TAKING OUR FEELINGS TOWARDS ANIMALS SERIOUSLY

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Much of contemporary animal ethics can be read as a reaction to its rationalistic roots, trying to correct for an epistemically impoverished picture of moral cognition. This "affective turn" in animal ethics which seeks to take seriously the role of affective cognition in moral deliberation has been very fruitful but it has also resulted in a tendency to take affective intuitions as evidence against alienating, demanding or repulsive conclusions from traditional, principle-based universalist ethics.
I argue that this is a mistake. Rather than elevating our affects to the position of evidence, taking their role in moral cognition seriously should actually make us *more* scrupulous in their use, not less. If moral cognition inescapably involves the use of feelings and emotions, I argue, then we must be especially careful to keep our feelings and emotions free from biases and fallacies. This will involve more intense alienation from and reevaluation of our affective intuition, not less.

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1. Introduction

In this text, I argue that even as animal ethics takes more seriously the role that the affective part of our cognition plays in moral deliberation, we should remain with the impartial, universalist ambitions of early, more reductively rationalist animal ethics.

Much of contemporary animal ethics[3] can be read as a reaction to its rationalistic roots. The mainstream of animal ethics of the last 50 years, what has since then been termed «moral individualism in animal ethics»[4], while regularly lauded for its undeniable accomplishments, nonetheless seems fundamentally deficient to many of its critics. This deficiency is regularly traced back to individualism's rationalism. This is not to say that the current crop of animal ethicists are suspect of rationality – quite to the contrary, rationality, and even rational choice[5] have retained a prominent place in animal ethics. Rather, the criticism targets a *reductionist* tendency in the underpinning rationalism of traditional animal ethics. This criticism takes a number of forms, but one important way it should be understood is as an accusation of *epistemic poverty.* There is more going on in moral cognition, the charge goes, than individualists in the tradition of Peter Singer[6] and Tom Regan[7] are considering. They reduce moral thinking

[3] *E.g.* A. Crary, "Minding What Already Matters: a Critique of Moral Individualism", in *Philosophical Topics*, vol. 38, n. 1, 2010, pp. 17-49; L. Gruen, *Entangled Empathy: an Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals*, New York (NY), Lantern Books, 2015; J. Donovan, "Attention to Suffering: a Feminist Caring Ethic for the Treatment of Animals", in *Journal of Social Philosophy*, vol. 27, n. 1, 1996, pp. 81-102; E. Aaltola, "The Anthropocentric Paradigm and the Possibility of Animal Ethics", in *Ethics and the Environment*, vol. 15, n. 1, 2010, pp. 27-50: 27; R. Acampora, "The Affective Turn in Animal Ethics", in *Relations. Beyond Anthropocentrism*, vol. 11, 2024, pp. 9-23.
[4] A. Crary, "Minding What Already Matters", cit.
[5] *E.g.* C. Abbate, "The Epistemology of Meat-Eating", in *Social Epistemology*, vol. 35, n. 1, 2021, pp. 67-84.
[6] P. Singer, *Animal Liberation*, New York (NY), Ecco Pr, 1975.
[7] T. Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, Berkley (CA), University of California Press, 1983.

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to the instance of rational choice based on abstract principles, and thereby reduce morality to a sorting of already pre-established, neutral and quasi-scientific facts into "moral" and "immoral". They thereby ignore important avenues of figuring out what is important – things like moral perception, attention and affective attunement.[8] This criticism is no doubt correct. The image of rationality of which Singer and Regan work off, with many in animal ethics following their lead, is overly reductive. It operates on a fiction of a mental faculty with a pure and unfettered access to the world in which the affects are either mere concomitants or even contaminants of morally correct choice. That is not how our cognition works,[9] nor should we want it to be. Affects are an important part of our cognition, and neither unrelated nor merely supplementary to getting our thinking – moral and nonmoral – on the right track. They are, rather, an essential component of it. Talk about the «affective turn»[10] in animal ethics is, in this way, highly productive and long overdue.

Because I will come back to them further down, let me here quickly enumerate the three main points of criticized reductionism inherent in rationalism's picture of moral cognition: 1. it (at least implicitly) takes moral cognition to be mainly working when one is actively considering a choice in a moral situation, 2. takes that choice to be a matter of appealing to abstract principles and 3. takes all of that cognition to be ideally an unemotional, dispassionate affair.

