Foreword

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Revolutions have been a favourite topic of political theorists. And not just political revolutions. Intellectual revolutions – revolutions of ideas – have commanded equal time. Indeed, the ideas of political theorists often have laid the foundations of real-world revolutions. One need only mention Rousseau and Marx to confirm the point. Without bread, the human body perishes. But without ideas, the human spirit withers. It is not for bread alone that political theorists have laboured.

It is odd, then, that most contemporary political theorists have been conspicuous by their absence in the revolutionary times in which we find ourselves. For there is a revolution of ideas afoot, one which, whether well- or ill-conceived, and whether successful or not, already is having effects that are trickling down to the realm of political action. Taking their cue from philosophers of science, some partisans refer to the change as the emergence of a 'new paradigm', a concept which, at this point in time, may be more aspirational than descriptive. The plain fact is that there is no single 'new paradigm' that has taken hold. Rather, there is a variety of contenders each at war with the others, each vying for widespread acceptance, each having to face the hard fact that theirs is but one voice among many – and that a voice which more often than not speaks to (and is heard by) 'the converted'. Deep ecology. Feminism. Animal rights. These are among the voices in the insistent choir of dissent, and the message of one is seldom the same as that of the others.

Usually, that is. But not always. Dissonant though their demands often are, one main theme is the same: traditional moral anthropocentrism is dead. This is the faith shared by deep ecologists, feminists, proponents of animal rights, and other critics of the intellectual status quo. Their common task is to bury Protagoras once and for all. Humans are *not* the measure of all things. And while it is true that the death of the 'old paradigm' by itself does not give birth to a new one, ideas may be like forests. Sometimes the stands of old trees must be destroyed by fire before the new growth can flourish. In the present case it is Protagoras and his descendants that find themselves in the furnace.

One part of this conflagration is being fuelled by those thinkers and political activists who constitute the animal rights movement. Among our contemporaries it was moral philosophers who struck the first

match. *Animals, Men and Morals*, published in 1972, marks the beginning, followed by Peter Singer's 1975 landmark book *Animal Liberation*, and then, in 1977, by Stephen Clark's *The Moral Status of Animals*. Since then there has been a steady stream of work by moral philosophers, some opposed to, but most in favour of, enfranchising non-human animals in the moral community. Andrew Rowan, Dean of Special Programs at Tufts University's School of Veterinary Medicine in the USA, and himself a notable critic of traditional moral anthropocentrism, does not overstate the case when he observes that within the past 20 years contemporary moral philosophers have written more on the topic of human responsibility to other animals than their predecessors had written in the previous two thousand years.

This monumental change in moral scholarship has occasioned a no less monumental change in the teaching of moral philosophy. Whereas only 20 years ago there was not a single student discussing animal rights in moral philosophy's classrooms, today there are upwards of 100,000 students a year who encounter this idea – just in America. Although the number predictably would be smaller, comparable changes likely have taken place throughout the English-speaking world and, judging from the evidence at hand, are well under way throughout Europe.

Theologians, too, have added their voice, and none more forcefully or influentially than Andrew Linzey, one of this volume's editors. If his most recent book, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (1988), is generally recognized as the most thorough attempt to ground the rights of nonhuman animals in Christian doctrine, his earlier book *Animal Rights: A Christian Assessment* (1976) retains its historical significance. For it was that earlier book that heralded the beginning, in earnest, of the growing theological assault on traditional moral anthropocentrism. And it is the fruits of these labours that we are now beginning to see in religion's classrooms, where normative questions about our responsibilities to other animals increasingly are being asked and debated.

Contemporary political theorists, by contrast, have had comparatively little to say on the issue of animal rights. The revolution of ideas, it seems, has caught them napping. Even among those influential theorists who have broached the topic, the views we find are familiar descendants of the moral anthropocentrism currently under siege from other quarters. In Robert Nozick's libertarian theory, for example, nonhuman animals have no moral rights. And the same is true of John Rawls' very different contractarian theory. Why this exclusion from full membership in the moral community should continue to charac-

terize the most widely discussed alternatives in contemporary political theory, while many secular and religious moral theorists are united in their opposition to what they regard as this prejudicial tradition (which they refer to as 'speciesism'), is a question that perhaps only future generations of scholars can be in a position to answer.

If this turns out to be true – if a later generation of political theorists explains this apparent anomaly – then the more enlightened vantage point from which this insight is commanded will be in no small measure due to this important, timely anthology. For it is in these pages that, for the first time, the most influential political theorists in the Western tradition speak to one of the issues that informs part of the contemporary revolution of ideas – the issue of animal rights. But not to this issue only. The selections compiled here touch on much else besides – in particular, the more general issue of the place of humans in nature. In this way all the thinkers represented here speak to the larger issue of moral anthropocentrism. In this way, therefore, those contemporary political theorists who use this book, whether in their research or in their classrooms, will become involved in the debate about the adequacy of this tradition and play the vital role they should in deciding whether, and, if so, how, the revolt against this tradition succeeds. Or fails.