

The Ethics of Societal Inclusion: Can Animals Join?

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One definition of a society is a “self-perpetuating group of individuals occupying a particular territory, which may have its own distinctive culture and institutions.”¹ The term is most commonly used to describe human societies, although it may be used to describe animal societies such as a pack of wolves or a herd of elephants. A society or group is a natural formation of similar individuals who join together on of their own will. This paper explores whether human society is limited to human participants or whether animals can also become part of the society.² Based on natural selection, historical progress, and the capacity of thought and rationality, it seems clear that society is limited to humans; though animals often interact with humans and provide valuable services or companionship, they are not in fact part of society.

What are the definitions, reasons for joining, and benefits of a human society? A society’s existence is predicated on the [human nature](#) to form groups and bonds with other humans. It is through these similarities that humans construct social groups based on gender, race, location, belief or preferences. Members of unique groups tend to acquire shared patterns of behavior and cognition. This brings up an important question: why do humans live in groups? Do they live in groups because it is human nature? Human nature is inherently an ambiguous term. The literal definition of human nature is the essence of being human or, in [Darwinian](#) terms, a species with typical behaviors and beliefs. On the other hand, human nature could be defined by that which is constituted in nature, which is usually taken to mean that which is the product of [natural selection](#). In animals, the two definitions are interchangeable. The reason behind the behaviors of bats

¹ Wikipedia Encyclopedia Online, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Society>, 2006

² This paper examines if entire species of animals are capable of entering human society. Age, race, or gender of the animal or human is not a factor in this discussion.

or chimps is largely a result of natural selection. This could also be true for humans. The evolution of humans and the study of biology are the core fundamentals to the study of human behavior and thought. Some philosophers argue that there are only two ways in which the human mind and its products can be designed, either through natural selection or [divine intervention](#).³ This paper focuses on the first rather than the latter, because it can be said that social norms and groups are likely to be the products of evolved adaptations, which are a result of natural selection.

What separates humans from animals if both are derived from the same concept of natural selection? The difference between animals and humans is that humans are rational social beings that create certain constraints and opportunities that can shape the way they think about the world. Being rational, they are able to comprehend both the regularities of the external world and their social needs and be able to adapt and form decisions and conclusions from them.⁴ Humans are not only able to adapt to their environment but also diminish the negative impact of that change. In contrast, animals must adapt to their surroundings for survival because they are incapable of making radical changes to their environment. Animals are incapable of reducing the negative impacts of environmental changes whereas humans are capable of diminishing these same impacts.

Being social creates opportunities that are common to all societies, such as the possibility of a division of labor, the need for social order and distributing knowledge not only to individuals but also across generations. One advantage of a social group is

³ Wikipedia Encyclopedia Online, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy_of_mind, 2006

⁴ Kenan Malik, Society for the Study of Human Biology, Institute of Education, London 2002 http://www.kenanmalik.com/papers/sshb_universal.html

cooperation, which leads to the division of labor among a society. Each member only needs to learn a part of the accumulated knowledge. Therefore, each individual can focus on only a small portion of knowledge but still be productive for a greater portion of their lifespan. This individual works using only a part of the total existing knowledge that he has learned and supplies the other members of society with the results of his work.

Therefore we see that it is of fundamental importance for human beings to belong to a society and that animals are unable to partake in these social activities that define a society. 

In addition to the economic and social benefits of belonging to a society, there are also the benefits of ethics and virtues that a society establishes and maintains. Ethics tells us what is good or bad as defined by a particular society. Without the guidance of ethics, humans would revert to their primal form and would therefore break apart the foundation of humanity. But ethics can only survive and exist if there is a group to accept and adopt the ethics that are created. Humans are capable of adopting these ethics because humans are rational beings and have the capacity to understand and comprehend, whereas the most talented animal would not be able to grasp these human concepts of ethics and interpret them in meaningful ways.