As a result of a shifting focus from supposedly unsentimental "rational" cognition to also including affective responses in legitimate moral thinking, many areas previously not on the radar of animal ethicists – such as the treatment of dead animals[11] – have become subject of discussion in animal ethics; while principles previously straightforwardly accepted by the

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[8] *Cfr*. E. Aaltola, "Love and Animals: Simone Weil, Iris Murdoch and Attention as Love", in A. Martin (ed. by), *The Routledge Handbook of Love in Philosophy*, New York (NY)-London, Routledge, 2018 pp. 193-204; J. Donovan, "Attention to Suffering", cit.; R. Acampora, "The Affective Turn in Animal Ethics", cit.; E. Linder, "What Is It Like to See an Animal? Self-Examination and the Moral Relevance of Ordinary Descriptions of Animals", in U. D. Leibowitz, K. Coko, I. Nevo (ed. by) *Philosophical Theorizing and Its Limits: Anti-Theory in Ethics and Philosophy of Science*, Basel, Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025, pp. 141-157.

[9] *Cfr*. D. E. Melnikoff, J. A. Bargh, "The Mythical Number Two", in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 22, n. 4, 2018, pp. 280-293; A. Scarantino, "Insights and Blindspots of the Cognitivist Theory of Emotions", in *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 61, n. 4, 2010, pp. 729-768.

[10] R. Acampora, "The Affective Turn in Animal Ethics", cit.

[11] S. Coghlan, "An Irreducible Understanding of Animal Dignity", in *Journal of Social Philosophy*, vol. 55, n. 1, 2023, pp. 124-142.

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vanguard of animal ethics – such as the equality in warrant of consideration between wild and domesticated animals[12] – are being questioned. Most importantly, animal ethics in its orthodox form was characterized by recommendations of radical revisions in our moral outlook. Beside the call to treat animals (ostensibly) as equally important as humans, these approaches also (ostensibly) condemn the preferential treatment of pets over wild animals and higher concerns for elephants and rhinos than for trout and krill. The anti-reductionist contingent, in contrast, takes an ecumenical approach: rather than declaring a large part of our moral impulses as illicit, they try to integrate them into their theories. This does not mean that their recommendations aren't also radical when compared to the values of general society.[13] However, the failure of that society to conform to these recommendations is not characterized as stemming from a tension between our intuitions and what morality demands. Rather it is, more often than not, characterized as a result of ignorance of the facts[14] or ideological blinders.[15] So instead of saying that our society's refusal to treat animals with respect stems from an inherent speciesist tendency, they might instead say that our authentic intuitions are falsified or obfuscated, *e.g*. by modern capitalist society's alienation from the production of its food. Accordingly, (authentic) intuitive resistance against a conclusion of moral theory is frequently given the status of evidence against that theory. Demandingness,[16] alienation[17] and the apparent inability to justify preferential treatment of individuals we stand in special relationships with[18] are taken to be decisive drawbacks to theories' conclusions. They are taken to be drawbacks because they result in a sort of cognitive dissonance with our affective intuitions or gut feeling; and since our expanded picture of moral cognition asks us to take seriously our affective and gut-level reactions, such dissonance is a sign that our deliberation has been faulty.

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[12] C. Palmer, "What (If Anything) Do We Owe Wild Animals?", in *Between the Species* vol. 16, n. 1, 2012, pp. 15-38.
[13] *E.g*. S. Donaldson, W. Kymlicka, *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.
[14] *Cfr*. C. Abbate, "The Epistemology of Meat-Eating", cit.
[15] J. Donovan, "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory", in *Signs* vol. 15, n. 2, 1990, pp. 350-375.
[16] C. Palmer, "What (If Anything) Do We Owe Wild Animals?", cit.
[17] L. Gruen, *Entangled Empathy*, cit.
[18] R. Hursthouse, "Applying Virtue Ethics to Our Treatment of the Other Animals" in ead., J. Annas, J. Reid (ed. by), *Virtue and Action: Selected Papers*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022, pp. 136-155.

