

Displays of Animal Altruism

Another Reason Why Animals Should be Considered Living Property

Tag Words: living property; animal altruism; animal love; animal care; intraspecies altruism; interspecies altruism; animal-animal altruism; animal-human altruism

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Summary: Under the law, animals are considered property; no higher than inanimate objects. However, animals show altruistic behavior and therefore animals should be considered, not “property” but “living property”. We compiled numerous videos about animal exhibiting altruistic behaviors, and published the compilation on YouTube. We then linked the video to a petition that upgrades animals’ legal status to living property.

Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSSZ5VSw-gE>
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9Li2ASRfnqKMFIVRTRlckVabDQ/view?usp=sharing>

The Issue: Animals should be living property due to their ability to embody an ideal we all aspire to, altruism (IS)

There are very few of us who would not be honored to be called altruistic. It’s a word that in itself evokes images of great men and women, our saints, our prophets and our heroes. It reminds us of those who were willing put everything on the line to help humanity in its time of need. However, there are other beings, from shrimp to insects to dogs to apes, capable of altruism in our world that do not get any nearly enough credit or respect. Yet, legally, we value them as no more honorable or respectable than a chair, a bottle or even a trash can. We have decided, in our feigned wisdom, that these beings are simply property. We are not trying to argue that these beings are more important, or more valuable than a human. However, we are arguing that it is still very important that we should place them above inanimate property, and place them in a category called “Living Property”. This category symbolizes their ranking above inanimate objects such as pencils and chairs, and yet still comfortably low enough as to not threaten our own noble rank. It is not as if we are suggesting anything new or groundbreaking. We already have numerous laws in place that grant animals some modicum of rights and respect. We are only asking that we consolidate all of these laws, and place them into a new category altogether.

Definition of Altruism (IS)

Before we go any further, it is of utmost importance that we define and set what altruism is. Altruism is “the principle or practice of unselfish concern for devotion to the welfare of others” (Dictionary.com). There are numerous examples of this that everyone has seen, from alms given to the needy to the common bee sting. The degree is far different in these two common examples. A good citizen gives alms to the needy in the hope that they will not starve tonight. In comparison, a bee literally sacrifices itself when it stings you, in the hope that you will leave their home and not return.

Different Forms of Altruism (IS)

There are those who would argue that a bee's sting, and most other examples of altruism, is not true altruism due to their sacrifice or loss causing a higher chance for their genes to still be passed on, and according to altruism as defined by any biology textbook, they are correct. In a strictly scientific sense, altruism is only when the animal decreases its fitness (fitness being its chance for its genome to continue on) and increase another individual's fitness (Cain). This can be applied to a bee's sting. They sacrifice themselves to decrease their fitness, and directly increase the queen bee's fitness by driving away an intruder. However, does anyone truly believe this is what a bee is thinking when it stings you? Yes, we agree animals are more respectable and intelligent than a chair, but not so intelligent to perform a statistical analysis.

There are two different forms of altruism we would like to focus on in this argument, human-animal and animal-animal. Human-Animal altruism is a favorite of our media to report on. We have all heard of examples of heroic dogs, and sometimes cats, which saved a family from a burning home. There have been numerous examples in even the last few years, so hopefully our listing will only serve to remind you of the numerous examples you have seen on the news, with some new ones you may have missed.

There is also animal-animal altruism, which is not nearly reported to nearly the same extent as human-animal, though for obvious reasons. The most common form of animal-animal altruism is a member of one species assisting a member of the same species (intraspecies). However, a more intriguing phenomena is when an animal assists an animal of a different species (interspecies) altruistically. There is little to no reason an animal should sacrifice its own fitness for animal of a different species, even in a biological sense.

Animal-Animal Altruism (LT)

1. Intraspecies Altruism

Laboratory Studies Concerning Wildlife (LT)

Animal are not just capable of showing altruistic actions towards human. In fact, evidence from daily news report, scientific studies, documentaries from zoo and wildlife conservation parks or even videotapes recorded by the public have all shown that animals do behave altruistically towards distressed members of their own species.

