

Is the “animal” as a category a boundary-making tool? Although it may seem apparent what separates a human from a non-human, the animal seems to both transgress and mark these limits.

Who are the “animals?” What defines them? Is there a universal category of the “animal,” or do different cultures have diverse conceptions of animality?

How can we see beyond the normalized boundary between us and them and establish more ethical ways of co-existing?

In light of my almost 50 year relationship with the box turtle Marmaduke I have a feeling of closeness, a “being-with,” but have many more questions than answers, particularly on the matter of ethics. The turtle is after all confined and is not an equal player in the relationship. Yet we have shared the bulk of our lives together. Is this an ‘inter-subjectivity’? If so, how do I continue to learn from this without

succumbing to anthropomorphism or other subjective projections?

We can think about the notion of being-with through the fascinating example of social amoeba, which are about as different from us as a living organism can be, yet they appear to have attractions, aversions and a kind of vibrancy that Kurt Vonnegut may have called “the Universal Will to Become.” How do we deal ethically with such amoeba in the lab? What rights might they have?

Have we lost our ability to connect to the “otherness” of (non human) others?

Is human exceptionalism a manifestation of ontological autism?

Does the Buddhist notion of no separation between the self and others have meaning in terms of our responsibility to be open to non-human subjectivities?

Where do we draw the line between “them” and “us”? Why do we draw it? At “sentience”? Why? How do we define this?

Why do we privilege organisms whose cognitive style most resembles our own?

Will future generations accuse us of unforgivable speciesism just as we criticize others of racism?

Is veganism the only logical conclusion of a trenchant engagement with animals?

Is there a necessary division between our animality and our rationality?

— *Collectively composed after a presentation  
by Terike Haapoja & Oliver Kellhammer  
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