



# Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy

By Gary Steiner

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*Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents* is the first-ever comprehensive examination of views of animals in the history of Western philosophy, from Homeric Greece to the twentieth century.

In recent decades, increased interest in this area has been accompanied by scholars' willingness to conceive of animal experience in terms of human mental capacities: consciousness, self-awareness, intention, deliberation, and in some instances, at least limited moral agency. This conception has been facilitated by a shift from behavioral to cognitive ethology (the science of animal behavior), and by attempts to affirm the essential similarities between the psychophysical makeup of human beings and animals.

Gary Steiner sketches the terms of the current debates about animals and relates these to their historical antecedents, focusing on both the dominant anthropocentric voices and those recurring voices that instead assert a fundamental kinship relation between human beings and animals. He concludes with a discussion of the problem of balancing the need to recognize a human indebtedness to animals and the natural world with the need to preserve a sense of the uniqueness and dignity of the human individual.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“Steiner’s work is a rigorous and stimulating reappraisal of the long-lasting and often baleful influence of Greek philosophy on Western attitudes towards animals.”

--*New England Classical Journal*

“Steiner has provided a needed and lucid account of the history he targets.”

—*Journal of the History of Philosophy*

“This book will be highly valuable to scholars of animal rights/welfare as a historical overview of this issue, and an excellent introduction to the history of Western philosophy in general. Highly recommended.”

—*Choice*

#### From the Back Cover

"Steiner has written a clear and detailed history of philosophical views of nonhuman animals. His book is unique because the perspective he brings to the history of Western philosophy is informed by the thought of Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida. Both animal rightists and opponents to animal rights can benefit from a reading of this book."--Daniel A. Dombrowski, Seattle University

"Steiner presents an engaging and most accessible historical review of the moral status of nonhuman animals in the Western philosophical tradition. This well-researched and clearly written book is a significant contribution to the ongoing discussion about the moral significance of animal interests, and it will serve as an important reference work for others working in the area."--Gary L. Francione, Rutgers University School of Law

"This major and original contribution to the history of anthropocentrism in Western culture fills a long-standing need for critical and illuminating analyses of the meaning and influence of this concept. Everyone interested in animal rights and the general field of environmental ethics should own this book for reference and reading pleasure."--Richard Watson, Washington University in St. Louis

#### About the Author

Gary Steiner is John Howard Harris Professor of Philosophy at Bucknell University. He is the author of *Animals and the Moral Community: Mental Life, Moral Status, and Kinship*, and *Descartes as a Moral Thinker: Christianity, Technology, Nihilism*. He is also the translator of Prauss’s *Knowing and Doing in Heidegger’s “Being and Time”* and Löwith’s *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*.

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