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This, I claim, is taking the wrong lesson from the original insight of non-reductionist animal ethics. The value of affect lies not in its providing us evidence in the form of intuitions, but in its role as a tool to guide our thinking. Elevating affects and emotions to their proper place as productive parts of moral cognition and problem solving means that they can only ever play the same kind of preliminary and revisable role as any other part of deliberation. Far from insulating emotional and affective responses against accusations of irrelevance or fallaciousness, accepting affective cognition as part of rational moral actually commits us to applying just those standards of correct deliberation to them we apply to supposedly "cold" cognitive processes. This means trusting them only as far as we do not see biases and fallacies of thinking in them, and allowing for their discrediting and debunking in light of more complete deliberation. My deep feeling that I should value my cat more than the animals I feed to her, if it is to play any role in my deliberation at all, must be open to be questioned and checked if it is well-formed and not, for example, dressing up an egoistic desire as morally relevant.

Taking seriously the role that emotions play in moral cognition, when done earnestly, will not lead us to an emotional equilibrium where we can, e.g., use our love and care for our cat to justify feeding it slaughtered animals, and where we no longer have to accept uncomfortable strategies of harm mitigation without giving equally harm-based reasons. Quite to the contrary, accepting that our compassion, empathy and impulse of care, are part of our moral cognition, and therefore equally as revisable as any other part of our deliberation, will make things harder for us. It will make dealing with animals more uncomfortable, not less, as we confront the fact that we are unable to live up to the moral ideal the vulnerability of animals demands of us and that the amendment of that ideal to more closely align with our moral feelings is not a viable way out.

2. Affective Intuitions and Their Warrant

«What Do We Owe Other Animals?» is a book written by Anja Jauernig and Bob Fischer[19] that is ostensibly about the question of whether people have a moral obligation to be vegan.

[19] B. Fischer, A. Jaurnig, *What Do We Owe Other Animals?: a Debate*, London, Routledge, 2023.

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Jauernig takes the animal rights perspective that we do indeed have such an obligation while Bob Fisher takes the position, rare in animal ethics, that we do not. There are a number of arguments fielded by both sides, but I want to focus here on what Fischer calls the «Anti-Equal Consideration Argument»:

> 1. If the Equal Consideration Principle were true, then various radical conclusions would follow [*e.g.*: We would have to give animals citizenship].
> 2. Those radical conclusions are false.
> 3. So, the Equal Consideration Principle is false.[20]

Fischer likens this argument to the Moorean[21] one against the real world skeptic: whatever premises the skeptic may bring forth to convince us that the world may not exist are less plausible than any of our ordinary judgments about the world. But if our ordinary judgments about the world are true, it follows that the world does indeed exist. So the argument of the skeptic, whether it is sound or not, fails because its premises are not as plausible as the intuitions its conclusion would disprove. In the same way, we can reject the Equal Consideration Principle (ECP) if it conflicts with more certain intuitions. Since the ECP conflicts, for example, with the intuition that we should put vastly more money into human healthcare than into animal healthcare, and since this intuition, to Fisher, is a practical certainty, the ECP shares a fate with the skeptic's premises. It must be discarded to maintain the truth of our very certain intuitions.

Anyone interested in animal ethics is liable to balk at this argument. On the one hand, it has serious philosophical problems. Those I will mention a little further down. But on the other hand, allowing arguments of this form risks undermining the whole enterprise of animal ethics. In animal ethics, we are most usually confronted with convictions which society at large finds unproblematic - say that one may freely confine and use animals for human use – and criticize those wildly held positions. If the fact that most of us intuitively have a high degree of confidence in a position was enough to discredit arguments to the contrary, such

[20] *Ivi*, p. 104.
[21] Fischer does not mention Moore by name but I will nonetheless take for granted that the generic «argument against the skeptic» he talks about is ultimately indebted to Moore.

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criticism would become, if not impossible, so at least toothless. This is not to say that animal ethics must necessarily come out against anthropocentrism, or for the ECP; only that, if we think that there is a meaningful discussion to be had here, its proposals cannot be dismissed just because they conflict with our current intuitions, no matter how deeply held.[22]

And yet, this argumentative structure is appealed to frequently, albeit usually only peripherally, in modern animal ethics. Cheryl Abbate,[23] for example, argues that utilitarianism and deontology both fail as frameworks for animal ethics because they fail to satisfy certain propositions animal ethicists agree on. These range from positions that are indeed well established by animal ethics, like that causing animals unnecessary suffering is wrong,[24] to ones which it is relatively difficult to find well-formulated arguments for in the literature. The position, for example, that it is wrong to participate in practices which are made possible by the unnecessary suffering of animals, even if by so participating we do not cause any suffering ourselves,[25] may feel right to many; but the exclusion of any, even the most remote, harm to any creature gives that feeling of rightness a load-bearing role.

