

## Research Statement

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I wrote a dissertation titled *A Contextual Theory of the Moral Status of Animals*. Since 2014, I have worked and thrived in interdisciplinary communities, contributing to the field of environmental and animal studies as a philosopher. My published work has focused on a number of issues in moral philosophy, animal ethics, animal studies, and environmental studies. Since my dissertation, my work has appeared in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, *Conservation Biology*, *Philosophical Studies*, and *Klêsis*, among others. My research project focuses on intersections between environmental and animal ethics and moral status, along three overlapping dimensions.

First, I'm interested in a neglected area of inquiry in animal ethics. The project, which I plan to turn into a manuscript within the next two years, is called "animal metaethics". It aims to provide a coherent overview of the key concepts and debates of, and a critical toolkit for doing, animal ethics, drawing on other philosophical (and disciplinary) areas such as value theory, metaethics, conceptual analysis, law, and psychology. For instance, I explore the ways, both theoretical and empirical, in which the ideas of moral status, intrinsic value, welfare, harm, meaning, and relations, among others, shape debates within animal ethics and at its boundaries (including environmental ethics). The project also clarifies the relation of other disciplines to an understanding of how people attribute value, rights and status to nonhumans.

Second, I'm interested in a range of practical issues at the intersection of animals and the environment. For instance, my writing sample, currently under review, defends the novel idea that many urban animals are genuine captives. The paper draws a surprising conclusion from a simple analysis of the concept of captivity. It explores the effects of anthropogenic environmental constraints on animals, and how these make them captive despite the absence of visible confinement. I'm also interested in the idea of "replaceability" and how it underpins contemporary discussions of sustainability and animal agriculture, and more generally, the ethics of killing. The questions include: What kinds of beings can permissibly be killed and replaced provided they have pleasant lives? What cognitive capacities ground an interest in life? What accounts for the harm of death? I argue that most sentient animals have an interest in continuing to live because (i) they have interests in future opportunities for well-being and (ii) they are self-aware in a perceptual sense that matters for such interests.

Third, my work engages directly with empirical research on moral cognition, social psychology and experimental philosophy, in particular the recent literature

documenting how people perceive mind and value in nature and other nonhuman entities. An ongoing part of this project consists in a series of online studies I have run on people's moral judgments about cases involving animals along variable intrinsic or relational dimensions (e.g. wild vs. domesticated, degree of vulnerability, or distance). These studies contribute to a descriptive approach to moral status across contexts and kinds of nonhumans. I also argue that it pertains to public debates about animal research, effective advocacy, and wildlife management policy. I am currently applying to UCLA's Animal Law and Public Policy Small Grants Program to support this research and I plan to expand my ongoing experimental work to collaborations with environmental scholars, psychologists and lawyers.

My work tends to engage with each dimension simultaneously rather than separately, as well as with the integration rather than the distinction of animal and environmental issues. For instance, my paper, "Valuing humane lives," addresses a practical application of R.M. Hare's and Gary Varner's two-level utilitarianism—humane farming and sustainability—based on axiological and psychological considerations. A recent article (written with Duncan Purves, forthcoming in the *Journal of Agricultural & Environmental Ethics*) gives an epistemic argument against large-scale engineering to reduce animal suffering in wild ecosystems, while in a single-authored paper I plan to explain why the issue is *psychologically* intractable. Another co-authored paper of ours, published in *Philosophical Studies*, illustrates the overlap of value theory and animal ethics. We argue for a novel account of meaning in life (as contributing to value through intentional agency) and that animals can have meaningful lives, which in turn raises ethical questions. In "Complicity and meaningful lives," I follow up on our account and draw on recent discussions of collective actions and consumer impact, in the context of climate change and factory farming. I frame the issue in terms meaningful actions and lives rather than individual moral accountability. Other works in progress pertain to a variety of topics: personhood (legal, moral, social), Wittgenstein (on minds and death), Bentham (on codification), and Nietzsche (on animal suffering).

I plan to complete most of these papers by the end of the current academic year and then to begin working on a manuscript on animal metaethics. I'm eager to keep exploring these and new questions in collaboration with colleagues and students. I conceive of research as a collective endeavor, enhanced by partnerships with co-authors and members of other areas and disciplines, as well as by a variety of research methods. For this reason, I'm also keen on fostering the creative, interdisciplinary, and empirically grounded environment that such projects demand, and from which public debates and policy can benefit.