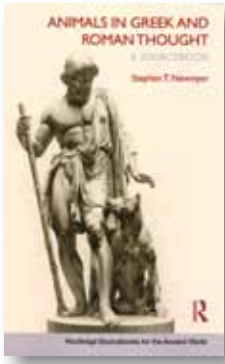


Animals and Ethics



Animals in Greek and Roman Thought: A Sourcebook

by Stephen T. Newmyer
(New York: Routledge, 2011).
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REVIEWED BY JACOB MORTON, *Ph.D. student in the Graduate Group in Ancient History at the University of Pennsylvania.*

This valuable book seeks to address a series of questions that have come to occupy an important place in contemporary ethical discussions: Are humans different from all other animals? Ought humans to treat these other animals with justice and, if so, does this mean that we should not eat them? If not, what rationale does one use to defend unjust behavior towards animals? How does one's view of man's relationship with animals shape one's worldview?

In *Animals in Greek and Roman Thought*, Stephen Newmyer gathers quotations from ancient authors ranging from Homer to Porphyry to illustrate how the aforementioned questions occupied the thoughts of people in the classical world and how their ways of thinking compare to modern concerns about animal rights. Newmyer states in his preface that this book is designed to fill a gap in the modern discussion on justice towards animals, and as such he often compares and relates the ancient sources to relevant modern discussions. This makes the focus of the book as much on the relevance of the views of the ancients to today's world as on the relationships of the different thinkers in the ancient world to each other.

The book has two parts: "Animals as Beings" and "Human-Animal Relations." Both parts are then divided into sections, each consisting of topical primary source quotations, commentary on the quotations by Newmyer, and briefly annotated suggestions for further reading. In these sections the author presents sources that focus on how humans view animals and how humans relate

themselves to the rest of the animal world. He gives background information on each author and work cited, explains Latin and Greek words of interest, positions the quotation in the larger work and, most helpfully, explains how this passage relates to the intellectual discussions of its day, and how the author in question is reacting to or incorporating previous discussions.

The section "The Language of Animals" is representative of the book's strengths. Newmyer begins by explaining that language was the trait separating man from other animals "most frequently singled out" (p. 59) by ancient authors. A lack of language would thus make an animal less than human and not due the justice due to a man. The author then links this ancient idea to the arguments of modern ethicists, cognitive ethologists, and philosophers. Newmyer walks the reader chronologically through six ancient authors, clearly demonstrating the development and exchange of ideas between ancient thinkers. True to his goal of presenting "arguments on both sides of every debate" (p. xii), the latter three authors, beginning with Plutarch, argue for language use by animals. The extensive use of Plutarch, who is responsible for 25 percent of the quotations in the book, is fitting from a Plutarch scholar of Newmyer's stature.

One cannot shake the feeling that modern concerns have perhaps received overly generous attention when Newmyer points out that "of all the uses to which animals were put in classical society, none was reckoned so essential to the functioning of the state as the sacrifice of animals in religious contexts" (p. 89). However, he cites only one author on animal sacrifice while, in contrast, citing seven authors on intellectual discussions of the less common behavior in antiquity of vegetarianism. Nevertheless, Newmyer does an exceptional job of gathering and contextualizing sources on the intellectual history of the question of what it means to be a human and how our understanding of this concept affects our relations with the rest of the animal world. This book will undoubtedly be an essential tool for students of the classical world and for people interested in the origins in Western thought of modern ethical arguments concerning treatment of animals. 🏠