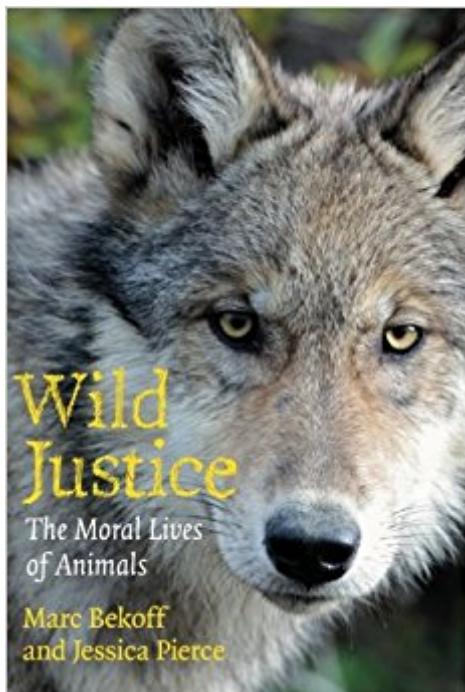


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# Wild Justice: The Moral Lives Of Animals



## Synopsis

Scientists have long counseled against interpreting animal behavior in terms of human emotions, warning that such anthropomorphizing limits our ability to understand animals as they really are. Yet what are we to make of a female gorilla in a German zoo who spent days mourning the death of her baby? Or a wild female elephant who cared for a younger one after she was injured by a rambunctious teenage male? Or a rat who refused to push a lever for food when he saw that doing so caused another rat to be shocked? Are these clear signs that animals have recognizable emotions and moral intelligence? With *Wild Justice* Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce unequivocally answer yes. Marrying years of behavioral and cognitive research with compelling and moving anecdotes, Bekoff and Pierce reveal that animals exhibit a broad repertoire of moral behaviors, including fairness, empathy, trust, and reciprocity. Underlying these behaviors is a complex and nuanced range of emotions, backed by a high degree of intelligence and surprising behavioral flexibility. Animals, in short, are incredibly adept social beings, relying on rules of conduct to navigate intricate social networks that are essential to their survival. Ultimately, Bekoff and Pierce draw the astonishing conclusion that there is no moral gap between humans and other species: morality is an evolved trait that we unquestionably share with other social mammals. Sure to be controversial, *Wild Justice* offers not just cutting-edge science, but a provocative call to rethink our relationship with and our responsibilities toward our fellow animals.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Cognitive ethologist Bekoff (The Emotional Lives of Animals) and philosopher Pierce (Morality Play) explore the moral lives of such commonly studied animals as primates, wolves, household rodents, elephants, dolphinsâ "and a few uncommon critters as well. Citing too few examples (though the authors say that the more we look, the more we'll see) and too many term definitions, this book presents studies of rats refusing to obtain food if it means hurting another rat; the care given by chimpanzees to a chimp stricken by cerebral palsy; and comfort offered to grieving elephants by members of the same herd. The authors contend that, in order to understand the moral compass by which animals live, we must first expand our definition of morality to include moral behavior unique to each species. Studies done by the authors, as well as experts in the fields of psychology, human social intelligence, zoology and other branches of relevant science excellently bolster their claim.

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--This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Do animals feel empathy for each other, treat one another fairly, cooperate toward common goals, and help each other out of trouble? In short, do animals demonstrate morality? Bekoff and Pierce answer with an emphatic âœyes!â • in this fusion of animal behavior, animal cognition, and philosophy. The authors discuss the sense of fair play and justice in nonhuman animals. Social animals form networks of relationships, and these relationships rely on trust, reciprocity, and flexibilityâ "just as they do in humans. Calling these behaviors morality, the authors present evidence that morality is an adaptive strategy that has evolved in multiple animal groups. Basing their argument for animal morality on published research (listed in the generous bibliography) and anecdotal evidence, the authors group moral behaviors into three clusters: cooperation, empathy, and justice, each of which is discussed in turn. A final chapter is a synthesis of moral behavior and philosophy, suggesting areas for further study and discussion. The conversational tone and numerous illustrative examples make this an excellent introduction to a new science. --Nancy Bent

