



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The Anthropomorphic Hegemony of Subjectivity: Critical Reflections on Law and the Question of the Animal

Villiers, J. de

Citation

Villiers, J. de. (2019, December 16). *The Anthropomorphic Hegemony of Subjectivity: Critical Reflections on Law and the Question of the Animal*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/82072>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/82072>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/82072> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Villiers, J. de

Title: The Anthropomorphic Hegemony of Subjectivity: Critical Reflections on Law and the Question of the Animal

Issue Date: 2019-12-16

SUMMARY

The Anthropomorphic Hegemony of Subjectivity: Critical Reflections on Law and the Question of the Animal

This project contemplates an ethics of difference and singularity that can effectuate a displacement of anthropocentrism and radical transformation in the way we understand and approach relationality across species borders. My reflections take place against the background of the problematic accompanying the (re)presentation of animals in the subject-centered models of moral philosophy and law, and I call into question the salient ways in which theorists have engaged these avenues in order to effect change in our treatment of animals. Animal liberation scholars and activists have mainly sought to address the plight of animals from the theoretical frameworks of legal rights, interest-based equality, and identity discourse that foreground the ways in which animals are essentially similar to human beings in terms of ethically relevant qualities or characteristics. My project critically reflects on Emmanuel Levinas's formulation of the ethical in order to advance an alternative understanding of human-animal relations as grounded in the radical singularity or difference of individual beings.

Following Jacques Derrida and Drucilla Cornell, I deconstruct the dominant animal rights models by uncovering anthropocentrism as a guiding thread of the Western metaphysical tradition and illustrating how the construct of subjectivity born from that tradition forecloses or limits certain ethical possibilities. I situate the functioning of the human/animal oppositional limit in relation to man's becoming-subject and argue that attempts at assimilating animals to the model of (legal) subjectivity paradoxically solidify precisely

the interpretation of man that is being called in question. In line with much of the scholarship written in the post-humanist tradition, I thus also take the metaphysics of subjectivity as the critical point of departure of my project. I aim to illustrate specifically *the anthropomorphic hegemony of subjectivity* – by which term I wish to designate the tacit anthropocentric contours of the construct of subjectivity that guide a determination of animal Being and ethical worth against a standard of humanness – and its implications for discourses and institutions that evoke this construct.

My focus ultimately concerns an examination of law's relation to animal subjugation, both as facilitator of animal sacrifice and potential enabler of animal liberation, against the operative force of the anthropocentrism embedded in law's fabric. I determine that law fundamentally grounds and maintains the subordinate status of animals and illustrate essential congruence between law and what might be called an anthropocentric culture. I accordingly propose that the critical focus of animal ethicists should be on law and legal discourse as signifier of anthropocentric power in preference to legal reform as such, and I call for an ongoing engagement with the underlying metaphysical support of animal rights at a conceptual level rather than a pragmatic utilization of the law as instrument of immediate resolution. This study concludes by offering reflections on ways in which literature might begin to open up new potentialities and risks for thought in relation to the question of the animal (in law). I explore the capacity of literature to problematize the authority of traditional philosophical and legal discourses and circumvent some of the theoretical and ethical constraints that they pose. By disrupting or de-centering the construct(s) of law, my primary aim is to open a critical space wherein an alternative thought of relation might develop.