Abbate is quick to point out that she is leaving the theoretical issue of the grounding of these intuitions aside but she takes anyone interested in animal liberation to be likely to be already committed to them. And while for some of the intuitions she appeals to, there can indeed be found ample argument in- and outside of animal ethics, others, such as the above mentioned, are justified more or less with an appeal to intuitive agreement.

That latter case presents a mirror of Fischer's argument, and it is an argument that can be found in texts of contemporary animal ethics, though most usually only on the periphery or as asides. When Clare Palmer[26] cautions us to take seriously the possibility that we do not have obligations to help truly wild animals, she also briefly appeals to intuitions and

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[22] What I am saying here is similar to what H. Rydenfelt "Controversial Views and Moral Realism", in *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* vol. 44, n. 2, 2023, pp. 165-176, argues for bioethics; that there (and, I argue, also in animal ethics), the possible truth of even very controversial views is taken as a base assumption of the discipline.

[23] C. Abbate. "Virtues and Animals: A Minimally Decent Ethic for Practical Living in a Non-Ideal World", in *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* vol. 27, 2014, pp. 909-929.

[24] *Cfr.* T. Köllen, D. Schneeberger, "Avoiding Unnecessary Suffering: Towards a Moral Minimum Standard for Humans' Responsibility for Animal Welfare", in *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility* vol. 32, n. 4, 2023, pp. 1139-1149.

[25] C. Abbate, "Virtues and Animals", cit., p. 911.

[26] C. Palmer, "What (If Anything) Do We Owe Wild Animals?", cit.

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psychological constraints;[27] to the intuition, on the one hand, that we think that parents have special obligations to their children;[28] and to the psychological limitation that conventional positions (but perhaps even contextual ones!) «commit us to too much with respect to what we owe to wild animals»[29]. That latter concern is common in newer animal ethics and bears resemblance to Gruen's[30] case, who takes a feeling of *alienation* an agent may feel towards principle based ethics as a central motivation to move away from it. Gruen, it is important to note, takes there to be two distinctive problems principle based theories have, both of which she calls «alienation»[31]. One is that they alienate us from possible interpretations of the context of a moral situation by flattening the richness of our experience. This is what I think is right with the affective turn. The other, only superficially related worry she gives is that abstract principles alienate us from the things that we already, antecedently, take to matter. This latter sense of the alienation worry is what I take to be analogous to the other examples I gave; the fact that different things seem important to us than what our best theories recommend can only be taken as evidence against those theories if "seeming" – that is, common intuition – is taken to play the role of evidence in deliberation.

Now, these sorts of arguments rarely make up the main thrust of these arguments[32] but they appear often enough in the margins of these views that we should examine them more closely.

What is appealed to here – and this is true as much for Fischer and Abbate as it is for, *e.g.*, defenders of animal dignity like Peter Kunzmann and Simon Coghlan[33] – is what I will term *affective intuitions*. Affective intuitions are intuitions on the level of gut feeling. They are comparable with a «feeling of rightness»[34] and are not the result of arguments but precede

[27] It should be reiterated that this happens on the periphery of her argument. She does not *only* or even *primarily* appeal to these considerations, nor are these appeals essential for her argument. What is important here is that the way she does appeal to them is in the form I am talking about here.
[28] *Ivi*, p. 30.
[29] *Ivi*, p. 34.
[30] L. Gruen, *Entangled Empathy*, cit.
[31] *Ivi*., chapter 1.
[32] Though sometimes they do, see *e.g.* P. Kunzmann, "Die 'Würde der Kreatur' und die Frage nach dem moralischen Status von Pflanzen und Tieren bei gentechnischen Eingriffen", *Journal für Verbraucherschutz und Lebensmittelsicherheit* vol. 4, n. 3, 2009: pp. 305-311.
[33] S. Coghlan, "An Irreducible Understanding of Animal Dignity", cit.
[34] V. A. Thompson, J. A. Prowse Turner, G. Pennycook, "Intuition, Reason, and Metacognition", *Cognitive Psychology* vol. 63, n. 3, 2011, pp. 107-140.

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them as common-sense reactions. Reed Elizabeth Loder,[35] for example, cites the «unified groan» we share when thinking of grossly genetically engineered animals as evidence for the existence of dignity harmed by such genetic engineering. Such affective intuitions contrast with the "well-considered intuitions" often appealed to in all areas of philosophy and which tend to be used not as evidence but more commonly as means of directing attention towards a specific argument, or as the psychological result of such an argument if it succeeds.

