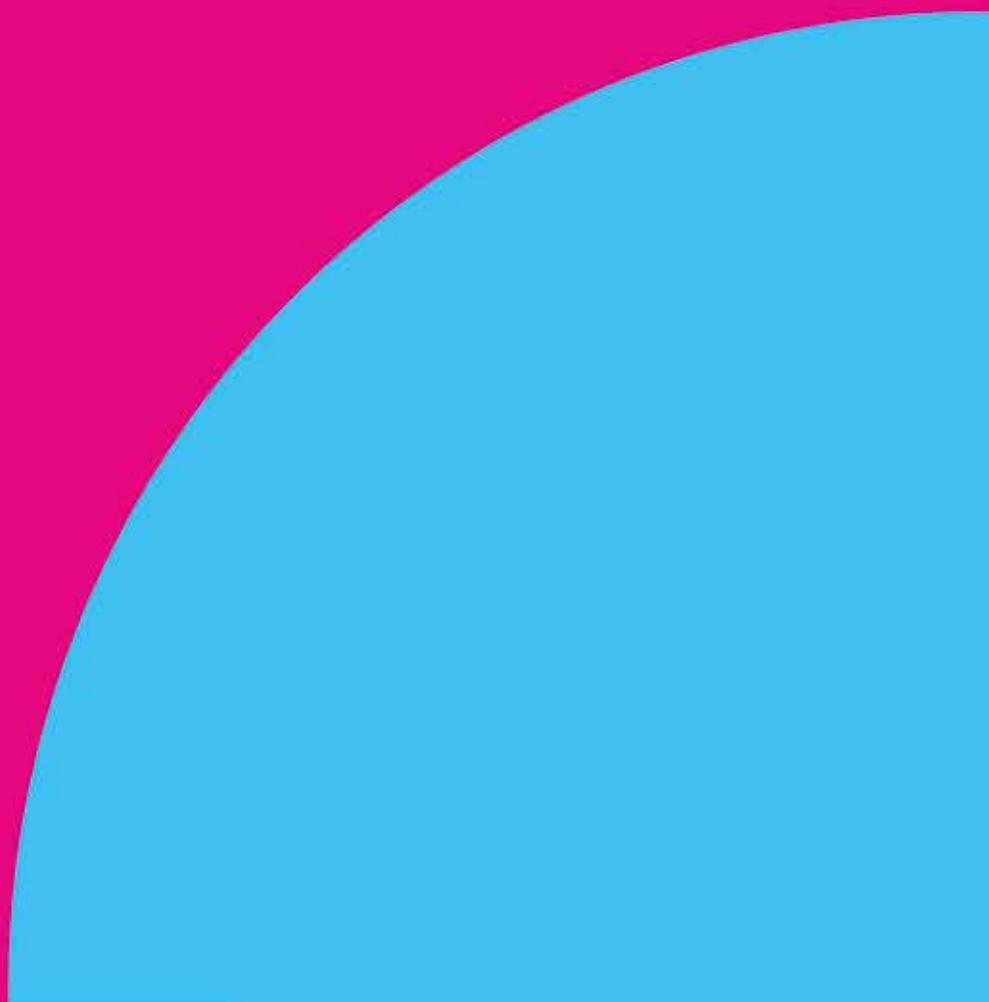


THE PHILOSOPHER

TheNewBasics.Planet





Issue

Winter 2022, Vol.110, No.1

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Over four issues to be published in 2022, *The New Basics* will consider 50 “keywords” on four themes: 1) Planet, 2) Society, 3) Person, and 4) Philosophy, providing a provocative introduction to central concepts, one that excavates the seismic intellectual and social changes of the past half-century. The keyword entries will emphasize the shifting and conditional nature of the vocabularies we are generating, eschewing the individualistic “brain in a vat” search for universal, ahistorical truths. They will retain the open-ended quest for meaning specific to the best of the philosophical tradition.