In a laboratory setting using chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) as a model to study contingent reciprocity between social partners, it is found that previous help from a social partner is not needed to elicit a response to help out another social partner in reaching out for food (1). In other words, this is not a reciprocal relationship whereby one social partner is expecting another half to carry out an action that will benefit him or her before he or she is willing to reciprocate with the same response. A social partner is equally likely to help out another half that may or may not have helped it to get food before (1). This is certainly an interesting finding, but still, it is too early to judge whether these altruistic acts are clearly what they seem, or the driving mechanisms are some kind of evolutionary puzzle that we will never fully understand. Regardless, this is still valid evidence to prove that chimpanzees do have certain level of selflessness. Could chimpanzees possibly be more "humane" than we thought just because both humans and chimpanzees are evolutionarily more related? Or is it that altruism is not intrinsically unique to

the primate family? Are we, in fact, not too dissimilar to members of different families in this regard?

Laboratory studies and field observations have been done on the social species, the common vampire bat (*Desmodus rotundus*), that feed exclusively on blood meal of larger mammals and birds. Restricted by a demanding physiology, vampire bats are incapable of surviving after more than 70 hours of fasting (2). To combat starvation at consecutive unfortunate nights when food sources are scarce, underfed bats elicit a begging behavior to solicit blood meal from fed bats (3). Although fed bats are more likely to regurgitate blood meal to closely related members and partners, they do help out hungry roost mates with little to no relatedness by regurgitating a smaller portion of blood (3). This is not a reciprocity behavior as roost mates might or might not have or will or will not help out their hungry donors both at the past or in the future (3). If reciprocity cannot be used to explain such noble act, then perhaps altruism is a more suitable term to describe it.

In the wild, a female octopus of the species *Graneledone boreopacifica* has recently been found to safeguard her eggs for 53 months - the longest brooding period that has ever been documented (4). The deep sea environment is harsh. The longer she can protect the eggs underneath her tentacles in order for the embryos to develop up to a certain size, the more likely it is for them to be able to survive out in the open ocean (5). Because the ambient temperature of the deep sea is so cold (about 3 degrees Celsius), this female octopus had such a slow metabolism that it did not eat for the entire 53 months (4). As soon as her offspring hatched, she died out of exhaustion (4). A bigger aspect of the whole altruistic concept comes from the willingness to sacrifice without asking for anything in return. The maternal instinct to protect offspring by any means deemed necessary is unarguably a form of altruism that lies on the borderline between biological altruism and ethical altruism. From the perspective of the mother octopus, we can never really know whether or not she was thinking of spreading her genome while continuously deteriorating her health just to secure the safety of her eggs. Regardless, sacrifice had to be made and it is indeed costly under both circumstances - she died so that her children may live. That is the whole beauty of altruism.

Domesticated Animals (LT)

Domesticated animals are capable of being altruistic too. February 9, 2009, a video about a stray dog rescuing another dog was posted on Youtube by the user "beehphy" (6). Allegedly, this video was recorded by a surveillance camera above Chile's highway. After the first dog got hit by a car, it laid still on the middle of the highway. A second stray dog came to the rescue by dragging it gently to the side of the road where traffic was less crowded. The second dog seems to be aware of its dangerous surrounding where vehicles were constantly rushing through with high speed. While dragging the injured dog, it did not forget to observe its surrounding to dodge incoming cars. Animals like dogs are truly intelligent creatures!

2. Interspecies Altruism

Livestock (LT)

In several cases animals have been observed to act altruistically towards a distressed member of a different species. On July 22, 2015, a herd of cows in Lincolnshire, England tried to save a baby seal by nudging and pushing it out of a pool of mud (7). What would a herd of farm cows

gain by trying to help a baby seal? As the seal had absolutely no relatedness to the cows, it leads one to think that this was an example of an instinctual altruistic behavior. It seems reasonable to assume that the cows can somehow sense the baby seal's distress signal and act accordingly. It would be interesting to do a controlled study to determine whether animals are truly capable of exhibiting interspecies altruistic behaviors.

