Animal Welfare Tree

Elliot Temple, Dec 2022

- Computer/robot theory of animals
  - Animal advocate literature?
    - The point of literature is that people think things through carefully then write down fairly stable thoughts that are fairly high quality, which they're fairly unlikely to change their mind about soon or easily.
      - It's better to argue with ideas that were already thought-through.
        - If ideas are not already thought-through, then one should focus on exploration and learning. It's inappropriate to have reached a conclusion, which you defend in debate, if you haven't thought things through yet yourself (and also don't have a thought-leader who thought things through for you and wrote them down, and then you think his literature is correct – that can be OK too).
      - Debating people who come up with new ideas mid-debate is problematic because they'll keep changing their mind or coming up with other ideas. So you are debating against moving targets. Showing them they made a mistake doesn't accomplish much because they're basically just brainstorming. Other people on their side would brainstorm differently, so the arguments don't carry over well for persuading other people.
        - It's also hard to organize the discussion. If you know your position in advance you can plan how to discuss it. If you don't know what you'll say later in the discussion, you can't plan ahead.
        - Changing your mind can be good. But if you keep changing your arguments while keeping the same conclusion, that's problematic. And if all your arguments that you brainstorm favor the same conclusion, that shows bias. If you're figuring things out as you go along, you should be brainstorming arguments for both sides – you're doing a learning process and learning shouldn't pre-suppose a particular conclusion.
    - Lack of literature covering issues shows that the thought leaders haven't thought things through.
      - Are these ideas too obscure for them to know about?
        - No. Research on animal behavior predates the animal liberation movement.
          - The idea of animals as automatons or robots is old (e.g. Descartes, or Hans Hass in ~1970, and I bet many others). The idea of looking at detailed research on animal behavior, and then thinking about what causes or explains that behavior, is not very novel or clever. People have wondered about whether the behavior is innate, instinct, learned, intelligent, sentient, etc. Animal advocates should discuss the research and comment on such issues.
            - Modern ideas about computers, robotics, AI programming, etc., have been around for decades and are well known now. Animal advocates should easily have been able to see the relevance by now and consider which animal behaviors, if any, are explained by this modern stuff.
            - Darwin wrote about it too, e.g. from *On The Origin of Species*: "An action, which we ourselves require experience to enable us to perform, when performed by an animal, more especially by a very young one, without experience, and when performed by many individuals in the same way, without their knowing for what purpose it is performed, is usually said to be instinctive." via https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2009/2009-h/2009-h.htm
            - The ancient Greeks and Romans considered this stuff. E.g. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animals_in_ancient_Greece_and_Rome#In_philosophy Some advocated vegetarianism but "According to Aristotle humans are separate from animals as they have the capacity for reason". Similarly "Augustine, a Christian theologian believed that animals were not part of the City of God as they were irrational beings."
              - Since these debates are so old, today's animal advocates should have high quality literature addressing these issues, including with updates addressing modern knowledge about robotics, computation, AI software, etc.
  - Animal research literature
    - There is reasonably high quality research documenting a ton of information about animals based on careful, lengthy observation or based on lab experiments
      - A PBS article about elephants is not high quality research. We should look for better evidence. If there is better evidence about elephants, we should use that. If it doesn't exist, we should start by looking at cases with better evidence. If we run out of those cases and still need more examples to discuss, then we could try to look at cases with only poor evidence.
    - We need to have conceptual categories first like algorithms and intelligence, and know what those mean. We need categorization criteria. We need to know what to look for. Then we can look at animal examples and categorize them.
      - If we have difficulty figuring out the right categories, looking at examples could help us develop categories. Using examples to develop categories, or to reach conclusions about animals, are different stages. We shouldn't mix them.
        - Once we have conceptual categories, we should put some relatively simple, clear, easy example animals into the categories, and agree on that before trying to deal with a harder case like elephants.
  - Topics/questions
    - Intelligence
      - Types of behaviors
        - Innate or fixed (genetic)
        - "Learned"
          - Algorithm that reads and writes data
        - Intelligent
      - Sources of knowledge
        - Genes (via biological evolution)
        - intelligent thought (memes, evolution of ideas)
        - sensory input and data storage
          - requires genetic algorithms or intelligence to use. not functional alone in isolation.
    - Suffering
      - Elliot doesn't think suffering is possible without intelligence. Let's set aside details until after discussing algorithms and intelligence.
    - Sentience
      - Related to the intelligence and suffering issues. We may not need to cover sentience specifically if we cover the other two issues.