However, affective intuitions are not apt to be used in a Moorean argument (and neither are well-considered ones, for that matter). For Moore, what makes an intuition like "here is a hand (and it is really there, in the ordinary sense of the word)" an apt counter to skepticism is not that *he* feels it to be certain, nor that this feeling is widely shared. What makes it, to Moore, a counter to skepticism, is that it is certain *tout court*, that is to say, certain even to the skeptic. Moore is not pointing out to the skeptic that he, Moore, disagrees, he is explaining how the skeptic's own commitment to the reality of his hands ought to undermine their confidence in their skeptical argument. Moore does not just feel like there is a hand there, as far as he is concerned, he *knows* that there is, and he knows it because it is self-evidently true, something which ought to impress the skeptic as much as it does Moore. The intuition necessary for a Moorean argument has to be one about which we reasonably expect *universal assent*. This is something Henry Sidgwick[36] calls a *rational* intuition, an intellectual seeming which is in no need of further grounding because it is itself part of the grounding set of thinking itself.

Whether there are any such rational intuitions has been heavily doubted, and there may indeed not be any. But it is this demanding version of intuitions that would be necessary for a Moorean argument in Fisher's style to succeed. It is not enough to feel something, no matter how deeply, for it to function as a convincing premise for an argument. That feeling must allow us some inference about the world - in the case of a rational intuition, about cognition, and about cognition's relation to reality.

This requirement illustrates well the allure of principle-based moral theory. If we can trace back our thinking to a set of non-optional, universally shared convictions, then we may be

[35] R. E. Loder, "Animal Dignity", in *Animal Law*, vol. 23, n. 1, 2016, pp. 1-64.
[36] H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, ed. by E. E. C. Jones, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1874.

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able to reconstruct from them moral conclusions that we all must accept on pain of incoherence. If the principles we derive, we derive from rational intuitions (or equivalently basic propositions), we end up with a moral system where we can use the Moorean argument to defend all its tenets, even if they (as, with this method, they are liable to be) end up unintuitive in the actual use case. If someone doubts one of its recommendations, we can simply point out that what motivates that recommendation is a proposition that they themselves have more confidence in than in whatever could be motivating their doubt. To Fischer, the rationalist could then say that his argument cuts the other way: even if it feels inescapable to Fischer that we must privilege humans over animals, he (Fischer himself!) is actually *more* committed to some basic necessary propositions (*e.g.* that things that are the same also deserve the same treatment[37] and that what is good is that which brings pleasure)[38] that end up contradicting that stance.

Naturally, this commits us to only take those intuitions as authoritative which can be universally shared. We can then not rely on those intuitions the existence of which relies on a person's particular position or history – and naturally, if your position is that there are only intuitions like that, then the Moorean argument is simply not available. But insofar it is, it can only sustain positions which are true from all possible perspectives. Your privileging of your cat over the animals you feed it must be understandable to me even if I am not in your position.

Again, I am not here taking a position that we have access to any such propositions, and that such a system is therefore possible. My point is only that affective intuitions cannot do this work in the same way. Affective intuitions are not a less implausible equivalents to rational intuitions; as far as their role in justification goes, they are qualitatively different. The strategy sketched out above, which I took to be the allure of principle based moral theory, is not available for a position relying on affective intuitions, because they are not universally shared, nor are they apparently basic. So to use our affective intuitions as evidence for moral rightness needs us to commit to a different strategy. In particular, it commits us to the

[37] K. Deininger, H. Grimm, "Certainties and the Bedrock of Moral Reasoning: Three Ways the Spade Turns", in *Analytic Philosophy*, 2024, online: https://doi.org/10.1111/phib.12357.
[38] H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, cit.

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additional assumption that there are certain conditions under which a deliberator's affective intuitions go right in some way. It commits us to the assumption that in cases where the affective intuitions of different people conflict, we can point at certain differences (say differences of empathy, attention or some more abstract kind of wisdom) in the affective makeup of these people that can tell us which of them has reliable intuitions. We have to assume the existence of a kind of *moral sense* which can be more or less well developed.

