

# Philosophical Anthropology and Interspecies Solidarity

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## Opinion

Nonhuman animals (henceforth animals) pose an especially strong case of the problem of other minds. This is the problem of justifying the belief that others possess minds, that they indeed have thoughts and feelings like oneself. If this is dubious in the case of other members of one's own species, then it is surely preposterous in the case of members of other species. In the seventeenth century, Descartes reasoned other minds with similar thoughts and feelings was a problem to be solved rationally by a process of reasoning from oneself as a solidarity 'I' to other thinking and feeling human beings. As for animals, he thought they are just mindless mechanisms, robots or 'anibots'.

However, the twentieth century philosophical anthropologist, Max Scheler, challenged Descartes' conception of radical alterity or otherness [1]. He argued all human life experiences not only emerge from a background of experiencing with others, but also engender feelings of responsibility for them, along with feelings of shared responsibility for the solidarity community. Indeed, this capacity for solidarity with others begins not at the rational but rather affective or emotional level of common experience. According to Scheler, experiencing with others presupposes a community of love; a community based on co-feelings binding its members to one another whether they want to experience these feelings or not. Nevertheless, his solution to the problem of other minds in such a community is fundamentally anthropocentric. Scheler identifies five types of primordial involuntary experiences, underlying solidarity with others in a loving human community [2].

First, we may feel the same feeling together, as when parents feel the same feelings of anguish concerning the death of their child. Second, a neighbor of the bereaved parents might empathize with their anguish over the loss of their child, but vicariously, at some distance from their pain. Third, one might be moved to action by fellow feelings or sympathy for others experiencing cruelty or abuse; feeling their pain, one wants to reach out and help, intervene to prevent their suffering. Fourth, one might be overtaken by a

contagious feeling, losing oneself in the celebratory atmosphere of a group of friends at a party or perhaps even losing oneself in the contagious violence of a mob. Fifth, at the extreme of contagion, one might lose oneself completely in others, identifying with your pain and your experiences rather than mine, as when a Christian mystic identifies completely with the sufferings of Christ [3].

Appealing to a phenomenology of specifically human experiences of co-feeling, Scheler simultaneously solves the problem of other human minds and lays the foundation for a solidaristic community of love. But is that all? Recent ethological observations of 'animal minds' confirm his five types of human co-feeling also apply to a great many human animals, domestic and wild. Not only do they appear to feel the same feelings and emphasize with others; animals sometimes act on fellow feelings to relieve the suffering of others. Their group behaviors are frequently contagious. Some ethological observers even attribute to some animals a capacity for mystical identifications [4].

The implications of these observations of animal mindedness and capacities for co-feeling are profound. Scheler's philosophical anthropology lays a foundation for multiple layers of solidaristic community across species lines. Scheler himself may easily recognize a basis for a human community of love entering solidarity with animals exhibiting the five types of co-feeling. However, this cannot be seen as an anthropocentric one-way street: humans establishing relations of solidarity with animals, but not vice versa. Animals are equally capable of establishing solidarity with other animals of different species and with humans. Scheler saw the five types of co-feeling as the foundation of a nonformal ethics of solidarity in affect and feeling rather than reason. Anything but Cartesian anibots, many animals should be viewed as equal participants with humans in just such an ethics, as one of interspecies solidarity.

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