This opening issue on “Planet” offers new possibilities for thinking through and living in the “Anthropocene” – the term that is increasingly used to define a new planetary era in which humans have become a planet-changing force through inflicting geologic intrusions, biological disturbances, or climatic alterations. The short, accessible essays in this issue offer powerful snapshots of what it means to live in a time of seismic change. To adapt a quotation from Travis Holloway’s new book, they are all “a response to the end of the world as we know it against the spectre of catastrophic climate change”.

Planetary questions are richly philosophical ones. The essays that follow cover ontology, ethics, political theory, feminist philosophy, and decolonial philosophy, as well as branching out into history, economics, and physics. In the opening essay, **Jeff Sebo** asks: “If our treatment of animals is worsening global health and environmental threats, how are we to treat them?” **Alexander Douglas** asks: “We are told that capitalism is destroying the planet, but what *is* capitalism?” **Malcom Ferdinand** asks: “Upon which stories of the Earth do we rely when we talk about the ecological crisis?” **Michael Marder** asks: “What does the emerging ethical ideal of connectedness do to actual and possible relations?” **Erin R. Pineda** asks: “In a world on fire, is there time for disobedience?” **Simona Capisani** asks: “How is the right to being in a livable space hindered by a shifting human climate niche?” **Thomas Nail** asks: “What are the planetary consequences of philosophy’s preference for stasis over movement?” **Pierre Charbonnier** asks: “What are we to do now that our traditional political categories are no longer fit for purpose?” **Romy Opperman** asks: “Do planetary ethics require us to reappraise the concept of racism?” **Nancy Tuana** asks: “What are the sensibilities we need to cultivate in order to change our ways of living?” **Simone M. Müller** asks: “What kind of collectivity is possible in an age of the toxic commons?” Finally, **Travis Holloway** asks: “Are stories about catastrophic weather contributing to a reinvention of epic or grand narrative?”

Other highlights in this issue include: **Jana Bacevic** explores lived experience via Simone de Beauvoir and Sara Ahmed; **Donovan Irvén** enters into the debate over free will from an Existentialist perspective; **Paul C. Taylor** discusses the evolution of race-thinking; and **Jason Blakely** is none too impressed by Steven’s Pinker’s *Rationality*. It has been a great honour to work with artist **Blane De St. Croix** and I am grateful to him for permission to use his stunning images in this issue.

Anthony Morgan, Editor

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**SECTION 1:
THE NEW BASICS
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ANIMAL

Humans are killing trillions of nonhuman animals per year, and this behaviour is worsening global health and environmental threats like pandemics and climate change. We rationalize this behaviour in part by viewing (many) humans as rational and all nonhumans as nonrational, when in fact all animals are partly rational and partly nonrational. We also view some animals as captive and domesticated, and others as free and wild, when in fact all animals are now at least partly captive and domesticated. In order to treat animals as they deserve to be treated, we must learn to view them differently: as individuals with morally relevant interests, needs, and vulnerabilities, struggling to adapt in a world reshaped by human activity.

Humans are currently killing nonhuman animals all over the world. We kill more than 100 billion animals per year in factory farming, and we kill 1-3 trillion animals per year in industrial fishing. We also kill many captive animals for research, medicine, entertainment, and other such purposes. And we kill many wild animals by destroying natural habitats and creating human settlements and food, energy, and transportation systems that accommodate members of our species much more than members of other species. The result is that we are causing or allowing countless nonhuman animals to suffer and die for our own benefit, and we are also driving many species to extinction and many ecosystems to collapse.

Our treatment of animals is, in turn, contributing to global threats that harm both humans and nonhumans. Factory farming, deforestation, and the wildlife trade all substantially increase the risk of pandemics, and factory farming and deforestation both substantially increase the threat of climate change. And when viral outbreaks, fires, floods, and other such disasters occur, humans are not the only victims. Many nonhumans die directly in these disasters, and many others die indirectly, due to an increase in human violence and neglect. For instance, we “cull” animals during viral outbreaks to prevent the spread of disease, and we “exterminate” nonhuman climate refugees to protect “human” property from “invasive species.”

