof indeed now falls on the anthropocentrist. But such a reply, I would suggest, is slightly disingenuous because even the most committed moral extensionist is likely to want to claim that there is *some* moral significance to the use of language. I want to close by clarifying how language use does indeed offer a certain point of departure in

the moral arena between those that use it and those that do not, though this is not quite the point of departure that the ethical anthropocentrist wants it to mark.

LANGUAGE USE AND MORAL AGENCY

Recall that one of the things said about language above that appeared *prima facie* to be evidence in favour of it having some moral significance was that it is connected to the possibility of individuals coming to agreement with other members of the community about what is and what is not morally permissible. Language can be used for setting up rules for the community and for making members of a community see when it is that those rules are being transgressed. But even more significant than this, the intentional state that members of a community possess when they see that something is wrong seems to be, at the very least, closely connected to the activity of their language use. Moral approbation appears to depend in some way upon the ability to use language publicly. We could not blame people unless we had a way of explaining to them that they were at fault. Sellars' position on the connection between language and mind helps us to see exactly why this is the case.

For Sellars, making a knowledge claim about the world is a matter of 'placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says' (Sellars [1953] 1997: 76). Placing something in 'the logical space of reasons,' according to Sellars, requires language and society. This is why mind or understanding is possible for Sellars only on the condition of a community of language users. Taking our lead from Sellars, we could argue in a similar way that placing a claim in the *moral* space of reasons also requires both a language in which to make the claim and a linguistic community in which to do the justifying. The ability to understand right and wrong seems to depend upon placing the thing believed to be wrong in the logical space of reasons that language makes possible. Language does, after all, appear to be required for moral reasoning.

But even if this is the case, the ethical anthropocentrist has not got what they want out of this Sellarsian argument. It should be pretty clear that the significance of language in this case is that it allows for the possibility, not of being wronged, but of knowing that some action is wrong. Language is necessary for being able to give reasons – to yourself and to your community – for the belief that killing is wrong. But nothing follows from this about language being necessary for it to be wrong to be killed. Language might be necessary for being able to understand moral or immoral action but it does not appear to be relevant to whether a creature can be treated morally or immorally.

These observations suggest a tentative Sellarsian sketch of the significance of language use to morality. Following Sellars' position on knowledge claims, being able to act morally appears to be connected the possession of language so

that one can place beliefs about right or wrong into the logical space of reasons. This is because moral accountability requires the possibility of being taken to task about an action or a belief. An action or a belief must not only be held or performed freely but there must also be ways for its rightness or wrongness to be articulated. Such a justification requires the moral claim being placed in the logical space of reasons. This is something that language makes possible. The tidy way to put this is to say that language use is closely linked to the possibility of being a moral agent.[8] On the other hand, it is not clear that language use has any bearing at all on whether a creature can be subject to moral and immoral acts. In other words, while language may be necessary for being a moral agent, it does not appear to be necessary for being a moral patient. Think, for example, of a mute human being or an infant. Both of these have moral standing despite their inability to use language. Language use does not appear to bear on a being's moral considerability. If this Sellarsian sketch of how to distinguish moral agents from moral patients is correct, then environmental ethicists and animal welfare theorists can happily accept that there is some significance to language use but insist that this significance lies in how it enables us to distinguish between moral agents and moral patients. They can still balk at the suggestion that language use suffices for the much more significant task of demarcating moral considerability.

CONCLUSION

At the very least, the continuum between non-human and human animals described in *Philosophy in the Flesh* serves in significant ways to desacralise and Darwinise the ability to reason. It also begins to look like it might do the same for the ability to use language. This desacralising of the kind of reason articulated by canonical figures such as Plato, Aristotle, and Kant can only help to broaden our understanding of the commonalities and the differences between human and non-human animals. The kind of approach to rationality and language that Lakoff and Johnson employ is Darwinian to its core. Darwinian forms of argument on topics such as these inevitably make alleged differences between one species and the next into distinctions of degree rather than distinctions of kind. And though distinctions of degree are not impossible to make, they are usually very difficult and often very contentious, especially when what hangs on the distinction is something as significant as whether or not an organism warrants moral considerability. In the case of the particularly prevalent belief that reason can operate as a clear boundary for demarcating moral considerability, Lakoff and Johnson's theory of the embodied mind provides lots of powerful, contemporary evidence that we need to be very much on our guard against marking this boundary along speciesist lines.

NOTES.

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[1] The position I will be describing remains a minority position in cognitive science. It has been pointed out to me that to call what follows 'findings in cognitive science' may be to overstate the case. I refer the reader to *Philosophy in the Flesh* and Johnson's *The Body in The Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) to evaluate the position I articulate here.

[2] See Lakoff and Johnson, 1999, pp. 30, 34–5, 42–44, 150–1 and Johnson 1987, 62, 208–9.

[3] See Lakoff and Johnson, 1999, Chapter 4 on 'Primary Metaphor and Subjective Experience' for a detailed account of how this happens.

[4] See Lakoff and Johnson's earlier collaboration, *The Metaphors We Live By*.

[5] See Mark Rowlands *The Body in Mind: Understanding Cognitive Processes*, Andy Clark *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again*, and Christopher J. Preston, *Grounding Knowledge: Environmental Philosophy, Epistemology, and Place* for extended discussions of this thesis.

[6] Such a move assumes, of course, that humans are the only language users. This is itself rather a doubtful claim.

[7] See Chapter 22 of *Philosophy in the Flesh* for the details of this argument.

[8] This close linkage is not a necessary relation because some communities– perhaps including some non-human communities – can also convey moral approbation with actions rather than words.

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