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The Good Life for Non-Human Animals: What Virtue Requires of Humans

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The more clearly we see the differences between animals and stones or machines or plastic dolls, the less likely it seems that we ought to treat them in the same way.

Mary Midgley, *Animals and Why they Matter*, p. 14

INTRODUCTION

Most of us have seen giant polar bears lying in the sun behind the high fence of a mid- to large-sized enclosure in a zoo. This zoo could be in nearly any big city in the world. The enclosure has cement floors and a pool for swimming. Or maybe we have seen great apes behind the glass of a viewing cage. In the cage are a few trees and some play equipment. The apes engage one another or look out silently from behind the glass or may even gesture at us as we look in at them. While children are simply fascinated by the sight of these animals, for adults these sights are sometimes troubling. Perhaps we even have mixed feelings about our unease. We are delighted like the children about having the opportunity to see these great creatures without the necessity of traveling to their habitats and pleased moreover about the children learning to appreciate them by getting a chance to see them in 'real life'. Yet there is also something unsettling about the experience. And, to this same extent, there is the additional worry that the children's appreciation of these creatures will be misguided by the experience.¹

Perhaps the only language that we are able to use to express our unease is, 'It is against the ape (or polar bear's) right to be so confined!' But what if we aren't sure that apes and polar bears have rights like this? Perhaps then we will resort to a claim like, 'Look, it is clear that the animal must be suffering.' But what if we become convinced by the animals' caretaker that the animals are content, fed better there than they would be in the wild and moreover, less likely to suffer from injury or sickness? Are we to go away quietly having all our fears answered? Not necessarily. That is because there is room for a quite different kind of concern.

¹ For an argument against zoos that makes a similar point but not specifically about children, see Dale Jamieson's (1994) 'Against Zoos'.

What do we care about when we care about protecting the interests of non-human animals? A significant part of what we care about is whether or not the animals are living lives that are good ones for their kind. It is this kind of concern, I think, that leaves us disturbed by the situation of the polar bear and the great ape. Moreover, it is this same kind of concern that explains why we are less bothered when the zoo is able to replicate the habitat, range, social interactions, and other factors relevant for flourishing for the particular type of animal.² The problem is that the usual ways of thinking about the interests of non-human animals cannot fully take account of the concern about species- or kind-specific good lives. These views focus on rights or on suffering, but not primarily on the nature of the good life for particular types of animals.

This chapter is concerned with the good lives of animals, yet it does not argue specifically that we ought to be concerned with animal flourishing *as opposed to* rights or freedom from pain. Rather, it simply offers a theoretical framework for engaging concern about animal flourishing or good lives.³ In order to offer such a framework, it will be necessary to focus on what makes animal lives good ones as well as why we should care about the good lives of animals. Both issues will be addressed through the lens of a eudaimonistic virtue ethical perspective. By a 'eudaimonistic' virtue ethics I mean generally an approach to ethics that understands the virtues as necessarily tied up with flourishing.⁴ This chapter thus develops a specific interpretation of this general type of virtue ethics that accounts for the role of non-human animal flourishing in answering the question how we ought to treat them.⁵

Generally speaking, then, how might we think about our treatment of non-human animals from a eudaimonistic virtue ethical perspective? Initially, the solution seems simple. We ought to treat animals well in so far as doing so is part of *human* flourishing. The explanation goes as follows: if treating animals well is virtuous, and acting virtuously is a necessary condition of human flourishing, then treating animals well is part of human flourishing. Thus it is true on a virtue ethics view that treating animals well is part of human flourishing as long as treating animals well *is* virtuous. Only so far we have made no headway in explaining why treating animals well is virtuous. Solving this piece of the puzzle will thus be a specific focus of this chapter. Moreover, I shall tackle this issue in a way that places emphasis on the flourishing of the non-human animals themselves. As stated above, the answer to the question how we should treat animals emphasizes only a consideration of *our* flourishing. While my

² For some types of animals an acceptable situation might be a wild animal park where the viewers must enter the animals' own habitat without unduly interfering with it. For other types of animals, zoos with restrictive environments that are nevertheless consistent with flourishing for the kind of animal 'on display' may also be less troubling.

