

## The moral status of animals in Islamic philosophy: A comparative and critical study

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The dissertation presents an in-depth examination of animal ethics in the western contemporary animal ethics and two of major Muslim philosophers from the medieval time and the early modern era, articulated across four chapters. Each chapter delves into distinct philosophical frameworks and figures, weaving together a comprehensive narrative that traverses contemporary and classical perspectives. The objectives and rationale for each section of the thesis unfold as follows.

The first chapter of the work tries to contextualise the research regarding the concept of the moral status of animals and about what kind of ethical complexities and issues we, as modern readers, are faced with in our relationship with animals. For this reason, we need to approach the question of the moral status of animals from the lens of contem-

porary animal ethicists, to see the possible answers of the past philosophers; issues like factory farming, raising animals in harsh and inhumane conditions, environmental issues in this regard, etc. Additionally, to have a constructive dialogue between these different approaches from different time frames, we need to have an overview of contemporary views to appraise these different approaches in relation to each other interactively.

The main focus of the first chapter is on the three major figures and approaches in modern animal ethics: Peter Singer's utilitarian claim for animal liberation, Tom Regan's deontological theory of animal rights, and Martha Nussbaum's Neo-Aristotelian capabilities approach.

Moving from contemporary discourse to historical philosophy, the second chapter tries to bridge the gap in studying

Avicenna (d. 1037) on the moral status of animals by reconstructing the animal philosophy of Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), a towering figure in not only Iranian and Islamic philosophy, but rather in the medieval Christian and Jewish philosophy. Avicenna's works provide an understanding of animals, which integrates elements of metaphysics, biology, and ethics. By analyzing his views, the dissertation aims to reveal how classical Islamic thought contributes to the broader conversation about animal ethics, offering insights that resonate with and challenge modern perspectives.

The third chapter addresses the significant gap in the academic study of Ṣadrīan (Mullā Ṣadrā Shirāzī's) animal philosophy, especially concerning the moral status of animals. Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1641) stands as a pivotal figure in Iranian and Islamic philosophy, yet his contributions to animal ethics remain largely unexplored. By examining his philosophy, we aim to shed light on how Ṣadrā perceived animals and their moral standing within the broader metaphysical framework. Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy often emerges as a reaction to Avicennian metaphysics. In various instances, Ṣadrā either aligns with or opposes Avicenna's ideas, using them as a foundation to address philosophical questions that persisted beyond Avicenna's time. This dynamic interaction signifies not only the continuity but also the evolution of Islamic philosophical

thought, as Ṣadrā engages critically with Avicenna's legacy to advance his philosophical journey. Furthermore, Ṣadrā's philosophy has left an indelible mark on contemporary Iranian thought, continuously evolving through modern interpretations. His ideas have been revisited, reinterpreted, and adapted to address current philosophical debates, ensuring that his intellectual legacy remains influential. By exploring Ṣadrā's views on animals, this chapter not only fills a scholarly void but also bridges historical and contemporary perspectives, enriching the discourse on animal ethics with insights from an early modern Islamic viewpoint.

### Summary of each chapter

*Chapter one* of the work engages with studying three contemporary views on animal ethics:

Peter Singer's preference utilitarian approach posits that entities capable of having *preferences and desires*, regardless of class, race, sex, or species, should be treated equally in regard to those preferences. As sentient beings, non-human animals should be included in the sphere of ethical consideration. Their desires and *interests* in avoiding pain and suffering should be taken into account in the same way as those of human animals. This consideration should apply to all activities involving them, as feeling pain is equally bad, irrespective of the species experiencing it.

Tom Regan's deontological animal rights approach posits that any creature qualified as a *subject-of-a-life* is entitled to obligations and duties towards them, or *rights* that necessitate its respectful treatment and confer *inherent value* upon it. As subjects-of-lives, non-human animals are thus entitled to respectful treatment and possess a categorical inherent value that must not be violated under any circumstances.

Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach argues that as long as an entity has *fundamental needs and capabilities*, regardless of whether it is human or non-human, a dignified life for that creature is one that enables it to satisfy its needs and develop its capabilities, provided that this causes no harm to others. These capabilities grant the creature the *entitlement* to flourish, and human society and our political system must take the necessary practical steps to ensure the implementation of this entitlement by incorporating it into the sphere of *basic justice*.

Despite their different approaches, these three thinkers have acknowledged the current conditions of using, or better to say misusing, animals as unethical, and have tried to deal with them differently. In the thesis, I have performed a critical assessment of each approach with regard to the other one.

*Chapter two* plans to respond to the question of the moral status of animals in Avicennian philosophy. To do it, first I've tried to reconstruct Avicennian animal philosophy to see how animals looked like in his system of thought. Following this, I have proceeded my investigations in two broad topics:

*Animal capabilities*: here he thinks of a variety of capabilities for animals. On the one hand, there are *perceptual faculties*. For Avicenna, animal mind is a complex phenomenon and consists of: *external* and *internal sensations*. External sensations include five senses, like touch, taste, smell, hearing, and vision; internal sensations include: common sense, formative imagination, estimative power, memory, and the compositive imagination. On the other hand, there is  *motive faculty*. Having perception causes *movement* and different actions. Some perceptions give rise to having desires and appetites, and some others to *fear and anger*. This makes animals *voluntary agents*, though not of the intellectual kind, which is reserved for humans, but of the bodily-sensible kind. According to Avicenna, this gives animals three main affections: *fear, sadness, and joyfulness*.

