

Josh Milburn, *Just Fodder: The Ethics of Feeding Animals*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022), 240 pages. ISBN: 9780228011514 (pbk.).

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Josh Milburn's book *Just Fodder: The Ethics of Feeding Animals* (henceforth referred to as *JF*) explores a diverse range of relatively neglected issues in animal ethics. Though animal ethicists often discuss food and, in particular, whether it's permissible to eat meat or other animal products, comparatively little has been written about feeding animals. To be fair, there have been various discussions of 'pet food' and whether we ought to provide our companion animals a vegan diet. However, Milburn's work demonstrates that the ethics of feeding animals is a much broader topic than it might at first seem to be.

Like Clare Palmer's *Animal Ethics in Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), and Sue Donaldson's and Will Kymlicka's *Zoopolis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), *JF* takes a relational approach to animal ethics, i.e., it distinguishes the different sorts of relationships we have with different animals, and it uses those relational differences to differentiate the duties we owe to those animals. Compared to its predecessors, however, *JF* contains a richer array of relational categories. Both *Animal Ethics in Context* and *Zoopolis* distinguish two main relational categories of animal: domesticated and wild. They note that some animals, such as wild animals living in urban environments, fall somewhere in between and perhaps warrant a third category, but three categories is the most they offer. *JF*, in contrast, distinguishes five main relational categories: animal family (companion animals), animal neighbours (wild animals who lives in urban and suburban areas), animal thieves (wild animals who live on farmed lands and who are typically treated as pests), animal refugees (wild animals

in wildlife rehabilitation centres), and animal strangers (wild animals who live beyond human spaces). In making these distinctions, the concept of ‘feeding’ plays a central role. For example, we’ve bred companion animals to depend upon us, so we have a *duty to feed* them (pp. 50-54). Urban wild animals, such as squirrels and backyard birds, have not been bred by us, but some of us do *choose to feed* some of them. Milburn notes that welcoming urban wild animals in this way generates duties of hospitality, such as a duty to ensure that the food one offers them is safe to eat (pp. 95-97). By contrast, the wild animals who ‘steal’ food from farmlands are *fed unintentionally*, so we don’t owe duties of hospitality to them. We still have negative duties to refrain from harming them - duties that are violated when we kill them with pesticides or during the harvesting process - but Milburn argues that we don’t have duties to feed them or otherwise assist them (pp. 131-134).

For the most part, *JF* doesn’t discuss farmed animals or veganism, but many of the issues it covers have a clear connection to the main moral case for veganism. Indeed, a number of the conclusions Milburn draws are grounded in the same considerations that underlie the claim that we have an obligation to be vegan. As I understand it, veganism is primarily a form of boycott. Vegans (myself included) maintain that animal agriculture is intolerably harmful to animals. Furthermore, we maintain that it’s wrong to perform actions that foreseeably contribute to the harming of animals. Since consuming animal products foreseeably perpetuates animal agriculture’s harming of animals, we maintain that consuming animal products is wrong. However, avoiding the consumption of animal products involves more than adopting a vegan diet. Buying animal-based foods for one’s companion animal(s) also contributes to the harming of farmed animals, so we have good reason to avoid feeding animal products to our companion animals. Milburn discusses this issue at length in *JF*’s second chapter, where he argues that the

development of cellular agriculture will potentially prove quite helpful. Though omnivorous companion animals (such as dogs) can adapt to a plant-based diet easily enough, obligate carnivores (such as cats) have more difficulty. Lab-grown meat has the potential to help us meet our companion animals' nutritional needs without harming other animals in the process (pp. 41-44).

An additional issue is that animal products aren't the only products whose consumption foreseeably contributes to the harming of animals. As I mentioned earlier, wild animals in farmlands are harmed by pesticides and during the harvesting process, so crop production is far from harmless. Though plant-based diets are less harmful to animals than diets that incorporate meat (in part because farming animals multiplies harms by requiring the production of feed crops), it's nonetheless false that plant-based diets are harm-free. In light of this fact, Milburn argues that we have good reason to transition away from traditional agriculture and towards vertical agriculture. Much the way condominiums reduce urban sprawl, growing food indoors via either hydroponic or aeroponic systems (instead of via soil) allows crops to be layered on top of each other, thus reducing the need for cropland (pp. 122-123). Reducing our use of cropland is of special interest to environmentalists, who may be interested in rewilding that land. As Milburn points out, though, it also reduces the number of wild animals killed during crop production.