³ I shall use the terms 'flourishing' and 'good' life interchangeably in both the human and non-human animal case.

⁴ Examples include Stoic and Aristotelian accounts. In the modern context, Rosalind Hursthouse's view in *On Virtue Ethics* (1999) offers an excellent example. Non-eudaimonistic virtue ethical views include those offered by Christine Swanton (2003) and Michael Slote (2001).

⁵ As discussed in the introduction to this volume, virtue based approaches to ethics may only share a loose family resemblance. Different views of how the virtues are related to flourishing and of the nature of flourishing lead to different versions of eudaimonism. By offering interpretations of each of these factors, in this chapter I support a particular version of eudaimonism.

account will also *begin with* a consideration of human flourishing, it will incorporate, as central, a consideration of animal flourishing.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. First I outline the kind of virtue ethics that I am concerned with. Next I consider whether eudaimonism so understood gives any straightforward recommendation regarding our treatment of animals. Seeing that it does not, I develop an argument for why we ought to care about and act to protect animal flourishing. In so doing I ask why it is that we ought to care about the flourishing of others. Then I investigate whether non-human animals share with us a type of flourishing that we ought to care about for the reasons established.

GROUNDING VIRTUE

A number of contemporary virtue ethical views seem not to depend on any foundation other than the virtues themselves. As with similarly structured rights views, the problem with this approach is that there is no support for the claims made regarding the virtues and vices other than internal consistency and other constitutive features of a good theory—assuming that the view is a *theory*. Given a list of virtues that includes humility while pride is a vice as arguably is found in some Christian views of virtue, and an alternative list of virtues including (proper) pride while (undue) humility is a vice as with Aristotle's view, there is no further principled appeal that can be made for the rightness of one set of virtues over the other. Assuming we don't think that the answer to the question whether pride is a vice is merely culturally relative, this state of affairs is unsatisfactory.

In a sense, of course, all talk about ethics must end (or start) with some fundamental claims. One could say that an attempt to defend which virtues get included in one's view just signals the end of the argument. However, unlike other places where arguments run out, one feels that there must be a reason why something is a virtue. Competing claims about particular virtues are quite different from a claim, for example, that the good is desirable. In that case it may be difficult to say what would even constitute an answer to the question why this is so.

In virtue ethics, the traditional reason for counting something as a virtue has to do with the relationship between this character trait and a flourishing or *eudaimon* human life. I shall take this starting point as basic to my view as well, with the caveat that such a foundational notion of human flourishing may be pluralistic in nature. In this chapter I shall assume for the sake of the argument that some good enough defense of flourishing as our final end is available. Moreover, I shall assume that this defense can give a reasonable account of how it is that the natural can be normative in a sense strong enough to ground the idea of species- or kind-specific flourishing. These issues are in fact highly contested and no clear answer has been given to how we should justify these views at a foundational level.⁶

⁶ David Copp and David Sobel (2004: 534–8) offer a critique of Hursthouse's (1999) view partly on the grounds that it fails to justify such a foundational story. On my understanding, however, Hursthouse's project is not one of foundational justification. Yet, I do think that such justification needs to be given.

ARISTOTELIAN EUDAIMONISM

Given, then, that flourishing is our final normative end, how specifically should we understand the relationship between the virtues and that end? The view endorsed in this chapter is roughly Aristotelian in so far as our final end of *eudaimonia* is 'mixed'. It is not, as with a Stoic account, reachable with virtue alone, but also requires the satisfaction of other elements.⁷ A more detailed account of these other elements and how they relate to virtue on my view is addressed a bit later. To create a backdrop for this discussion, we must first look at Aristotle's account of the relationship between the virtues and the good life.

