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John Rawls and Animal Ethics

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JOHN RAWLS AND ANIMAL ETHICS

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In my paper, I explore the place of animals in John Rawls influential political/ moral philosophy. I draw mainly from his later Political Liberalism and also from his A Theory of Justice. Other sources include Peter Carruthers The Animals Issue and Annette Baiers Knowing our place in the animal world.

Rawls development of his theory of justice over the twenty years spanning between his two books has been a source of controversy. He has redirected his focus from a more ethical-driven motive to find the best moral/ political theory for societies, to a strong declaration of the strictly political (rather than moral) nature of his Political Liberalism, which is designed, he claims, to simply find a way to compromise among multiple equally valid theories.

As Rawls work has been immensely influential, concern has grown for the place of animals in his theory. Uncertainty has arisen due to Rawls changing philosophy. Being a contractualist theory, and owing to its focus on rational agreement, it has in the been used to justify the exclusion of animals from moral consideration; Peter Carruthers attempts this line in his book. However, I try to show in my paper that this view is mistaken, my inspiration being drawn from Baier.

I believe that the inclusion of animals in Rawls theory is not only possible, but less discordant with Rawls own feelings.