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Subhuman: The Moral Psychology of Human Attitudes to Animals

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Considering, as Kasperbauer poignantly highlights, that our lives are deeply interconnected with those of animals, it is refreshing to read a work of this calibre examine the way in which we think of animals and our moral evaluations of them. Having published widely on the relevance of moral psychology to animals and the environment, Kasperbauer demonstrates proficient fluency in navigating diverse topics spanning animal welfare and de-extinction through to contemporary issues of sustainability. The enquiry is consistently supported with carefully selected empirical evidence – undoubtedly demonstrating the author's familiarity with the relevant resources related to the subject across a multitude of disciplines. Drawing from a substantial corpus of literature, admirable effort is made to leave no stone uncovered in the quest for understanding human attitudes towards animals. As such, *Subhuman* presents a compelling and revealing case in the first systematic account of our often-paradoxical and underappreciated relationships.

The central tenet of this vividly communicated thesis is that it is animals' role as a contrasting class to human beings that has resulted in both the negative and positive human attitudes towards them. The explanations of dehumanisation and its secondary form of infrahumanisation are presented with clarity and lucidity, creating a cohesive and rich narrative based upon these comparative perceptions that continues as a common thread throughout the book. The latter form, essentially a negative judgement that animals are members of an outgroup, thus eliciting aversion, is posited as central to understanding human attitudes towards animals, a claim which is supported with tenacity and consistency in the ensuing chapters.

Subhuman explores fresh new grounds of inquiry into the traditions of moral psychological research. Kasperbauer begins by examining through an evolutionary lens how our modern understanding of human-animal relationships has emerged, rooted in a triad of associations: namely as predator-prey, food, and care-based relationships. Ultimately, he asserts, our ancestors faced adaptive pressures to both like and dislike animals, but evolutionary psychology predicts antagonistic relationships. He goes on to explain that it is through formal education that children learn that animals are animals, separate from humans; citing numerous studies demonstrating that even from a young age we see ourselves as different to animals and thus our perception as animals requires significant directed instruction.

Value is given early on to dehumanisation research which offers a compensatory rationale for some of the darker sides of exploitative behaviours towards animals, grounded in the notion of our consistent comparison as being superior to them. Kasperbauer explains astutely how thinking about animals associates with thoughts of death, and thus through mortality salience and threat aversion such as disgust and fear, terror management theory (TMT) explains much of the physiological threats posed by animals. Describing our divergent treatments of animals, he reiterates the common trend permeating each relationship, where consistently '...we take actions to emphasize their inferior status. This is one of the main consequences of the psychology of infrahumanization, which is at the heart of our relationship with animals' (p. 84). This principal focus on disgust as the emotion exemplar in its role in moral judgements (largely as a response to purity violations imparted by the presence of animals) helps us better to understand our moral development and subsequent predominantly negative relationships with animals.

Kasperbauer frequently uses the example of animal consumption to illustrate cases of animal ethics, while avoiding implicit bias for its moral justification, instead bringing rational logic and reasoning to the debate. Poignant examples contributing to the discourse around animal consumption are expertly framed, for instance cognitive dissonance – an aversive affective state which arises when an individual attempts to simultaneously hold inconsistent expectations or beliefs. Cognitive dissonance is tactfully placed here in the illustration of recognising animals' mental or phenomenal states including capability to feel pain and suffering, while subsequently associating them as food sources. Kasperbauer again illustrates here the fundamental basis of dehumanisation, denying animals ingroup status, but also the psychological outcomes associated with the process.

A succinct review of the central problems and subconscious moral barriers to attempts at enacting moral change exemplifies how our behaviour is often influenced by situations and emotions without our noticing. The positioning of contrasting philosophies concerning instrumental values of animals to humans are then judiciously outlined, notably illustrating potential objections to his psychological plausibility position for animal ethics, outlined in the chapter with the case of abolitionist versus animal welfarist interpretations. This example typifies his consistent aptitude at critically examining moral objections and contrasting viewpoints, subsequently strengthening his proposed ethical positions by considering the counterfactual and opposing arguments. Kasperbauer goes on to present psychological plausibility and non-ideal theory related to animal ethics – a view within philosophy which aims to take into account real world constraints and realisability of moral ideals, a challenging but highly relevant aspect of moral evaluative theory influential to the discussion. His review continues to highlight that the plasticity of moral attitudes operates in ways beyond an assumed expanding moral circle, portrayed well as a historical account of moral progress and wisely reiterating that divergent moral foundations are cross-cultural phenomena.

While the book is thorough in its intellectual scope, certain subjects appear like afterthoughts when closer, more balanced examination could have been warranted. As a case in point, the final chapter focuses on managing moral psychology for animal ethics. The reader is primed to expect an impact-oriented guide to the utility of this knowledge with regards to improving treatment of animals and furthering our moral progression, building upon earlier premises that education could be pertinent to forging more positive ethical evaluations of animals. To some extent this is achieved, but framed as 'a few parting suggestions' (p. 192), the extent of the issues appears depreciated, serving to illuminate latent scepticism regarding the prospects of moral change. Tantalisingly, space was left vacant for further delving into the practical implications of deepened understanding in these areas and the foundations of moral change. Possible avenues for prolonged attention could have included the normative value of moral attitudes towards animals, exploring the possibility of fostering cultures of more conscientious consumers through broadened common knowledge surrounding our relationships with animals, and the pertinence of this debate within numerous sectors. Finally, in general the relevancy of the rich insights gleaned from this excellent research to traditional human-ethical debates could have appeared more prominent.

Interest in human–animal relations continues to steadily increase, notably in recent research in social psychology. Of note is the lack of psychological and philosophical literature in dehumanisation – Kasperbauer steps up to the challenge of remedying this surprising deficit and provides a rich account of the fascinating dynamics from a multidisciplinary perspective.

In summary, *Subhuman* shines light on the underestimated complexity of this area of moral psychology and offers a cogently presented and profound contribution to the field of animal

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ethics. With robustly outlined arguments from start to end, Kasperbauer fastidiously disentangles the complicated domain of moral psychology, adopting an interdisciplinary approach to address key questions regarding the foundations of our moral attitudes to animals.

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