In contrast to animals, humans possess universal values and behaviors through social interactions. As a result of these interactions humans have the capacity to make historical progress over time. If we value this viewpoint, then the definition of human essence would change from what we consider to be the common properties of our humanity to be the product of our historical and cultural development and not just our

biological genetic makeup.⁵ This proves that humans are able to form interactions with other humans and make historical progress. In contrast, animals are unable to make history which is supported by Aristotle's quote, "many animals have memory, and are capable of instruction; but no other creature except man can recall the past at will."⁶ 

Society plays an important role on a person's quality of life. Previous members and generations in the society have developed tools and gained beneficial knowledge that is passed on from one generation to another. Take into consideration that the life span of a society is so much greater than the life span of an individual and the accumulation of knowledge across time is substantial. For that reason, it is critical that this knowledge is passed on from one generation to another and this is accomplished through history. History originated in storytelling or folklore, and the ability to tell stories is a unique trait in humans that animals do not encompass. 

A society exists because its benefits outweigh its costs. Humans partake in society because it benefits them to do so. By being a part of society we are accepted and are able to enjoy the benefits of being a member. If a society no longer benefited humans, then nobody would stay in the society and everybody would leave. Humans are selfish creatures who want to preserve their life; therefore, it is in human nature to form these associations. However, when these associations no longer benefit humans, then they will cease to exist. If humans are capable of leaving society then are other species able to enter? 

For instance, take into account the added value of dogs to the [K9](#) department of the police force. With the specialized training and education that these dogs go through,

⁵ Kenan Malik, Society for the Study of Human Biology, Institute of Education, London 2002 http://www.kenanmalik.com/papers/sshb_universal.html

⁶ Aristotle, [The History of Animals: 350 B.C.E](#), Translated by D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson

they are a valuable asset to the police officer because these canines are able to perform tasks that a human would not be able to conduct as successfully or efficiently due to their natural physical abilities. K9 dogs units are given official badges and even state identification cards stating their occupation and department. Does the fact that the canines meet the some of the criteria that would allow humans to join society enable them to join a human society? Police assistance animals are sometimes considered to be officers but in most cases they are nothing more than a specialized, expendable tool. Special laws exist to protect the rights of these animals, but they are exceptions to the law. A human officer may use any force necessary except lethal force if someone were to assault the animal. A human officer may not kill another human for assaulting the canine.⁷ This is a clear separation of law and regulation that dictates who is part of society and who does not belong. Although canines have special rights and privileges, there is no correlation between these rights and being counted as a member of society. Just because these service animals receive special rights does not mean they are part of human society.

Human society is derived from social order that is created by man. By definition social order is a relatively stable system of institutions, patterns of interactions and customs that are capable of continually reproducing those same conditions that are essential for its own existence. Social order cannot be derived from the laws of nature because social order exists only as a product of human activity. Human activity is defined by the actions of man and it is through these interactions that humans gain knowledge. When people interact, they do so with the understanding that their respective perceptions

⁷ Law Enforcement Canine Use-of-Force Research, <http://www.laaw.com/cuofr.htm>, 2006

of reality are related, and as they act upon this understanding of their common knowledge of reality becomes reinforced. By these definitions it can be said that reality is socially constructed through interactions between humans.

The unique character of humans is that humans are rational, social beings with the ability to transform themselves and their societies through logical dialogue and activity.

All animals have an evolutionary past, but only humans make history. The existence of humans can be characterized as a history-making species. Humans are capable of creating

social distinctions, and that is what separates us from the animals. This ability also

distinguishes who belongs in society and who does not. Animals are unable to enter

human society because they do not possess the same traits as humans despite the

similarities in nature. Animals across generations, as natural selection has shown us, do

form groups and pseudo- societies among themselves. However, animals are unable to

make historical changes within their own species and are not rational creatures.

Therefore, they are not counted as members of human society. Working animals that are

given special privileges prove to be nothing more than human tools for the progress of

society.