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After thoroughly loving my last non-fiction nature read, I excitedly picked this one up - a book that I have been meaning to get around to for the past six years... I have wanted to read this book so much that I actually have it in hardcover, Kindle and Audible... so needless to say, I have really wanted to read this one...And I think that may have fed into my ultimate disappointment. The authors spend a lot of time defending their word choices and repeat their anecdotal evidence quite a bit, too. Maybe this wouldn't be as noticeable if I was the sort of reader who set a book aside for

days, weeks or months at a time, but in listening and reading to it over a few days, I have to say that I found it repetitive for being so short. What evidence there was that was discussed was certainly interesting, well-presented and definitely balanced, but I just wish that there had been more of it! Even the examples were repeated and overall, I just had wanted the book to be more engaging than it was... I wanted more anecdotal evidence as these examples clearly illustrated the authors' main points... I am not sure, the book kind of felt like an overly long introduction without ever really getting "there"... I wish that I didn't have quite so many formats of it... I don't know that I will be re-visiting this one...

... I just wish that this was that book. The authors seek to convince us that when we see animals working together we aren't seeing "veevers of cooperation, fairness, and trust, but the real thing." "Wild Justice" is the name they give to the combination of behaviors they group under the names "cooperation," "empathy," and "justice." They adopt a multi-disciplinary approach, drawing on observations of animals (captive and wild), neurological studies, and philosophy. Of special interest to them is whether or not animals can be said to have moral agency and how our own observational bias comes into play via our expectations that animal morality look like human morality. While I was ideologically prepared to accept their argument at the beginning of the book, I was unconvinced when I finished. I wish they had spent more time on the argument of moral agency and what it means to behave morally if one may not be making the decision to do so. Too many studies were presented as leading inevitably to the conclusion that an animal acting in a certain way was behaving morally -- it would have been much more convincing if Beckoff and Pierce had explored other theories that attempt to explain why the animals acted the way they did before simply drawing the conclusion that animals have moral lives. As reading, this was relatively dry. Those expecting the more anecdote-driven style of, say, Jeffrey Masson, will be disappointed. This wasn't convincing enough to be an outstanding addition to the growing body of scientific/philosophical justifications for changing the way we relate to animals. Nor was it emotionally engaging in a way that will win hearts. However, if you have interest in the subject, it may provide a good place to start your research.

A first rate foray into uncharted territory. Long-overdue in a world of behaviorist dogma that has denied interiority to animals for a century and a half. Groundbreaking and daring. Hats off to the authors!

Rather deep and thought provoking. Nicely documented. One wonders about how we ought to define being human. It seems that most all the distinctions we want to pull out get blown out of the water on regular basis. One wonders if the next revelation will be animal spirituality, them declaring "Of course we have souls. We don't misplace them like you do."

Great book. Important message. Transformational.

This book is notable for both its brazenness and its modesty. Bekoff and Pierce dare to argue for the moral agency of nonhuman animals; yet they do so in an entirely sober and scientific way, as well as with philosophic circumspection. Why is their thesis bold? Because it is common, even among animal-lovers, to attribute total moral innocence to other animals. Among animal users and abusers it is a chief argument for withholding moral consideration from them. One of the standard kinds of moral theory maintains that only beings who are capable of being moral agents deserve to be treated with moral concern and respect. While there are plausible considerations for holding such a view, theorists such as Bekoff and Pierce (and myself) ultimately reject it. The ethicist Tom Regan has put forward the classic rebuttal, which is that a being can be a so-called moral patient, and not (or not only) a moral agent. This means that one can fully merit moral regard even if one is incapable of holding others in moral regard. An obvious example among human beings would be a severely mentally retarded person, who might have no conception of how to treat others properly but who nevertheless would merit being treated properly by others. So a standard "move" by animal advocates such as Regan is to argue that nonhuman animals are moral patients if not moral agents and hence deserving of our moral consideration even if they are incapable of having any for us or even other members of their own species. But Bekoff and Pierce roll out the red carpet even further to welcome our fellow animals into the moral community by attributing moral agency to them and not just moral patency. A great strength of the book, as I have noted, is that the authors do all of this circumspectly. They marshal a great deal of both anecdotal and scientific evidence in favor of their thesis. However, the thesis would not be worth much if unaccompanied by an analysis of just what "moral" means; and here again the book is worthy for its careful and thorough delineation of how they are using that term and concept. If Bekoff and Pierce are right - and they have certainly convinced me, who was a skeptic to begin with - animals are twice-removed (by being moral agents as well as moral patients) from their normal designation as mere objects for human use and exploitation (as in eating them, experimenting on them, wearing them, breeding them, and so forth). One possible caveat regarding the practical implications of their thesis, however, comes from

