

Human-controlled survival of nonhumans

Commentary on [Treves et al.](#) on *Just Preservation*

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Abstract: Treves et al. are right about the need for morally just preservation of nonhumans. Their suggestions can move us in that direction. But isn't what only humans are capable of doing in analyzing and solving these problems, in its broadest sense, "anthropocentrism"?

[Donelson E. Dulany](#) is Professor Emeritus of Psychology. The focus of his work has been the development of metatheory of the role of conscious contents and non-conscious operations in explicit and implicit processing with theoretical and experimental analyses of volitional control, learning, and causal reasoning. [Website](#)



Treves, Santiago-Avila, and Lynn (2019) are right that we need "world views that incorporate multi-species justice" for "just preservation" of nonhuman species. But it seems rather obvious that it is the thoughts, values, decisions, and numerous complex actions of *humans* that are needed to engineer just preservation. (To use the term a little broadly: all of that is unavoidably "anthropocentric.") What are the international, cultural, and economic dangers for nonhuman and human survival? What might humans do to support the survival of humans and nonhumans? We are faced with political as well as scientific challenges.

Treves et al. recognize that global warming is extremely serious and an alarming danger for both humans and nonhumans. It was humans, not nonhumans, who laid out the Paris Accords (though these have apparently proved too profit-threatening for some, including the one national leader who withdrew). We can also recognize that a young girl has brought out supportive crowds intercontinentally. Some humans might move us toward a possible solution: oil fields and coal mines replaced by windmills and water mills in rivers, streams, and ocean tides; and more solar panels — though solving the grand problem will no doubt create still further problems, such as human employment.

For the salvation of nonhuman animals, I see promise in the scientific study of animal sentience of a particular kind: felt states of consciousness activated by symbolic representations. We humans can symbolically represent an event or person in conscious perception, activating a feeling; it is reasonable to assume a similar process in nonhuman species. Conscious states are the sole carriers of symbolic representations (Dulany, 2009, 2014). They are essential for generating the feelings of desire that lead to mating and the feelings of fear that lead to avoidance (a view similar to that of Reber 2016 in this journal and 2019). Brain imaging, a developing technology with values and limitations (Dulany, 2014; Poldrack, 2018), can help identify the general conscious state, if not its specific content.

References

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PhD Scholarship in Foundations of Animal Sentience (ASENT)

London School of Economics

The Foundations of Animal Sentience project (ASENT), a five-year ERC-funded project led by Dr. Jonathan Birch, aims to study the methodological foundations of animal sentience research and the link between sentience and animal welfare. The project seeks to recruit **one PhD student**. The student will contribute to the project either by exploring the methodological foundations of animal sentience research, or by investigating the pathway from animal sentience research to consequences for animal welfare legislation and policy and/or animal ethics.

The student, at the time of starting the PhD, should have an excellent undergraduate degree and a completed Masters degree in philosophy or another relevant subject, such as comparative psychology, cognitive science, or animal welfare science. The primary supervisor of the PhD project will be Dr. Jonathan Birch. If you have any questions or want to know more about the project, please write to Jonathan at j.birch2@lse.ac.uk.

The successful applicant will receive full funding for a **4-year PhD at the LSE**, including full payment of tuition fees AND a **maintenance stipend of £18,000 per annum**. To apply, please apply to the MPhil/PhD in Philosophy at the LSE in the usual way, carefully following all the requirements described on the LSE's website: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/study-at-lse/Graduate/Degree-programmes-2020/MPhilPhD-Philosophy>. When you apply, please indicate clearly in your application (in both your Statement of Academic Purpose AND your Research Proposal) that you wish to be considered for the ASENT scholarship.

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