



Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals

Marc Bekoff, Jessica Pierce

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Scientists have long counseled against interpreting animal behavior in terms of human emotions, warning that such anthropomorphizing limits our ability to understand animals as they really are. Yet what are we to make of a female gorilla in a German zoo who spent days mourning the death of her baby? Or a wild female elephant who cared for a younger one after she was injured by a rambunctious teenage male? Or a rat who refused to push a lever for food when he saw that doing so caused another rat to be shocked? Aren't these clear signs that animals have recognizable emotions and moral intelligence? With *Wild Justice* Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce unequivocally answer yes.

Marrying years of behavioral and cognitive research with compelling and moving anecdotes, Bekoff and Pierce reveal that animals exhibit a broad repertoire of moral behaviors, including fairness, empathy, trust, and reciprocity. Underlying these behaviors is a complex and nuanced range of emotions, backed by a high degree of intelligence and surprising behavioral flexibility. Animals, in short, are incredibly adept social beings, relying on rules of conduct to navigate intricate social networks that are essential to their survival. Ultimately, Bekoff and Pierce draw the astonishing conclusion that there is no moral gap between humans and other species: morality is an evolved trait that we unquestionably share with other social mammals.

Sure to be controversial, *Wild Justice* offers not just cutting-edge science, but a provocative call to rethink our relationship with—and our responsibilities toward—our fellow animals.

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Dhe says

le premesse erano più che buone. gli autori son personaggi interessanti e l'accoppiata sembrava promettente: bekoff è un professore di ecologia, con all'attivo numerosi studi riguardanti il comportamento animale, alcuni dei suoi libri sono stati anche tradotti in italiano, ma non li ho mai letti. pierce è una scrittrice e una studiosa di filosofia, tutto faceva ben pensare, dagli autori all'argomento trattato: la moralità nel mondo animale.

avendo letto già numerosi libri di etologia ero curiosa rispetto a questa sfaccettatura dell'argomento, ma devo essere onesta, mi aspettavo di più da questo libro.

il sommario è interessante: la moralità nelle società animali, i fondamenti di giustizia selvaggia, la cooperazione, l'empatia, la giustizia, posizioni contrarie alla moralità animale. ciò che lo è stato meno è la trattazione. ora devo fare un piccolo passo indietro: questi due autori sono i pionieri di questo aspetto dell'etologia. mai nessun libro è stato pubblicato sull'argomento. in effetti l'argomento è tabù nel campo etologico, sostenere che gli animali provano emozioni, empatia, che sono "etici" nel loro comportamento è qualcosa che viene detto a volte in modo ufficioso ma raramente in modo ufficiale, e quando avviene ecco che cosa accade: si afferma una cosa, poi si mettono "i puntini sulle i" puntualizzando cosa si intende, le eccezioni al caso... in pratica si dice una cosa e si nega poche righe dopo di averla detta. è la stessa cosa che è accaduta nel libro, purtroppo.

il nostro modo di vedere gli animali, soprattutto allo stato selvatico è piuttosto semplicistico, dovuto prevalentemente al modo di rappresentare gli animali in televisione: la dura legge del mondo animale, la sopravvivenza. gli animali sono istintivi, non ragionano nelle loro azioni. tutto quello che fanno è legato alla loro sopravvivenza o al massimo a quella del gruppo o della specie. tutto normale, se non fosse che ci sono animali che escono da questo schema. come si possono intendere i comportamenti altruistici al di fuori della propria specie? che motivo ha un elefante di aiutare una gazzella mettendosi in pericolo anch'esso? può essere che provi empatia, che capisca la sua paura e voglia soccorrerla? e la giustizia? gli animali hanno un concetto di giustizia? in alcuni gruppi l'elemento che "ruba il cibo" spesso viene isolato fino a quando non si adeguà alle regole del gruppo. mentre questo sembra legato alla sopravvivenza del gruppo se l'elemento viene isolato anche se fa solo i dispetti o non sta al gioco, che significato può avere?