These realities raise difficult questions about how we see animals. First, our ways of thinking and talking

by Jeff Sebo
New York University

about animals can have implications for our treatment of them. When we see animals as “lesser than,” we become more likely to harm and kill them. Second, our ways of treating animals can have implications for our ways of thinking and talking about them. For instance, when we transform the world through deforestation, development, pandemics, and climate change, can we still say that many animals are “wild” and “free,” or must we instead now say that all animals are at least partly “captive” and “domesticated”?

What follows for how we should treat animals moving forward? I will suggest, firstly, that we should change our ways of thinking and talking about animals so that we can more clearly see that they merit respect and compassion. I will then suggest, secondly, that we should change our ways of thinking and talking about animals so that we can more clearly see how human activity is impacting them. Finally, and more speculatively, I will suggest that we should learn lessons from this discussion for other ways of thinking, talking, and behaving. We might one day interact with sentient beings who are not animals at all. We should prepare for this possibility by moving beyond not only a human bias but also an animal bias.

Part of why humans exploit and exterminate nonhumans at such high rates is that we see them as “lesser than.” In particular, we see humans as having highly complex cognitive and sensory abilities, and we see most nonhumans as having either no cognitive or sensory abilities at all or, at least, highly simplistic ones. This way of seeing other animals both supports, and is supported by, our ways of thinking and talking about other animals. For instance, we refer to humans as “agents” who act “rationally” and nonhumans as “creatures” who act “instinctively.” We call humans “he,” “she,” or “they” and (most) nonhumans “it.” And when we want to mark humans as “lesser than,” we use dehumanizing language that compares them with “mere” animals.

These ways of seeing, thinking about, and talking about animals are bad, not only because they contribute to our oppression of other animals (and, via dehumanization, to our oppression of other humans) but also because they misrepresent reality. On one hand, humans are not

as rational as we like to think. Granted, we sometimes decide what to do by making judgments about reasons, but we also sometimes decide what to do through habit, instinct, and other such processes. And even when we decide what to do by making judgments about reasons, these judgments are shaped by our perceptions, emotions, and other such states. In short, humans are animals too, and we share many ways of thinking and acting with other animals.

OUR INFLUENCE ON ANIMALS, BOTH AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL AND AT THE POPULATION LEVEL, IS INCREASINGLY PERVERSIVE

On the other hand, many nonhumans are more sensitive – as well as more rational – than we like to think. Fifty years ago, many experts believed that nonhuman animals either have no interests at all or, at least, have only a narrow and weak set of interests. But we now realize that nonhuman animals are much more complex than that. Not only can many animals – at the very least, all vertebrates and some invertebrates – consciously experience pleasure and pain, but they can also do much more than that. For instance, they have the ability to learn, remember, communicate, solve problems, and make and act on plans. As a result, we now realize, many animals have a much more sophisticated set of interests than we previously appreciated.

To correct these mistakes and improve our treatment of both humans and nonhumans, we need to partly collapse our ways of seeing, thinking about, and talking about each other. On one hand, we need to embrace the reality that humans are, in many respects, much less rational than we like to think, and, on the other hand, we need to embrace the reality that nonhumans are, in many respects, much more sensitive and rational than we like to think. Granted, it would be a mistake to collapse these categories entirely: There are still important differences between humans and other animals that we should track through our language. But

we currently overstate the differences and understate the similarities, and we need to strike a better balance.

At present, we commonly make a distinction between domesticated and wild animals, as well as between captive and free animals. According to the former distinction, an animal is domesticated to the degree that humans influenced their evolution, and an animal is wild to the degree that humans did not influence their evolution. And according to the latter distinction, an animal is captive to the degree that humans control their behaviour, and an animal is free to the degree that humans do not control their behaviour. For example, we commonly think, the animals who live in our homes tend to be both captive and domesticated, the animals who live in forests tend to be free and wild, and the animals who live in our cities tend to be somewhere in the middle.