*Animal in-capabilities*: for Avicenna, some capabilities are byproducts of having *reason and intellect*, which is reserved just for the human species. Due to the absurdity of gradation in the category of substance in his metaphysics, no

animals can have these intellect-based abilities in any way, the doctrine according to which the boundaries between species forms are fixed and insurmountable.

Animals in-capabilities in Avicennian philosophy are: social life and morality, specialisation of tasks and inferring crafts, speech, intellect-related affections (*amazement, weeping, laughter, embarrassment*), time perception and prudence, having conception and assent, recollection, the ability to form fictional images actively and consciously. These capabilities, for Avicenna, are specific to humans, and in which other species of animals cannot participate. Even though there might be some signs of these capabilities in animals, since they haven't been resulted from reasoning and intellection, but rather caused instinctively, they aren't comparable with the ones in humans.

Regarding *self-awareness*, Avicenna thinks of other species of animals as self-aware, but their awareness is of a different kind to that of humans. While humans, due to having intellect, are always aware of themselves, even though they don't remember it, animals are only aware of themselves as long as they perceive something. Without perceiving something, they cannot be self-aware, unlike us humans.

Finally, regarding *the moral status of animals*, we will see that, for Avicenna, animals should be included in the moral

sphere, because as *sentient beings* capable of feeling pain and pleasure, they can be treated cruelly or kindly. We have *direct duties* and obligations towards animals. It is the animals themselves that are the main target of our moral obligations, not humans that our acts towards animals might affect them. However, due to enjoying the rational soul which grants us a superiority over other species, humans can have the privilege of using animals for various reasons, as long as they use it in a compassionate way.

According to the classification of different ethical approaches with regard to animals that Tom Regan has provided, to my opinion, Avicennian animal ethics can be described as a *cruelty-kindness* stance. The cruelty-kindness stance from Avicenna in relation to other species admits the current procedures of factory farming and raising animals as cruel and immoral.

*Chapter three* of my dissertation aims to respond to the question of the moral status of animals in Şadrian philosophy. To perform it, first I have tried to reconstruct Şadrian animal philosophy in relation to his ontology, epistemology, psychology, and eschatology, and explore their possible consequences for a moral approach that includes animals.

With regard to *Şadrian ontology*, according to the main doctrines of Şadrian philosophy – namely, the *primordiality*

*of existence* – all creatures are fundamentally portions of existence. According to the doctrines of *gradation* and *movement in substance*, as existence, they are in a gradual process of transformation and becoming that can evolve and transform them into higher existential levels. Within this framework, species or essences are nothing more than delimitations of the same existence at a given time, manifesting in different, and sometimes opposite, forms that we consider as essences or species.

Consequently, this metaphysical framework, unlike the Avicennian one, provides the tools for a more integrated view of species and creatures, considering them as existing along a continuum. The main doctrines of his philosophy allow him to adopt a process view of reality, contrary to the idea of species as fixed and discrete essences. He sees them as integrated existences. And the possibility of transformation of species into each other, which Şadrian metaphysics attempts to explain, allows for the concept of intermediary species, which he, as a philosopher rather than an experimental biologist, tries to account for, the point which is missing in Avicennian account.

With regard to *Şadrian epistemology and psychology*, according to Şadrā, perception – whether sensible, imaginative, or intellectual – is the very activity of the soul and is immaterial, though in different grades. This is because percep-

tion, presence, and existence are different words for the same concept. In this framework, animals might share with humans in having an afterlife, to which they are entitled as compensation for all the sufferings they may have undergone in their earthly lives, the main point that conflicts with Avicenna's philosophy.

Regarding *the moral status of animals*, Şadrian philosophy encompasses the major elements of a *care ethics*, particularly towards animals as sentient creatures and, more generally, towards the whole universe as the manifestations of pure existence or God. According to this stance, just as God has the highest compassion towards the lower levels of existence, humans, if they are to become more perfect and god-like, need to imitate God by showing compassion towards the entire universe and its components, including animals. This view posits humans as *the guardians of existence*.

There can be two possible interpretations of Şadrian care ethics: *the minimal interpretation*, according to which we can still use animals for various purposes, including killing and eating them, as long as we pay attention to their needs and welfare; *the maximal interpretation*, according to which such usage would be limited, with no allowance for killing animals.

According to both interpretations, what's clear is that the current procedures of factory farming and raising animals are immoral.

I've also shown that there can be significant convergences between Şadrian animal ethics and Nussbaum's capabilities approach.

In the *concluding chapter*, I've tried to raise some questions and deal with them in the light of our investigations. Here I just mention two of them very concisely:

Can we describe the Avicennian and Şadrian philosophies as discriminative with regards to animals, or as being speciesist? The Avicennian system can be described as speciesist, due to elements like: reserving the rational soul merely to human species, and subsequently, denying various capabilities for animals, and also denying them an afterlife, which allows animal suffering in this world with no recompense in an afterlife. The Şadrian system, on the other hand, thinks of the majority of humans and especially higher animals with the same status in some sig-

nificant ways, and as animals, under the control of their estimative power, even though most of humans can take advantage of their rational power to reach these estimative goals. Other species of animals can enjoy having an afterlife also, due to the immateriality of imagination in Şadrian philosophy.

According to the virtue-based approaches of Avicennian and Şadrian morality, to be moral in our conduct, we need to cultivate a moral character. However, regarding new approaches, like Regan's and Singer's, more emphasis is placed on the ethics of conduct, with less attention on ethics of character.

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