come dicevo l'argomento è decisamente interessante. per chi ha animali in casa molti dei concetti espressi sono banali, scontati. chi ha un gatto o un cane sa che quando si sta male sono particolarmente affettuosi e tendono a non mollarci un attimo, fino a che non ci rimettiamo in salute. si può chiamare empatia, affetto o con qualunque altro nome ma è una situazione in cui ci si riconosce senza troppa difficoltà. ho trovato particolarmente interessante la difficoltà degli autori nello spiegare concetti, a volte banali, comprendendo che la loro difficoltà stava essenzialmente nel timore di essere fraintesi nell'affermare che molti animali provano sensazioni ed emozioni molto simili a quelle umane. dire che un animale prova "amore" è rischiosissimo per uno studioso di etologia, perchè significa antropizzare un comportamento animale, il che pare essere il peggior sbaglio che è possibile commettere in quel campo.

la mia sensazione (personalissima ovviamente) è che sia più un libro per gli addetti ai lavori. ricco di paroloni, riferimenti ad altri testi più tecnici (più di questo libro?!?)... per darvi un'idea la bibliografia alla fine del libro occupa più di 20 pagine! l'idea come dicevo è buona, ma gli autori hanno passato più tempo a dire cosa avrebbero spiegato (i primi 2 capitoli su 6 totali sono un continuo "come vedremo successivamente") e come, perchè, in che situazioni la loro conclusione è valida piuttosto che a raccontare episodi, casi e riflessioni sugli stessi.

non mi sento di sconsigliarlo in assoluto, per certi versi può essere interessante, soprattutto per chi ama una tipologia di libro in cui la saggistica e le definizioni la fanno da padrone, per quanto mi riguarda cercherò altri testi sull'argomento, ma meno "professionali" e più emozionali. come sempre vi ringrazio per l'attenzione!

????? ?????? says

I have to admit that this book is completely different. I respect and appreciate the book for its scientific subject and ethical and moral value. I found this book quite distinct from the intellectual, historical and literary books in general. The book taught me that all animals deserve respect, care, compassion and appreciation and how we all should be responsible toward animals.

In this book, Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce deliver the moral behaviors of animals and the book focuses the perceptions of animals, their behaviors, and even their emotions. Some of the scientific studies in this book contributes to refute and demolish the faulty hypothesis that entrenched in our minds for many years such as animals are less important than humans and that belief came from the idea that animals don't have the ability to think. Bekoff and Pierce provide indisputable evidence and arguments that some of the actions of animals should be classified as moral and animals do think and do have morality. Also, the book is against the prevailing idea that animals like to dominate and compete with each other. In addition, this book shows the importance of having balance between nature life and justice in the animal world.

Notice,

Arab readers who are interested in the world of animals and their lives and their actions and behaviors will accept a lot of the credibility of this book beside that they would prefer the scientific studies especially the studies that done by names such as John, Edward, Michael Suzan, or William to studies that done by Fatemah, Ashraf, Ahmed, or AbdulAziz.

Cheryl says

This book brings together science and ethics and thus can be appreciated by a wide audience. Bekoff and Pierce challenge the anthropocentric worldview that infests so much of our thinking, especially in discussions of what sorts of beings can act morally. By inviting us to consider a scientific definition of morality from an evolutionary standpoint, Bekoff and Pierce provide indisputable evidence and arguments that some of the actions of animals should be classified as moral. As an animal ethicist and ethics professor, I appreciate this book for two major reasons: (1) it encourages us to rethink the definition of what it means to be a moral being, while drawing our attention to the fact that there are types of moral actors that fall inbetween "full blown moral agents" and "nonmoral beings", and (2) it incites us to question WHY some individuals continue to deny all of the science that supports the conclusion that animals are moral beings (the answer: to maintain a world of human supremacy). Of all the books I had read on animal ethics and animal minds, this is, without a doubt, my favorite.

Henrique Maia says

If you are familiar with the works of the likes of Frans de Waal, Edward O. Wilson, Jane Goodall, [insert name of reputed ethologist/biologist], the subject matter of this book will not come to you as a surprise. In a way, its preisse, that of animals having a sense of justice, morality, fairness, all being evolved traits, is just a given. However, when you start to read the book, you know you are not the primary target audience of its message.

