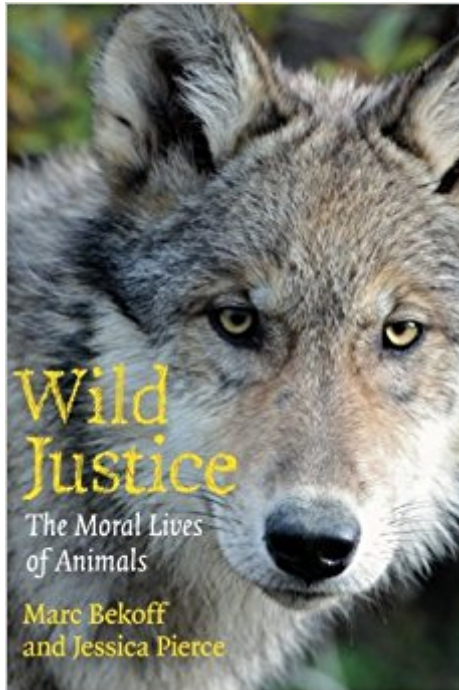


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Wild Justice: The Moral Lives Of Animals



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? Aren't 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

Paperback: 208 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press (May 1, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0226041638

ISBN-13: 978-0226041636

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.7 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 13 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (28 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #710,939 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #64 in [Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Zoology > Animal Psychology](#) #174 in [Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Zoology > Animal Behavior & Communication](#) #2988 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Ethics & Morality](#)

Customer Reviews

I'm glad Wild Justice is bringing in comments, as it deserves a wide readership. It's fine science coupled with fascinating stories, and I disagree avidly with its being labelled as 'wild speculation' (see earlier review). I'd like to point out, as a primate studies-oriented anthropologist who has observed apes for many years, that the reviewer who brings up the now-cliche 'the plural of anecdote is not data' misses the point of what Bekoff and Pierce set out to do. B&P realize that we've barely scratched the surface of understanding animal cooperation, empathy, and morality/justice, and that we need to go beyond statistics to embrace what animals do (sometimes, not all the time) under different circumstances, with social partners of certain social histories, etc. They are as interested in negative evidence for their hypotheses, it seems to me, as in positive evidence. After all, individual variation is key to their endeavor, just as it is key to the workings of natural selection. They note, furthermore, that animal morality has its limits; they do not conflate nonhumans with humans. In sum, the case-study approach DOES have merit scientifically. It can be beautifully combined with statistical studies, so no one is arguing for either/or. It's time for long-term, rigorously done qualitative work on animal behavior to get its due, and there's no place better to start than with what Bekoff and Pierce have accomplished here. Read my full review here:[...]PS Please don't take anyone's word for Bekoff's expertise in this arena: look him up. His website is full of credentials.

. . . 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 "veneers 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.

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."

First, this book in general is interesting. It presents several interesting experiments and events. But it is fairly dry. The authors spend way too much time precisely describing what it will talk about, definitions, etc. The kind of thing that is definitely required for a scientific journal, but boring in a book. Then the descriptions of the animal behavior are too short. The examples are used to push certain views/conclusions, as opposed to encouraging creative thinking and debate, and possible future experiments. I was hoping for far more detailed descriptions and analysis of possible different explanations, as opposed to a statement of view with short descriptions intended to defend that viewpoint. It is clearly written by scientists and works hard to be taken seriously as a work of science. But this is not a peer-review scientific paper. Less of a sense of rigorous argument and more a sense of wonder would have made the book much more interesting. For example, it discusses how rats sometimes refuse to push a lever to get food if they see another rat be shocked when the lever is pushed. This is very interesting, but instead of delving further into it, the book provides little more information than I just did.

It seems the emotional lives of animals can be just as complex as humans. Empathy, compassion, sadness, and outrage at injustice are shared by many non-human animals, and this book lays out some fine examples. Highly recommended.

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