Many people think that these distinctions have implications for our treatment of animals. In particular, many people think that our moral duties to captive and

domesticated animals are different from our moral duties to free and wild animals. On the one hand, we have a duty to help captive and domesticated animals more, since these animals are more vulnerable and dependent on us, and we are more responsible for their predicament. On the other hand, we have a duty to leave free and wild animals alone more, since these animals are less vulnerable and dependent on us, and we are less responsible for their predicament. Meanwhile, we have a combination of these duties to the “liminal” animals who exist in between these extremes.

But even if we accept these distinctions, we might need to apply them differently moving forward. After all, we now live in the Anthropocene, a geological epoch in which humanity is the dominant force on the planet. Increasingly, humans are at least partly influencing the evolution of most if not all animals, and are at least partly controlling the behaviour of most if not all animals. In some cases our influence is direct, such as when we impact animals through deforestation and development, and in other cases our influence is indirect, such as when we impact animals through human-caused climate change. Either way, our

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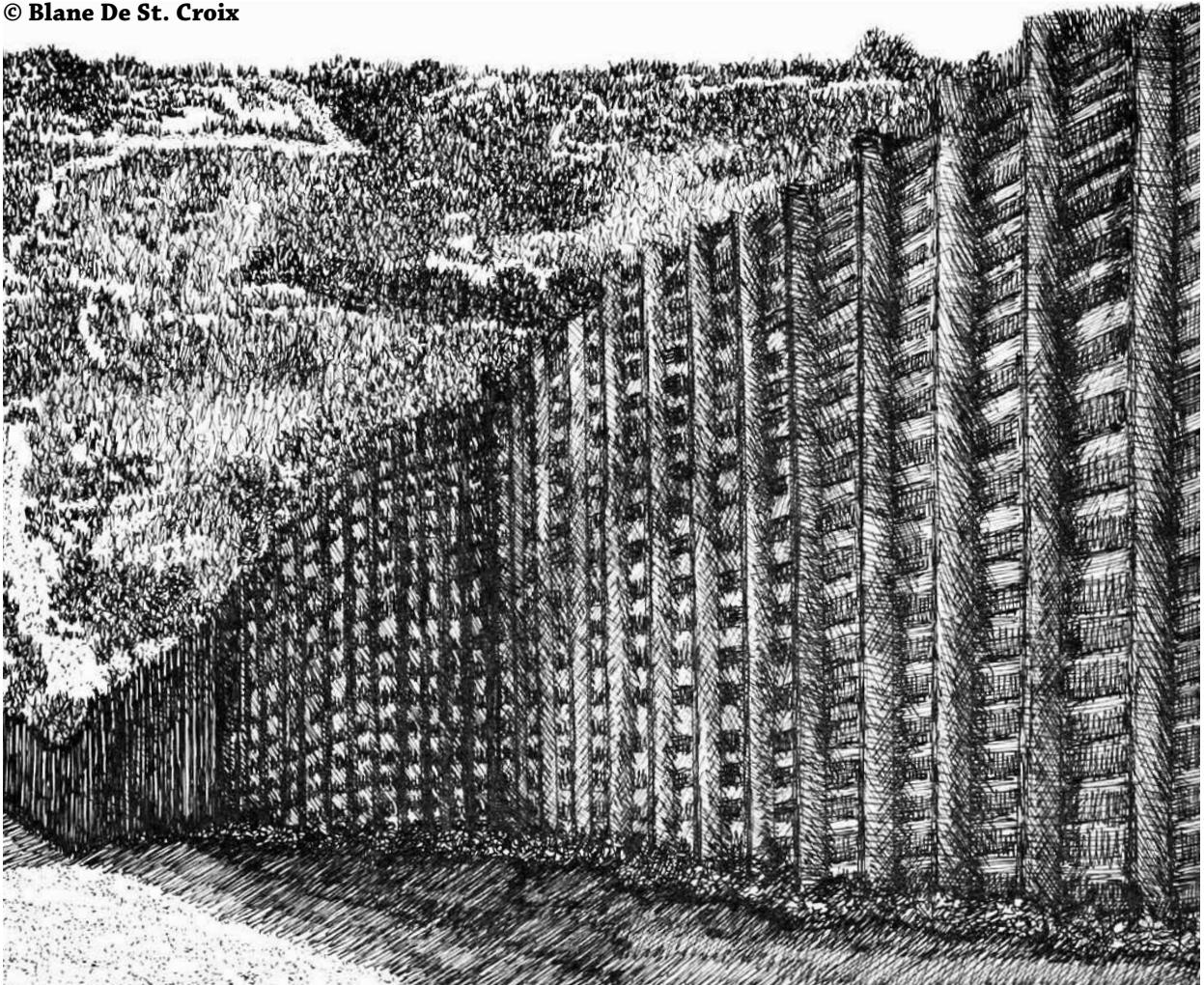
influence on animals, both at the individual level and at the population level, is increasingly pervasive.