Of course, crop production isn't the only context in which humans harm wild animals. One oft-discussed and rather obvious way humans harm them is by hunting them. Though vegans are against humans hunting animals, many of us have a moral blind spot of sorts when it comes to animals hunting animals. To be fair, hunting is not analogous to predation. Human hunters are morally responsible for the deaths they cause, whereas predators are merely causally responsible. What's more, someone who hunts an animal harms the animal, whereas someone

who allows a predator to hunt merely refrains from preventing harm. However, it is possible to contribute to the killing of prey animals without directly killing them ourselves. Milburn argues that wildlife rehabilitation centres do precisely that when they rehabilitate, and subsequently release, predatory animals (pp. 147-154). As Milburn notes, wildlife rehabilitators are trying to help predators hunt, i.e., they're trying to restore predators' physical functioning so that the latter are able to feed themselves once again. In at least one respect, this actually seems worse than the harms associated with consumption. Whereas consuming animal products *foreseeably* contributes to the harming of farmed animals, Milburn argues that rehabilitating and releasing predators *intentionally* contributes to the harming of prey animals (pp. 151-152). Though Milburn doesn't go so far as to call for an end to predator rehabilitation, he does argue that those who choose to rehabilitate predators have a responsibility to refrain from enabling predation. One option is to keep rehabilitated predators in captivity (pp. 153-154).

Milburn's argument concerning predator rehabilitation is one of the most interesting in his book. In fact, I made a less-developed version of this argument in my own work (see Kyle Johannsen, *Wild Animal Ethics: The Moral and Political Problem of Wild Animal Suffering* (New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 46-47). Though I think Milburn's argument is good, it has implications that he doesn't anticipate, particularly with respect to the issue of wild animal suffering.

In recent years, animal ethicists have grown increasingly aware of, and concerned about, the pervasiveness of suffering in the wild. Of particular concern is r-strategist reproduction, i.e., reproduction that protects parents' genes by producing large numbers of offspring, most of whom die shortly after being born, from painful causes such as starvation, predation, exposure,

disease, etc. As Milburn himself is aware, r-strategist reproduction might entail that most sentient, individual wild animals don't even have lives worth living (pp. 160-161).

Though Milburn takes wild animal suffering seriously – he devotes Chapter 7 to discussing it – he's also wary of the claim that we have a general duty to assist wild animals. As beneficent as assisting them may be, Milburn's agnostic about whether beneficence is ever more than supererogatory (p. 171). Of course, the situation is morally different when our actions foreseeably (or intentionally) contribute to wild animal suffering. Indeed, Milburn allows that, due to anthropogenic climate change, we may have a duty to rectify some of the harms that some wild animals suffer (p. 172-176). The problem is that there are quite a lot of ways we can contribute to wild animal suffering. Consider veganism and vertical agriculture. If enough people in the world adopt a plant-based diet, then we won't need to feed so many farmed animals, which in turn reduces the amount of cropland we'll need. Similarly, and as Milburn himself explains, if we transition away from growing crops in soil and towards growing them vertically, our need for cropland will decrease even further. From an environmentalist perspective, the obvious thing to do with former cropland is rewild it. However, rewilding it will foreseeably increase the size of wild animal populations, and thus increase the number of bad lives that come into existence (lives that may not even be worth living). To be fair, it may be possible to ensure that the wild animals rewilding brings into existence at least live minimally decent lives. Doing so, however, may well require developing, and employing, the sort of welfare-improving interventions that Milburn is reluctant to fully endorse, such as pain-dulling genetic modifications (p. 169).

The above criticism notwithstanding, *JF* is an excellent book that makes a substantial contribution to animal ethics. I highly recommend it.

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