

Jeff Sebo, *Saving Animals, Saving Ourselves: Why Animals Matter for Pandemics, Climate Change, and Other Catastrophes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. xvii + 255.

Jeff Sebo's topical book *Saving Animals, Saving Ourselves: Why Animals Matter for Pandemics, Climate Change, and Other Catastrophes* explores what animal ethics looks like in the Anthropocene: an epoch characterized by the tremendous impact that human activity has on the planet. More specifically, and as its subtitle suggests, the book focuses on the connections that issues of animal welfare, and animal rights, have with pandemics and climate change, as well as on the moral implications of those connections. Some of the book's topical features are obvious: due to COVID-19, pandemics have been oft-discussed in the news, and in the media, for the past few years. Other topical features lie beneath the surface, though. For example, animal ethics has traditionally focused on domesticated animals, neglecting, for the most part, issues concerning what we owe to wild animals (especially wild animals who live in the wild, rather than in captivity). Not so with Sebo. His book devotes roughly as much attention to issues of wild animal welfare and rights as it does to issues of domesticated animal welfare and rights, thus contributing to recent work in what's sometimes called 'wild animal ethics'. What's more, though animal ethics has traditionally focused on issues concerning what we individually owe to animals, Sebo's book is largely (but not entirely) about what we collectively owe them. As a result, his book also contributes to recent work in what's sometimes called 'the political turn in animal ethics'.

In many respects, Sebo's book is similar to Martha Nussbaum's recent book *Justice for Animals: Our Collective Responsibility* (2022). Indeed, both books explore the Anthropocene's implications for animal ethics, both books divide their focus between domesticated and wild

animals, and both are about what we collectively owe to animals. However, Sebo's book is (arguably) more pragmatic. Unlike Nussbaum, who devotes a significant portion of her book to arguing that her own theoretical approach to animal ethics – the capabilities approach – is superior to other theoretical approaches, Sebo doesn't commit himself to any particular theory. Instead, as I discuss in further detail below, he works to identify areas where competing moral theories, especially utilitarianism and rights theory, converge in practice (pp. 33-35), and he uses that convergence to identify goals for activists and policy makers to focus on (pp. 92-114). In fact, it seems clear that Sebo's book is meant to function, in part, as a guide of sorts for members of the effective altruism movement: a movement which Sebo himself is a part of and which is devoted to doing good, and preventing bad, as efficiently as possible. After all, farmed animal welfare, wild animal welfare, pandemics, and climate change, are all important cause areas within the effective altruism movement, and Sebo's book is concerned with the connections between these areas. Furthermore, Sebo's focus on identifying advocacy goals that utilitarianism and rights theory converge on in practice helps to ensure (a) that those goals will appeal to effective altruists, since effective altruists tend to be utilitarian, and (b) that those goals will appeal to activists who have deontological leanings, such as human rights activists and animal rights activists. Put another way, Sebo's book is meant to help effective altruists be more effective by providing a framework to identify advocacy goals that, if accomplished, would be impactful, and which are also capable of attracting support from a broad array of groups (pp. 117-120).

As I stated above, Sebo's book is focused on the connections that pandemics and climate change, have with animal welfare and animal rights. More specifically, it discusses how animals (or the ways we use them) are causing pandemics and climate change, and how animals are also

harmed by pandemics and climate change. For example, factory farming, in addition to being an animal welfare and animal rights issue, is also a global health and environmental issue. It places animals in conditions that are conducive to the spread and development of zoonotic diseases (p.48), it consumes a tremendous amount of land and water, and it's a very significant source of greenhouse gas emissions (p. 50). On the flip side, pandemics, in addition to being a global health issue, are also an animal welfare and animal rights issue. For example, many animals, both wild and domesticated, can become sick during a pandemic, and many are likely to be either 'culled' or exterminated (pp. 52-55). Similarly, climate change, in addition to being an environmental issue, is also an animal welfare and animal rights issue. For example, climate change increases the risk and severity of natural disasters, and natural disasters harm both wild and domesticated animals (p. 56).