3. Moral Cognition

It could be said that all I did in the last section was take the scenic route to arrive at a characterization of a perfectly respectable position in moral philosophy: moral sense theory. More specifically, we have arrived at what Sidgwick calls «perceptional intuitionism», the position that «in its most extreme form, […] recognizes simple immediate intuitions alone and discards as superfluous all modes of reasoning to moral conclusions»[39]. In its less «extreme form», it can be also found as taking intuitions and those «other modes of reasoning» to uneasily remain side by side. But in arriving there as I did, I hope to have shown how weighty of a position that actually is, and the kind of work it has to do in order to make our affective intuitions into viable evidence for non-arbitrary moral judgements. Some acknowledge the weighty anthropological and metaphysical assumptions necessary for this and so, *e.g.*, Gruen endorses a fundamentally relational ontology to underpin the justificatory power of her chosen moral sense, entangled empathy.[40] It is noteworthy that such an appeal to weighty metaphysical assumptions somewhat diminishes the advantage a position like Gruen's has over orthodox rationalism, since it moves the focus of the argument from the reality of social cognition to reasoning equally as abstract as that of the rationalists, and to an anthropology at least as controversial.

I don't want to focus on that aspect here, however. Rather, I want to finally return to the beginning, to the initial motivation of the rejection of reductive rationalism. The affective turn, I said there, was motivated by a (correct) repudiation of rationalism's anthropology and by a deeper appreciation for the full depth of moral cognition. Reducing our moral cognition

[39] Ivi, chapter VIII, §2.
[40] L. Gruen, "Expressing Entangled Empathy: a Reply", in *Hypatia* vol. 32, n. 2, 2017, pp. 452-462: 458.

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to a dispassionate decision based on abstract principles, we said, is an unduly reductionist tendency that orthodox animal ethics exhibits and that should make us suspicious of the rationalism of that orthodox approach. The implication is that a thorough appreciation of our moral cognition will move us to, at least sometimes, abandon rigidly universalist principles espoused by rationalists in favor of moral judgments grounded on affective intuitions. But even though suspicion of orthodox animal ethics is well-justified by the available evidence, does it really support that affective judgments ought to do that heavy lifting? To do so, it would not be enough for the evidence to show the three points of criticism against rationalism I have outlined in section 1 to be correct. It would not be enough for it to show that we don't always use that kind of thinking to make moral decisions, or that thinking important to morality is going on outside of situations where principle-based choice is even an option; nor would it be enough to show that affects play a role in well-formed moral judgments. Rather, what one would have to show is that successful moral cognition at least sometimes terminates at the level of immediate intuition. It would have to be shown that there are at least some instances where 1. moral decisions are made by affective intuition, where 2. that moral decision is well-formed and 3. it is not possible to ground that intuition in some more general, non-affective principle or logic. This position is not unheard of in moral psychology – Jonathan Haidt, one of the more well known moral psychologists of the last decades, espouses a position where all moral thinking terminates at the level of affective intuition, whereby any appeal to greater principles is a post-hoc rationalization. But the empirical evidence does not support this strong claim of intuitions' primacy over deliberative judgment;[41] nor do we have good reason that when it does, that is a particular successful application of moral cognition.[42] We have plenty evidence that cases of moral judgment where we rely on intuition without

[41] J. May, "Moral Rationalism on the Brain", in *Mind & Language* vol. 38, n. 1, 2023, pp. 237-255; C. McHugh, M. McGann, E. R. Igou, E. L. Kinsella, "Searching for Moral Dumbfounding: Identifying Measurable Indicators of Moral Dumbfounding", in *Collabra: Psychology* vol. 3, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1-24: 23; M. L. Stanley, S. Yin, W. Sinnott-Armstrong, "A Reason-Based Explanation for Moral Dumbfounding", in *Judgment and Decision Making* vol. 14, n. 2, 2019, pp. 120-129.

[42] H. Sauer, "The Appropriateness of Emotions: Moral Judgment, Moral Emotions, and the Conflation Problem", in *Ethical Perspectives*, vol. 18, n. 1, 2011, pp. 107-140.