The book presents its case in defense of the notion of Wild Justice, a sense of justice, morality, fairness that

some social animals have, thus blurring even more the lines that separate the human animal from all other non-human animals. The case is more philosophical, or theoretical, than practical; that is, the authors rely on the works of primatologists, ethologists, biologists, etc, to draw conclusions allowing them to question the long standing assumptions that morality is an exclusive human characteristic.

The text tends to be a bit repetitive, the text seeming to be rotating in some way, the same idea popping up again and again with a very similar presentation. Is it intentional? Is this the result of having the text composed by two separate authors? In any case, that's not as bad as it sounds, for the repetitions allow you to remember, or at least to give a second (or third, fourth, ...) thought about the issue that is being put forth.

Does it deserve a reading? If you are familiar with the biology/ethology field, maybe not. If you have a philosophical bent and like to explore the ethical dimensions open up by the current consensus on the animal behavior front, than this book is for you. For in it you'll have a good summary of the observations, experiences, hypotheses and conclusions on animal behavior research.

Lorien says

I was a bit disappointed with the lack of science in this book, however, the authors make no claim that it is intended to be a scientific study of morality in non-human animals. Rather, the authors, a biologist and a philosopher, intend to raise the idea of morality in non-humans for consideration in the philosophical and scientific (as well as lay) communities. Their premise is essentially (I am oversimplifying) that certain behaviors in non-humans that are called "pro-social," are labeled "moral" in humans. Therefore (they argue), why not label these behaviors "moral" in non-humans as well as humans? The book is a challenge to philosophers to begin to expand their consideration of morality to include animals, and to scientists to devise behavioral studies that more accurately reflect an animal's natural habitat (and that are more respectful of the animal's being), in order to discover how far these "moral" behaviors extend. In a sense, it is a radical little book.

The authors restrict their argument to a few animal species, including most primates, some social carnivores (specifically canids), elephants, rats and some birds. These species show behaviors that appear to be akin to some of the components of morality in humans, such as reciprocity, a sense of fair play, and altruism. As I stated above, while the authors do cite to some animal study results (and Marc Bekoff is a biologist who studies canids), the science is pretty much on the "gee-whiz" level, and the bulk of the book is devoted to their philosophical argument. So it won't satisfy anyone wanting a hard science argument before they get on board with non-human morality and its attendant right jab to the edifice of human uniqueness. I'd actually suggest reading this book along with Marc Hauser's Moral Minds, which has an entire section detailing the study of behaviors such as reciprocity, altruism, cooperation, deception, and punishment in non-human animals, for some further insight into the scientific work done in this sphere (although that's not a "science" book either).

All that said, Wild Justice is a fast, easy, provocative read, and well worth reading, especially because the study of animal minds is a really exciting field right now.

Elaine says

Philosophers have pretty much judged that nonhuman animals can not act morally. On what do they base this judgment? The fact that only humans are capable of moral behavior. Well, if you define morality as something only humans have, then of course, you can say only humans are moral. That, of course, is circular reasoning. It also ignores Occam's Razor, which says that for something to be true, it can't rest on faulty hypotheses, and *a priori* judgements automatically fail the test of Occam's Razor.

But, why blame only philosophers? For years, scientists have claimed that animals are just a bundle of learned responses. Even before modern Behaviorists insisted that judging animals' behavior, one must always start with the premise that animals don't think or reason. Again only human animals were considered to be capable of thinking. Again, the reasoning is circular: if you define thinking as something only humans do, then you don't acknowledge the possibility that other animals think.

At this point, I could go on and show that animals do think and do have morality. But I won't. This book and Mark Rowland's *Can Animals be Moral* both give plenty of examples. Moreover, you'll find incontrovertible evidence of animal thinking on my blog <http://dogsandwolves-smartoldlady.blogspot.com>....

Scientists with no preconceived notions to defend, have found that all social mammals have brain structures that correlate with human ones for compassion, fairness, love, and other emotions. The only thing humans have that animals don't is language, but in order to encode anything into language, you must have thought of it pre verbally. Before you can find the words and syntax to encode in speech, you have to have had a nonverbal feeling. In fact, everything we say is first experienced non-verbally. The Executive function of the brain has to find the words and syntax that match the nonverbal thought. Humans aren't aware of what they've been thinking until it presents itself in language, but that doesn't negate the fact that initial thoughts are not in linguistic form. How could they be? Something has to decide what words and grammar to use to express what a person has decided or has been thinking.