Animal - Human Altruism (AW)

Animals have also been known to exhibit altruistic behaviors towards human beings. This does involve pets assisting their owners in life-threatening situations, but also exotic animals caring for people. While there are animals that are trained to save lives, for example police dogs, there is an abundance of examples where untrained animals have saved human lives.

Pets are well-known for bonding with humans. There are many stories of pets saving their owners from various types of situations. One example is Lulu, the heroic pig, who alerted help to save her owner, when the owner entered cardiac arrest (8). When Jo Ann was in cardiac arrest, Lulu noticed the distress and ran outside to get help. The pig laid down in the middle of traffic until one driver got out of his car to assist the pig. The bystander then followed Lulu inside the house, after noticing cuts the pig suffered from running outside to the road. The owner told the man to call an ambulance, where she was taken to the hospital to undergo emergency heart surgery. Another example of a pet that saved his owner's life was when Dory, the owner's rabbit, alerted the owner's spouse thumping his legs vigorously on top the man (9). This peculiar behavior caught the spouse's attention, and prompted her to call for an ambulance as her husband was in a diabetic coma. There are additional stories of pets protecting families from other animal attacks. An 11 year old boy encountered a cougar in his backyard while he was doing housework. The cougar approached the boy closer and eventually pounced. Luckily, the family's dog, Angel, jumped in front of the wild cat and intervened. The boy screamed for help and eventually the police came to help out. The cougar was eventually killed, and Angel was transported to a veterinary hospital. Angel had no life threatening injuries and was allowed to return home (10).

Wildlife has also been seen saving human lives. One example is Binti Jua, a gorilla, who saved a little boy after he fell more than 20 feet into a gorilla exhibit at the Brookfield Zoo. After the boy fell into the exhibit, the gorilla picked up the child and carried him to safety (11). The gorilla then swaddled the boy and even turned away from other gorillas. Binti Jua handed over the boy to zookeepers when they arrived. Another example of animal altruism was shown in Todd Endris's life threatening situation. Todd was surfing in 2007 off the coast of California. A great white shark attacked him multiple times, but Todd was able to protect himself for a short period of time. Eventually, dolphins encircled him, which allowed Todd to get back on his surfboard and surf to shore (12). A Beluga whale at an aquarium is credited with saving a diver's life, who suffered from leg cramps that paralyzed her. As she started to sink, Mila, a Beluga whale, grasped Yang's leg and pushed her to the surface (13).

Evidence of Love/Care/Emotion (IS)

Often times, we invoke the name of animals when we are quantifying how brave or courageous, or even nervous, a person can be. Being as jittery as a mouse, brave as a lion or as clever as a fox are very common sayings that most people have heard at one point or another.

One invocation that most people must not have heard is having the empathy of a rat (14). In an experiment done by animal cognition scientists, it was shown that rats will sacrifice their own food to save a fellow rat that is in danger of drowning. Since we believe that many animals are capable of altruism, this is not surprising to us. What did surprise us is that the rat would save their fellow rat faster if the rat was at one time in danger of drowning themselves, displaying an ideal, empathy, that most of us would never associate with rats.

A common attribute we associate with dogs is how loving they are. We have all witness how even small dogs, when not well trained, will bark and growl at anyone else who dares go near their owner. The owner would claim this is out of love. As shown on 60 minutes with Anderson Cooper (15), when a dog looks at its owner, the brain releases oxytocin as measured by MRI. This same chemical is released when, for example, we fall in love and when a mother looks at her child. This data seems to suggest that dogs are as capable as love as any human is.