psychologists Kurt Gray and Daniel M. Wegner, who argue that the distinction between moral agents and moral patients works to structure our moral responses in unsuspecting ways ("Moral typecasting: Divergent perceptions of moral agents and moral patients" in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 96, no. 3, pp. 505-520, 2009). One of those ways, they claim based on their empirical research, is that beings who are perceived primarily as moral patients are more likely to garner moral consideration than beings who are perceived primarily as moral agents. This runs quite contrary to the usual philosophic take, as noted above, and may only be based on preliminary findings. But if there is anything to it, then attributing moral agency to nonhuman animals, however correctly, could actually backfire as a strategy of animal advocacy. However, that sad fact would not affect the truth of the thesis. One glaring omission from this book is a sustained discussion of obligation and responsibility. It is one thing to argue that animals can be empathic and cooperative and compassionate and even just, but quite another to argue that they can be held accountable for their actions and might even be found "guilty" of immoral behavior. So by "moral" Bekoff and Pierce seem to mean only that animals can be morally good, as when we say that someone's behavior was highly moral. But we can also speak of moral responsibility and moral obligation, which implies that someone's behavior can be immoral or morally bad or wrong. And on this the book is strangely silent. By the way, a very interesting article on this issue is Paul Shapiro's "Moral Agency in Other Animals" (in *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, vol. 27, pp. 357-73, 2006), which Bekoff and Pierce do cite. (Having noted that, I will declare my sympathy for a view of ethics that omits obligation, even for human beings. A noteworthy contribution to this view of ethics is Richard Garner's *Beyond Morality*, 1994 and now available in revised form on his Website.) One bête noire that Bekoff and Pierce nicely avoid being bitten by is anthropomorphism: the critique that human beings tend to project our own humanity into nonhuman animals. Attributing morality to other animals could be considered an extreme example of that fallacious mental habit. However, the authors parry that human beings are first and foremost animals, as Darwinism has demonstrated in abundance. And therefore it is an unwarranted assumption that any trait we possess is distinctively human. So it could very well be the case that many of the features of ourselves that we see in other animals are shared animal features rather than misattributed human ones. Another fine point I took away from this book (as well as from Shapiro's article) is that the abstract components of human morality may not be an essential feature of morality as such. Even if human morality were inherently abstract, as by incorporating explicit codes or rules or "commandments" or theories of ethical behavior, it would not follow that all moralities need be. Bekoff and Pierce assert their view that moralities are species-specific. This means not only that they would tend to apply primarily to other

members of one's own species but also that their structural features could differ. I would like to add two points. First is that the abstractions and theorizing that are endemic to human morals could have to do not so much with morality as with our human penchant for codifying and theorizing. We do this for furniture and plants as well as for morals. Second is that a morality bereft of abstract self-awareness could conceivably be a better example of its type. Contrast for example the person (or being) who decides after much deliberating and calculating that the right thing to do is to help her neighbor, and the person or being who simply does do habitually and spontaneously. Which is the more moral?

This is Marc Bekoff's academic version, but very interesting.

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