According to Book One of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the good life is the complete and self-sufficient end of our actions (1097b5–20). Human virtue as excellence in activity expressing reason is constitutive of the flourishing life since human good activity just is the expression of excellence or virtue (*NE* 1098a15). To put this in terms of our function, virtue as a whole is excellence in the fulfillment of our function, which is activity expressive of reason. The various virtues are individual excellences which, taken together, constitute living well. So in this way, the individual virtues are just particular aspects or activities involved in a flourishing life. The virtues are also instrumental in achieving the good life in the sense that they benefit their possessor. For example, the actions expressing virtue are pleasant to the good person (*NE* 1099a10–15).

However, other external supports will also have to be in place in order to achieve flourishing. For example, not being born into devastating poverty such that the basic necessities of life are hard to come by. On Aristotle's view, without these additional external supports, we shall not be able to become virtuous at all. Alternatively, if we are virtuous and suffer devastating and irredeemable loss of external goods, for example, loss of all of our close friends and family along with financial devastation, we shall also not be counted in the end as having had—all things considered—a good life (*NE* 1099b5–1100a5).

So how should we understand the logical structure of this relationship between external goods, virtue, and flourishing? We might think that a basic set of external goods is necessary for both the development and maintenance of virtue itself. If this is true then an otherwise virtuous person who suffers a devastating loss of external goods will actually suffer a blow to his or her virtue. Yet it seems implausible that a loss of the kind we are imagining would itself interfere with *virtue* rather than only with flourishing. This could be true even if we agree that the lack of certain fundamental goods may be inconsistent with the initial development of virtue. So a loss of external goods does not necessarily undermine established virtue, but rather only flourishing. Moreover, as Aristotle discusses, we praise virtue as an achievement, but to the extent that flourishing has elements that are totally beyond our control, it is a

⁷ For an excellent discussion of the various problems with Aristotle's view of the mixed nature of our final end as well as of the disagreement between the Stoic view and the Aristotelian view, see Julia Annas's *The Morality of Happiness* (1993: chapters 18–19).

kind of 'blessedness' (*NE* 1101b10–1102a).⁸ Since the loss of external goods is also not necessarily in our control, it would make sense that this loss may only interfere with flourishing.

We have opened up a conceptual space between virtue and flourishing such that we could plausibly be said to be virtuous without flourishing (although not flourishing without being virtuous). And if this is true, then being virtuous is a necessary but not sufficient condition of our final end of flourishing. Moreover, it seems right to say that our concept of flourishing is not merely one of activity expressing reason (or virtue), but that other elements are also properly considered central to flourishing. These elements are also not merely the external goods at issue above. As will be seen, although non-human animals do not partake of activity expressive of reason in the sense required for moral and intellectual virtue, they may partake of some elements properly fitted to our concept of flourishing.

EUDAIMONISM AND ANIMALS: IS THERE A STRAIGHTFORWARD SOLUTION?

Once we recognize the centrality of flourishing to a eudaimonistic virtue ethics, we might assume that such a view must also attend to the flourishing of non-human animals. We might think that this is especially true given the gap we have noted between virtue and flourishing. After all, although animals are not virtuous or vicious in the ways that we are, animals do flourish or fail to flourish. The notion of an animal's having a 'good life' is not deeply mysterious. Further, if good lives are what we aim at with virtue, then why would it matter whether these lives are human or non-human animal lives?

If we could jump easily in this way from the significance of flourishing for *us* to an obligation to attend to animal flourishing, working out a virtue ethical approach to our treatment of animals would be mostly a matter of working out details about which kinds of lives are good ones for which types of animals and which kinds of interactions with those animals are virtuous. We might wonder, for example, whether virtue requires that we further, protect, or simply not interfere with animal flourishing in given specific cases. Should we actively work to add members to endangered species with procreative assistance or should we simply stop encroaching on the habitats of such species? We might also wonder which types of character traits are properly brought to bear with respect to which kinds of human–non-human animal relationships and interactions. For example, can we properly feel friendship towards animals or only care? In short, how do we act and feel 'at the right times, about the right things, towards the right [animals], for the right end, and in the right way?' (*NE* 1106b20).