There are numerous other ways that animals have displayed various emotions and, seemingly, altruistic acts. Although animals are unable to express emotions and altruistic behaviors like that of a human, these expressions appear to be real and not a matter of coincidence. One cannot argue that animals are completely devoid of any feeling like that of an inanimate object such as a chair or pencil. This is why we believe it is a gross injustice for animals to be in the same class as non-living objects, and this is why their legal status should be upgraded from being “property” to that of “living property”.

Community Action: Animals Show Altruism -They should be LIVING Property

We compiled numerous videos about animal exhibiting altruistic behaviors, and published the compilation on YouTube. We then linked the video to a petition that upgrades animals’ legal status to living property. Link to petition: <https://www.change.org/p/us-senators-change-the-status-of-animals-from-property-to-living-property>

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Letters to the Editor

Sent to Daily Targum - IS

To the Editor

Altruism is a trait that is celebrated amongst humans. It is the number one trait we assign to our courageous heroes, our pious saints and our great leaders.

This all goes out the window when an animal displays altruism. We have tried to discredit them time and time again. We try to delude ourselves into thinking that because these two animals may share a portion of their genes, they are not being truly altruistic. In our legal system, we place animals in the same ranking as a chair, as property.

I am not trying to argue that animals are more important, or more valuable than a human. However, I am arguing that it is still very important that we should place them above inanimate property, and place them in a category called "Living Property". This category symbolizes their ranking above inanimate objects such as pencils and chairs, and yet still comfortably low enough as to not threaten our own noble rank.

It is not as if I am suggesting anything new or groundbreaking. We already have numerous laws in place that grant animals some modicum of rights and respect. We are only asking that we consolidate all of these laws, and place them into a new category altogether

Sincerely,
Ismail Sukkar

Sent to National Geographic Magazine - AW

To Editor in Chief,

As more research is being done with animals, new evidence points towards animals being more human like than ever previously thought. For example in your articles “Dogs Are Even More Like Us Than We Thought” and “Yes, Animals Think And Feel. Here's How We Know” show that animals possess complex human qualities and emotions. Even with strong examples of animals’ intelligence of planning, and even eavesdropping, and emotions such as empathy, animals are treated as property under the law. Animals should be in the least upgraded to living property to be distinguished from owned inanimate objects in regards to the legal system. Animals also have the capability of altruism, a quality even lacking in some people. Stories about animals saving other animals’ lives, humpback whangsforum@nationalgeographic.com, whales saving seals from killer whales (Worrall 2015), or even human lives demonstrate altruism. As pets are beings and are capable of expressing altruism, they should be looked upon as least as living property in the legal system.

Wei-Hass, Maya. 2015. Dogs Are Even More Like Us Than We Thought. National Geographic.

Worrall, Simon. 2015. Yes, Animals Think And Feel. Here's How We Know. National Geographic.

From,
Adam Weinberger

Sent to USA Today - LT

Altruism exists in animals too

Humans are not so unique and more evolutionarily advanced as we once thought. Multiple studies both in laboratory setting and in the wild have shown that animals are capable of being altruistic not only towards members of their own species but have also shown love and cares to members from a different species too. After all, who is to judge the fate of one entire species moreover ruling over all existing one when in reality, animals are indeed very similar to us or perhaps I should say we are very similar to them due to the very fact that animals of all sizes behave altruistically somehow regardless of how we discredit them.

Unfortunately, humans do rule over animals. Laws that treat animals like property instead of living property, hunting licenses permitted to those who wish to participate in the slaughtering of "game species" for the sake of sports and pride, regulations that allow for the killing of zoo or wild animals if they ever posed a threat to us, what have we become? Maybe we are not even

animals like the alpha predators we thought we are, at least predators show respect to their preys by granting them a quick death. We are something more; we are smarter yet much darker and much scarier than you thought you really are. With great power comes great responsibility, it is still not too late to save animals before we ultimately regretted for not doing so. The first step is to change the legal status of animal from property to living property, or to something better.

Leslie Tsen Jing Wei
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