Animal Rights and Human Duties: The Moral importance of human-Animal relations

One can hardly argue that we don’t need to consider animal welfare when talking about justice and that animals lack our moral concern. Starting from the premise that animals do matter morally, I want to research what this moral status exactly entails and where it is grounded in. The question this paper attempts to formulate an answer to is: Do our relations to animals matter in determining our moral obligations towards them? In order to find out whether our relations to animals matter in determining what we owe to animals, I will first discuss the most familiar accounts put forward in the animal rights debate since these solely focus on intrinsic properties when determining obligations to animals. These intrinsic approaches might explain why we have negative duties to animals i.e. refrain from killing and harming, they don’t tell us whether we also have special responsibilities and positive duties to animals. Secondly, I will discuss why these traditional accounts are insufficient and discuss ways of approaching animals rights and moral obligations by looking at our relations with animals. The basis of our moral obligations, is besides the nature of the being in question, also the relationship which we have to the being in question. Thus, I will argue that we have moral obligations towards animals in virtue of their similarity with us in the ability to suffer and experiencing a life, as well as moral obligations in virtue of the relationships we have with animals, just as with humans. Furthermore, the notion of special responsibilities is helpful in discriminating responsibilities based on the type of relationship. The conjunct of (pro)creation and dependency puts a greater responsibility upon us, than say, mere interaction and coexistence. This I argue, is particularly relevant for acknowledging our great responsibility towards not only companion animals as Burgess-Jackson states, but also to domesticated animals in general. Especially domesticated animals, I think, put a stringent duty on us because we have made them very dependent. Thereafter, I will discuss the book *Zoopolis*, whose authors argue that we have different moral obligations to different types of animals, namely domesticated, wild, and liminal animals. They argue for group-differentiated rights, and provide a systematic account for how an interspecies theory of justice might look like. Consequently, our moral relationship with these different kinds of animals will be determined by the frequency of interaction, historical origin, dependency, and physical proximity, to name the most important factors. I will end with a critique of *Zoopolis* by arguing that the idea of different relations to animals with corresponding moral obligations is plausible and insightful, but that the framework of citizenship that the authors use is implausible. Donaldson and Kymlicka argue for applying the concept of citizenship to make sense of our duties.
towards animals. The fact that animals and humans are governed by the same institutions doesn’t suffice to accord animals citizenship I’m afraid. Nor do the possibilities for animal agency, participation and cooperation in human communities prove their citizenship status. I agree with Donaldson and Kymlicka that because we have removed domesticated animals from the wild and integrated them in our societies by making them dependent on us through breeding and altering them, we should somehow include them and make them members of our society. It is indeed the same combination of dependency and causality of which Burgess-Jackson speaks of that enables this moral duty on our part. Donaldson and Kymlicka claim that we use the notion of citizenship to catch this idea of being a member of a human society. But the notion of citizenship is not universal in the sense that it doesn’t even apply to all humans, in all societies, through all eras. Citizenship entails being a specific kind of member, namely an active member with duties and responsibilities that cannot be extrapolated that easily to other animals, or for that matter to other societies e.g. dictatorships or totalitarian regimes. Even political representation doesn’t require animals to possess citizenship themselves, as is proven by the political situation of the Netherlands. Unfortunately therefore the framework of citizenship theory rather obscures the goal of formulating a more encompassing theory of justice. Indeed, by using concepts with a normative content they don’t seem to realize that animals are incapable of grasping the normative content of these concepts. Although the three main types of human animal relations Donaldson and Kymlicka formulate in order to clarify our different moral obligations towards animals are insightful, they go too far by wanting to construct a complete theory of obligation within the framework of citizenship theory. Needless to say, I think we should devise a better concept in order to catch this notion of animal membership in human societies, without thereby undermining the normative content of what a citizen is supposed to be.