These types of concerns are central to any worked out virtue ethical view of how we ought to treat animals. Yet they are not central concerns for this chapter because a

⁸ According to Annas (1993: 44), '*eudaimon*' (she translates as 'happy') and '*makarios*' (blessed) are interchangeable terms for Aristotle.

consideration of the good lives of non-human animals by itself does not straightforwardly tell us *why it is* that virtue requires that we care about and attend to the good lives of animals. Thus we must focus on answering this question before we could hope to offer a rich practical view of how we ought to treat animals.

So what must be resolved in order to know why it is that a virtuous person must care about and attend to animal good lives? One obvious issue is what kind of 'good life' we ought to value. Within a traditional eudaimonistic virtue ethics the focus is on the capacity for reason. It is the proper exercise of this capacity that constitutes living well. As long as no one is arguing that non-human animals are themselves capable of the relevant kinds of intelligence, the sense in which their lives are 'flourishing' or 'not flourishing' is one that may seem far removed from the application of this concept to our lives. A similar idea is expressed by Aristotle when, after describing *eudaimonia* as consisting in 'activity of the soul expressing virtue' (*NE* 1100a25) he concludes, 'It is not surprising, then, that we regard neither ox nor horse nor any other kind of animal . . . [*eudaimon*], since none of them can share in this sort of activity' (*NE* 1100a). It would seem, then, that in order to establish that we should care about non-human animal flourishing we must first establish that there is a relevant notion of flourishing at issue.

In order to see whether this is the case, we need to look more closely at why it is that we ought to care about the flourishing of other human beings. Once we have the answer to that question, we shall be able to see whether these same kinds of reasons apply to the flourishing of non-human animals. We shall do so by considering what kinds of flourishing animals aim at and by investigating the relationship of these types of flourishing to that of human beings. Since, on my view, a resolution to this set of issues formulates a necessary backdrop to a more detailed virtue based picture of how we ought to treat animals, I shall have only limited points to make about particular implications. That is, I shall have little to say about those issues that are the primary topics for the virtue ethicist who starts with the assumption that virtue requires that we attend to animal flourishing.

CARING FOR OTHERS

So far we have said of human flourishing that this is both what we aim at with virtue and that it is also constituted, at least in part, by virtue. In this sense, flourishing grounds our ethical aims in life by giving us an end for which there is no further justification and that alone—as self-sufficient and complete—is our ultimate end as human beings. But it is quite clear that we cannot act virtuously if we do so merely for the sake of achieving our own flourishing. Actions are only successfully virtuous if done for their own sake (see, e.g., *NE* 1105a30). So we are left with a familiar question. Since I cannot act virtuously if I do so *only for the sake of* gaining some good for myself (my own flourishing, in this case) what is it that gives me reason to act, through being virtuous, in a way that *in fact* furthers my own flourishing? Further, and this is the significant question for our concern, what gives me reason to act in a way that aims at the flourishing of others?

The obvious response is to point out that flourishing is not something that we gain instrumentally by our virtue, rather it is *constituted*, at least in part, by virtuous activity. Virtuous activity, for its part, must be done from the motive proper to the virtue and not egoistic reference to one's own good life. Further, part of what it is to have some virtues is that we do aim at the good of others. Yet, correct as this response may be, it doesn't so much answer the question as simply restate the problem. We are still left with our primary worry, namely, why is it that I *should* care about and act to support the good lives of others whether the lives at issue are human or non-human animal?

The practical answer to the question, 'why care about others' flourishing?' is that we ought to because that is just what we learn to do when learning to be virtuous. And, at an even more basic level, caring about others simply goes hand in hand with our nature as social beings, whether we manage to be virtuous (to care properly for the right others in the right way at the right times) or not. From this practical point of view, asking for a further explanation of *why* it is that I should care about the good lives of others is absurd. In this practical sense as well, the story of why the flourishing of others should be normative for us, is a story that can be told with the same subtle detail for our interactions with non-human animals and the environment generally.

Yet it might well be pointed out that our answer so far only indicates *how* it is that we end up caring about and acting to further others' flourishing, not yet why it is that we have reason to do so. Ancient eudaimonistic virtue ethicists were not so worried about this question as such. Rather they simply incorporated concern for other (humans at least) into their theories as an obvious element of virtue.⁹ Yet in the modern context it is hard to take concern about others as simply a given. I wouldn't for example want to claim that we have reason to care about others just because we've been taught to do so as part of our character training or conversely that we would not have reason to do so had we not been so taught.