According to Sebo, linkages such as the above have an array of upshots. The main moral upshot he identifies, however, is twofold. First, for the sake of pandemic and climate change mitigation, we should reduce (and sometimes cease) our use of animals. Second, as part of our adaptation efforts, we should help and support animals who suffer from pandemic and climate change related harms. For example, in Chapter 5, Sebo argues that including animals in impact assessments would be conducive to reducing our use of them, and that we can help and support animals by including them in social services.

In addition, the connections that pandemics and climate change, have with animal welfare and animal rights, create both problems and opportunities (pp. 117-120). With respect to the latter, Sebo notes that they create opportunities for intersectional alliances between activists who work on different causes. With respect to the former, Sebo notes that, in practice, they sometimes generate value conflicts. I haven't the space to discuss value conflicts at length, but I will note

that, for Sebo, such conflicts support taking a structural approach, since making changes to institutional and other structures is sometimes sufficient to remove conflicts (pp. 120-123). Though structural changes are difficult to accomplish, they can become easier to achieve, in time, if we take the right steps now. For Sebo, much of what's appealing about the (comparatively) short term advocacy goals he identifies in Chapter 5 is that accomplishing them would 'help us to build knowledge, power, and political will toward helping humans and non-humans more effectively in the long run (p. 115)'. Given the host of complications Sebo raises in Chapters 7 and 8 concerning which animals are sentient, how to compare the welfare of members of different species, which animals have lives worth living, and other matters, building knowledge seems especially important.

The last thing I'll note about the connections that pandemics and climate change, have with animal welfare and animal rights, is that they supply some of the empirical premises needed for utilitarianism and rights theory to converge. Sebo argues that these theories converge on, among other things, 'a duty to help animals as much as we reasonably can, within certain limits (p. 33)'. For utilitarians, this duty follows from the fact that there's a tremendous amount of preventable suffering and death within animal populations. For rights theorists, though, it follows from the fact that we're causing much of that suffering and death, such as the suffering and death that pandemics and climate change inflict on animals. Though rights theory is compatible with the idea that we can have a duty to assist others even when we haven't harmed them, duties of rectification are less sensitive to demandingness than duties of beneficence are, and thus demonstrating that assistance is a matter of rectification suggests that we have a duty to assist even when doing so would require a lot of sacrifice.

The convergence Sebo identifies between utilitarianism and rights theory is both interesting and promising, but I do wonder whether Sebo's overly optimistic about its prospects for building a broad coalition of activists. After all, applying utilitarianism and rights theory to animals requires that we abandon our prejudices and include animals within our moral circle. For example, both theories require abandoning the view that even relatively trivial human interests are sufficient to justify practices that cause tremendous suffering to animals. Regrettably, though, most people, including environmental activists and human rights activists, aren't prepared to abandon such views. To be fair, activists who care about human rights and/or the environment, but not about animal welfare or animal rights, have reason to support reducing uses of animals that contribute to pandemics and climate change. However, it's less obvious that such activists generally have reason to support including animals in our pandemic and climate change adaptation efforts, especially in cases where helping animals would be costly. At best, environmental and human rights activists have reason to support ways of helping animals that are (a) cost effective, and (b) connected to goals such as public health or conservation. At worst, they have reason to support harming animals who pose a threat to such goals. For example, to prevent the spread of zoonotic diseases, they might have good reason to support vaccinating wild animals, but they might also have reason to support 'culling' wild animals if killing is less expensive than vaccinating. As a result, I suspect that Sebo's convergence is more capable of uniting utilitarian animal activists with animal rights activists, than it is of uniting animal activists with other activists.

Notwithstanding the above concern, Sebo's book makes a novel, and very valuable, contribution to animal ethics. I highly recommend it.

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