

Framing a New Interspecies Ethics: The Role of Care Theory in the Laboratory

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Professor Marie Fox | 26 October 2016 | 1800

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Recent feminist scholarship has applied care ethics to human relations with non-human animals. In valorizing emotion, nurture and relationship with animals, it has offered a valuable corrective to masculinist accounts of animal ethics. Within the laboratory, the recent ‘affective turn’ in social studies of science has brought a renewed focus on embodiment, care and affective relations in lab work, and generated awareness of how care has been repressed in experimental science. Taking up these ideas I aim to examine the potential of care theory to prompt a re-thinking of ethico-legal obligations to ‘laboratory animals’. I argue that care theory, steeped as it is in relationality rather than animal capabilities or characteristics, serves to problematise human exceptionalism and has much to offer in re-thinking of interspecies relations, by bringing the embodied lives of individual animals and those who care for them to the fore. I advocate understanding caring as an embodied practice or ‘doing’, entailing an ethical commitment on the part of the individual who cares. In this process I seek to show that ‘thinking with animals’ allows us to critically assess how care has been theorised and reveals possible limitations and blindspots in current paradigms of caring.

Marie Fox is the Queen Victoria Professor of Law, in the School of Law and Social Justice at the University of Liverpool. Her research focuses on legal governance of human and animal bodies and legal theories of embodiment. She is currently working on projects which explore the policing of the human/non-human boundary and the role of technologies in mediating this relation and (with Michael Thomson) which examine the ethics and legality of genital cutting of children.

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