Still, a consideration of how it is that we come to care about others does some significant work. It makes vivid the necessity of distinguishing between the question why we should care about others at all and why we should care about those that are not the natural objects of our affection. The question why we should care about *any* others is not our question. That is a question about why we should be moral beings at all. Our question has to do with what sort of care and for what types of others is consistent with virtue. To answer this question we must know why it is that we should (if we should) cultivate care about the good lives of others who are not necessarily the natural objects of our affection. This is an especially important question for both those animals and faraway humans with whom we may have no natural affinity.

So how might we approach the question why we should care about the good lives of others from this narrower perspective? We might simply state that we ought to care about all others (human or non-human animal) for their own sakes because they are ends in themselves. This seems correct in general but does not give an explanation for why they are ends in themselves or of what sort of ends. We won't, for example,

⁹ For a rich discussion of this topic see Annas (1993), chapters 10–13.

want an explanation according to which all beings cared about for their own sake have absolute value. So then what shall we say? To begin, we need an explanation for the human case. Then we can see whether this explanation also provides reasons to care about animal flourishing. We need to know why the good life, as the in fact ultimate human end or telos, is something that we, as virtuous, must love for its own sake not only for ourselves, and those other humans for whom we have natural affection, but also for all who aim at the same end.

Since, according to any eudaimonistic virtue ethics, a good life is our proper end, when we recognize it as such in our own case we do so rightly. Moreover, duly to appreciate this end, we must love it because of the kind of good it is, and not simply because it is our *own* good end. This does not mean that we love it simply *by itself* since it is valuable (and intelligible) only as manifested as an end of particular humans. But it is also true that a good life is the proper end of every other (at least) human *person* as well (leaving aside the issue of which humans are persons). If we recognize the good life as our end, but fail to recognize that it is also the end of others, we also fail to appreciate what kind of good it really is. In other words, we fail properly to appreciate what it is for us to flourish if we fail to recognize the way in which a good life is also the end of others. So fully to recognize good lives as good in the way in which they are good is to recognize them as good for each one of us. But then to pursue it only in our own case (and in the case of those we naturally care about), but not in the case of others, also seems to fail to take seriously just what kind of end this is. How much so and in what ways virtue requires us to contribute to the good of others (as opposed to simply not interfering) I leave for some other discussion.

It is important that the claim is not that we should care about other humans *because they are like* us. Rather, they have a feature in common with us, which is that they also aim at their own flourishing. It is this feature that we ought to care about, but as a feature that cannot be valued independently of valuing those whose good lives are at issue. The good life is then a shared end in so far as it is a good for humans as such (and thus has certain generally shared elements as will be discussed below), but it is also a good for each individual in so far as good lives can be coherently manifested only by particular individuals.

This view may start to sound strangely familiar, yet not in a way comfortable to virtue ethics. It will be good, therefore, to differentiate it from two views in the neighborhood. In particular, I make no claim here as a utilitarian might that we must maximize the good aimed at or that we must count the good of each equally. Further, unlike on the Kantian view, on the view offered here, there is no rational necessitation in the claim that we ought to care about the flourishing of others. That the good of others *is* normative for us if we happen to latch on to virtue properly does not imply that it is rationally required of us to find that good normative.

But even if all this is true, why does it give us reason to support the good lives not only of other humans, but also of non-human animals? After all, non-human animal lives are not good in the *same way* that human lives are good. At least not in so far as they are made good by the exercise of the virtues. An answer to this question begins with the ways in which human good lives are, after all, not so different from non-human animal good lives. To expand, we should start by going back to Aristotle and

his explanation for why activity expressive of reason should count as the characteristic human function.

THE CHARACTERISTIC HUMAN FUNCTION?