To give you an example of how homo-centric human scholars can be, consider Descartes. He, preceding B.F. Skinner by decades, decreed that animals feel no pain. When "scientists" cut living dogs up without using anesthesia, the screaming and howling of pain was considered an automatic reflex. Why would this "automatic reflex" take the form of screaming as humans do when they are subjected to horrible pain? For centuries, however, scientists, medical doctors and just plain folk never thought to ask that question.

Just as humans are not just bundles of responses to stimuli, neither are animals.

Marc Bekoff cites data observed by impartial humans that show animals obeying moral imperatives and solving new problems without being conditioned to do so. This book like his *The Emotional Lives of Animals* is well written, and avoids pseudo-scientific jargon. Even if you don't share a love of animals with him--or me--you'll find a lot of thought provoking observations in this book. He sees nonhuman animals as part of a cline from non-humans to humans. The difference between me and my dogs is one of degree, not of kind. In fact, I can understand what my dogs are conveying to me because they do so much as humans do. Eye contact, moaning or happy sounds are familiar to me from raising four babies

If you're sick of novels, try this novel presentation of the moral lives of animals based upon careful, nonjudgmental observation of their actions and reactions.

I have to admit that I have read Mark Bekoff's works --and other works--while researching my forthcoming

book, *Humans, Dogs, and Civilization*

Gustavo Ladeira says

O autor introduz alguns conceitos básicos, inclusive uma ótima discussão sobre a cautela necessária nesse ramo da ciência (como os riscos da antropomorfia e de uma visão "mecanizada" do comportamento animal, onde nenhum comportamento tem relação com moralidade ou cognição).

Ele então determina três comportamentos que servem de base para a moralidade: cooperação, empatia e senso de justiça. O resto do livro segue no debate filosófico e científico desses temas, com exemplos da literatura (muitas vezes anedóticos, mas o autor é bem honesto quanto a isso).

Uma introdução muito boa ao Comportamento Animal/Etologia.

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Shaun says

For a subject I am intensely interested in, this was an intensely dull read. Some of the anecdotes of animal behavior we're interesting but I had heard a lot of them before. I also found interesting the authors perspective on anecdotes as evidence and their defense of those who get criticised for anthropomorphising animals in biological and philosophical discussions of animals. The overall sentiment of the book is one that I can definitely get behind but I thought the writing let it down.

Abu Hasan says

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Nikki says

What can I say about Wild Justice? Nothing great, that is for sure. I should be the target audience for Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals. I hold a degree in Biology and I am a vegan on moral/ethical grounds. But I found this book to be dull, dry, slow, basic and extremely repetitive. Oh boy was it repetitive.

The preface itself is an extremely long winded summary of the book that seemed never ending. It literally seemed by the writing choices to be on the verge of ending a dozen times or so but you turn the page and it is still going and going and going. *sigh* Then you think you are going to get into the nitty gritty when the chapters start but all you get is dull repetition and bland attempts at covering the topic at hand. Circles, so many circles we traveled in. I cannot even count the number of times we were told an example was coming up only for no example to come. THEN we would be told "for example" and it wasn't even necessarily the example we were promised. At this point though I just could not come to care.

The lack of science was also a major hangup for me. The only times scientific data was even mentioned was during brief summaries of studies they noted. Unfortunately many of the studies they used employed animal testing to support the claims of empathy or other evidence of morality. For some crazy reason I just cannot get on board with injecting mice with acid to cause them incredible pain just to see how the other mice react (who subsequently also get injected). So let me get this straight, Mark Berkoff who supports animal rights uses vivisection cruelty in his book to support this philosophical crap? Way to go.

Perhaps I am not the target audience, perhaps the target audience is actually philosophy fans as this book was extremely heavy on the philosophy and extremely weak on science. It had far too much philosophy, turns out I really am not much of a fan of philosophy. Are philosophers naturally repetitive? If so I'll avoid any such topic in the future.

This book is an insomnia cure, duller than most biology and other class textbooks I've read over the years. If you enjoy reading a grad student's thesis in philosophy by all means, read this and you'll get about the same amount of enjoyment.

Mohamed Al says

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Lina AL Ojaili says

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