Chapter 3
Integrity as Something Worthy of Moral Protection

In this chapter, I shall discuss three alternative ways of describing integrity as something which is morally worth protecting. (i) In the case of the integrity of animals, some people have proposed a teleological view where we start from the premise that every species is carrying an intrinsic purpose and that this purposiveness is something which should be specially protected. (ii) An alternative to (i) is to focus on the individual’s own experiences in analogy with how respect and moral consideration have been linked to the individual’s capacity to experience pain or happiness. This alternative corresponds better to my own theoretical perspective, which takes as its starting point integrity as an emotional territory. An advantage of using this approach as a basis for moral consideration, is that we are able, with the help of physiological measurements and the study of behaviour, to determine objectively if, and to what degree, individuals are subject to territorial intrusion. Another advantage with a theory of integrity as something related to the individual’s capacity to experience things and social orientation, is that it can be applied to both animals and human beings. The behavioural modules can appear somewhat different for different species, depending both on how different environments have necessitated different strategies of adaptation and how different cognitive abilities are integrated in a response. According to this line of argument, all creatures that are able to feel have a special right to moral protection. As a creature capable of feeling, the individual who possesses the property of integrity is entitled to be assigned a special moral status just as beings with the capacity to feel pain are assigned such a status. Confronted with beings that are capable of sensory feelings, we halt in the sense that we should neither inflict pain on such a being, nor violate their integrity without good reason. (iii) A third approach to moral consideration fixes on the individual’s capacity to act as something morally important, and therefore particularly worthy of moral protection. It is inter alia the Kantian moral tradition which has emphasized respect for the individual as a moral agent, although focussing exclusively on human beings. Morality regulates the intercourse between different individuals and groups. In human history, a number of moral principles have evolved in order to guide the social interaction between people and to cope with different conflicts of interest. According to the Kantian moral tradition, the members of a moral community impose on themselves the fundamental requirement that in their thoughts and actions they must refrain from everything that is based on violence, compulsion or deception.
Ultimately it is a question of respecting another individual’s moral authority. This presupposes a capacity in the individual to be able to impose on themselves this form of basic requirement. It is here that there is a break in continuity with the rest of the animal kingdom, even if human beings share many capacities with the other animals and the actual experience of a violation of integrity in its basic essentials follows universal psychological principles.

3.1 A Teleological Perspective with Regard to Integrity

The concept of integrity has in recent years begun to figure in discussions of animal ethics. In this context, however, one usually interprets the concept on the basis of a teleological perspective and not from the individual’s own experience or capacity to act. The capacity to feel pain has been widely accepted as a reason for assigning to animals a moral value which must be respected by human beings in keeping animals or using them in research experiments. Arthur Caplan has in addition proposed an animal’s purposiveness as a basis for moral status (Caplan 1993). If an organism tries to attain certain natural ends, such as drinking water, seeking out its habitat, or resting, then other things being equal, it is wrong to frustrate these desires and ends. According to Caplan, the capacity for feeling and purposiveness constitute two properties which intrinsically provide sufficient ground for ascribing to an organism a moral value which we should not violate without good reason.

With regard to these properties, human beings and animals are similar, even if there are often relevant differences concerning the complexity involved which can constitute a legitimate ground for treating different beings differently. The capacity to feel pain is complex inasmuch as it can involve one or more of the following three components: namely a sensory one, an affective one and a cognitive one. A purely sensory pain reaction which can be observed in animals is by no means necessarily experienced by the animal as something painful. The nociceptive message never passes parts of the brain which cause the animal to feel pain. It is first when the affective and cognitive components are activated that it is meaningful to speak of suffering. If an animal has cognitive capacities which, for example, entail that an experience of pain can be anticipated or remembered, the prerequisites exist for mental suffering. The more advanced the capacities for experiencing pain that an animal possesses, the stricter the moral protection should be. In an analogous way, we can imagine that the property of being purposive varies in degree of complexity and can therefore constitute a ground for different treatment, even if all individuals with these properties have a right to moral consideration.

Caplan never speaks of integrity in this connection but contents himself by giving purposiveness as a ground for a moral value. Bart Rutgers and Robert Heeger, however, take this purposiveness as a reason for assigning integrity to animals (Rutgers and Heeger 1999). According to their proposal, an animal’s integrity is a property which is composed of three components: the wholeness and completeness of the animal and the species-specific balance of the creature, as well as the animal’s