In light of our influence on the planet, we might need to partly collapse our ways of seeing, thinking about, and talking about domesticated and captive animals, on one hand, and wild and free animals, on the other hand. In particular, we might need to accept that most if not all animals are now at least partly domesticated and captive, and, consequently, that we now have at least a weak moral duty to help most if not all animals to the degree that we can. As with humans and other animals, it would be a mistake to collapse these categories entirely – there are still important differences between, say, dogs and wolves that we should track. But once again, we currently

overstate the differences, and we need to strike a better balance.

At present, many people aspire to create a world with universal human rights. According to this view, all humans should have basic moral, legal, and political rights, simply in virtue of our shared humanity. When we consider how many humans are still deprived of basic rights, we can see how important this aspiration is. But when we consider how many nonhumans are still deprived of basic rights too, we can see how exclusionary this aspiration still is. The idea that *all* humans should have rights is good, but the idea that *only* humans should have rights is bad. And when we base the idea

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of universal rights on membership in the species *Homo sapiens*, we invite both this good consequence and this bad consequence at the same time.

For this reason, many animal advocates now aspire to create a world with universal *animal* rights. According to this view, all animals should have basic moral, legal, and political rights, simply in virtue of our shared animality. This aspiration is more inclusive than the aspiration toward universal human rights: It implies that all human *and* nonhuman animals should have basic rights, independently of which biological categories we happen to occupy. Granted, to the degree that we have different interests and needs, we might have different rights accordingly. But in general, we should all have basic rights that reflect our basic interests and needs. And this will require treating many animals much better than we do.

But even if we think that this aspiration toward universal animal rights is a step in the right direction, we might still wonder whether it goes far enough. After all, humans share the world not only with other animals, but also with other living beings, such as plants. And while plants might or might not have the ability to experience pleasure or pain, they do have the ability to learn, remember, communicate, and act intelligently. Moreover, moving forward, we will likely also share the world with other kinds of beings, such as artificial intelligences. Plausibly, sufficiently advanced artificial intelligences could have many of the same abilities as animals or plants, and if and when they do, we will once again be responsible for their predicament.

THE IDEA THAT ALL HUMANS SHOULD HAVE RIGHTS IS GOOD, BUT THE IDEA THAT ONLY HUMANS SHOULD HAVE RIGHTS IS BAD

Given these possibilities, we should ask whether an aspiration toward universal animal rights will impede further progress in the same way that an aspiration toward universal human rights has done. If the answer

is yes, then we might have reason to move beyond both of these categories *now*, to pave the way for further progress. For instance, maybe instead of aspiring toward universal human *or* animal rights, we should aspire toward universal rights for all *sentient or living beings*, human or nonhuman, animal or nonanimal. That way, even if we focus mostly on human and animal rights for now, we can at least be framing this work in terms of broader values that will make further progress easier rather than harder when the time comes.

Jeff Sebo is Clinical Associate Professor of Environmental Studies, Affiliated Professor of Bioethics, Medical Ethics and Philosophy, and Director of the Animal Studies M.A. Program at New York University. His new book Saving Animals, Saving Ourselves: Why Animals Matter for Pandemics, Climate Change, and other Catastrophes is published this year by Oxford University Press. jeffsebo.net & twitter.com/jeffrsebo