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explicit reasoning are either cases where the reasoning has already been done before [43] or is being done implicitly 'under the hood', so to speak.[44]

That is consistent with the image of the human mind set forth by contemporary cognitive science, where no independent capacity of "rationality" or of "affect" can be identified, and which is a picture already anticipated and frequently appealed to in animal ethics in the care tradition.[45] It is also consistent with a more modest reaction to rationalism's implausible anthropology than the perceptual intuitionist one: that when we are reasoning about how to treat animals, many more things are involved in ascertaining how to treat them than cold deduction from abstract principles; but that the aim of that reasoning should nonetheless be something that, ultimately and with all the thinking done, can be represented as such a deduction and gains its moral warrant from that fact. So it could well be that we are morally justified to feed anonymous animals to our cats, or that, as Rosalind Hursthouse[46] suggests, sometimes speciesist arguments are more like familyist reasons than racist ones. But if this is so, it is incumbent on us to explain why this would be so, and to explain it in a way available also to those who do not share our intuitions. In such an explanation, we may appeal to an affective intuition, but we will have to explain its origin, what Mary Midgley calls the «rational, conceptual link»[47] between a moral emotion and its target.

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[43] G. Kahane, "On the Wrong Track: Process and Content in Moral Psychology", in *Mind & Language* vol. 27, n. 5, 2012, pp. 519-545.

[44] P. Railton, 'The Affective Dog and Its Rational Tale: Intuition and Attunement', *Ethics*, vol. 124, n. 4, 2014, pp. 813-859; C. McHugh, M. McGann, E. R. Igou, E. L. Kinsella, "Reasons or Rationalizations: the Role of Principles in the Moral Dumbfounding Paradigm", in *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, vol. 33, n. 3, 2020, pp. 376-392. Nor is there much reason to believe that by focusing on principle thinking, we are merely reenacting the preferences of a patriarchal system which prizes male over female reasoning. The gender differences in moral cognition claimed by C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 2016, which have often undergirded feminist critiques of rationalism, *e.g*. J. Donovan, "Attention to Suffering", cit., do not bear out in subsequent research, *cfr*. Lawrence J. Walker, "Sex Differences in Moral Reasoning", in W. L. Kurtines, J. Gewirtz, J. L. Lamb (ed. by), *Handbook of Moral Behavior and Development*, London, Routledge, 1991, pp. 333-364. Rather, both men and women use in their moral thinking both principles and emotions; both justice and care, *cfr*. S. Baez *et alii*, "Men, Women… Who Cares? A Population-Based Study on Sex Differences and Gender Roles in Empathy and Moral Cognition", in *PLOS ONE*, vol. 12, n. 6, 2017, online: https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0179336.

[45] *E.g*. M. Kheel, "The Liberation of Nature: a Circular Affair", *Environmental Ethics* vol. 7, n. 2, 1985, pp. 135-149.

[46] R. Hursthouse, *Ethics, Humans and Other Animals: an Introduction with Readings*, London, Taylor & Francis, 2000, p. 127.

[47] M. Midgley, "Biotechnology and the Yuk Factor", in ead., *The Myths We Live By*, Routledge, 2003, pp. 102-107: 104.

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And if we go with that more modest critique, which is the one justified by the empirical evidence, then our affective intuitions simply join ranks with all the hunches, inferences and mental connections which rationalists have already been utilizing, both implicitly and explicitly, in their "rational" argumentation. As such, though, they become as ill-suited to, on their own, ground a moral judgment as any hunch or unsupported inference. They can only do work in moral reasoning when embedded in larger self-referential structures of rational review and critique – structures which they take an active part in, as tools of thinking, rather than as evidence. So I agree with Aaltola when she says (in a slightly different context) that «Moral beliefs are accepted, not just because they are logical, [rather,] how moral beliefs seem is often at least partly the result of background beliefs»[48]. What that means for us, though, is not that our background beliefs (and feelings, and intuitions and other affective components of our cognition) are in themselves morally significant, but that they play a part, for good or for ill, in how our convictions are formed. That means that we are under the obligation to check them for their logical consistency, applicability and bias. In the end, then, the affective turn in animal ethics does not give us license to use our feelings of care, disgust or sympathy to disconfirm universalist, rationalist judgments that go against what those feelings recommend. What it does is, correctly, point out that those feelings are there for a reason, and that they play an important role in any judgment – even the rationalist is bound to be guided by a sort of feeling of rightness and to feel something like revulsion if their universalism is denied, without which they would be aimless in their deliberation. And just as the rationalist should not point at that feeling of rightness or of revulsion to justify their views but rather use them as tools in the process of arriving at a rationally describable, intersubjectively sharable justification, so too can our affective intuitions only serve as revisable tools of deliberation.

[48] E. Aaltola, "The Anthropocentric Paradigm and the Possibility of Animal Ethics", p. 31.

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