Aristotle seeks our characteristic human function in order to determine which function, if fulfilled with excellence, is constitutive of a flourishing human life. He considers, and discards, the possible answers: living itself (as nutrition and growth) and sense-perception. The fundamental reason why these functions are not to be counted as the characteristic human function seems to be that we share them with, in the first case, plants, and in the second case all sentient animals (*NE* 1098a). Instead, the proper characteristic function for humans must be activity of the soul expressive of reason, for this is the sole function that is unique to humans (*NE* 1098a5–15). Excellence in this function, then, must define our end.

However, being a unique function is not required in order to be a characteristic function. How odd it would be to discover that intelligent aliens exist, or that dolphins, chimps, or elephants do in fact share the capacity for reason of the sort required for virtuous activity and thereby claim that reason is not, after all, the characteristic human function. Sharing the other functions with plants and/or other animals, does not itself imply that the excellence of these functions is not our particular end as well. Nor is it true that sharing the function of practical reason with other kinds of beings would diminish its role for us unless we are strangely constituted indeed.

Moreover, there is no good reason why our function should be monistic in nature. It is more plausible that our characteristic function should be a combination of all those functions that are characteristic of us as a kind or species. These functions could be described in the manner Aristotle outlines or perhaps with a modern assay more akin to functional capacities. In so far as a flourishing human life is constituted by the excellence of characteristic functioning, then, it would be constituted by excellences in our many different types of functioning, however understood.

A WIDER SCOPE FOR HUMAN GOOD LIVES

If we understand the human function as activity of the soul expressive of reason, then the good life is one in which excellence in this function is achieved. If we do not limit the human function out of hand to that function unique to humans, then how should we view the good human life? To get a thorough answer to this question, we would need to know what role reason plays in flourishing and what role other functions play. In addition, we would need to look in detail at the other factors that contribute to human flourishing including the external factors that Aristotle mentions. For our purposes a thorough understanding of human flourishing is not necessary; we need merely to get enough of a picture of human flourishing to see where it overlaps with animal flourishing. To do this, we should review briefly both some aspects of the role of reason in human flourishing and virtue as well as some other aspects of human flourishing.

To begin with the connection between reason and virtue, it is possible that the proper exercise of reason, although necessary, is not a sufficient condition of virtuous action. When one's health is failing or one is consumed by pain it can be very difficult, if not impossible, to behave virtuously and certainly difficult to develop virtue initially under such circumstances. Indeed, the fact that we admire very much those who manage to be virtuous despite gross physical difficulties implies that these deficiencies in general good human functioning compete in at least some cases with the goals of reason. Having a healthy body and generally high spirits will help greatly with both the development and maintenance of virtue, and thus with achieving flourishing, and lacking these things in the extreme may make virtue difficult if not impossible to achieve.

Yet, even if it is not true that the development and/or maintenance of *virtue* depends on capacities other than properly functioning reason, surely flourishing is so dependent. It is quite unlikely that flourishing depends only on reason and its excellent functioning in virtue and not also on other additional functions and, as already discussed in the section on Aristotelian eudaimonism, on at least some basic external goods. As mentioned at the end of the last section, 'functions' may be understood in different ways appropriate to this context. What is important is that they include characteristic human capacities and activities significant for human flourishing such as the ability to communicate with others, to have sympathy for others, to feel empathy for others, to engage in physical exercise, to engage in 'nesting' activities such as homemaking, to sleep restfully, and so on.

This does not mean all of a person's capacities must function fully (or at all) in order to have a good life. Humans are amazingly adaptive creatures and can lean heavily on the capacities they do have in filling in for whatever capacities they may lose or lack. Indeed, it can happen that loss of some particular capacity may make a human life better overall if this loss leads a person to flourish in a previously neglected, but perhaps more significant, life aspect. For example, if a person highly obsessed with physical activity finds his physical abilities limited by an impairment, he may instead put more of his energy into enriching personal relationships that end up contributing more to his overall flourishing. Similarly, in the case of external goods, it is clear that many deprivations can be borne and can in some circumstances promote rather than undermine flourishing. Further, apparent external goods may in fact undermine flourishing. For example, newly found wealth may lead some families to distance themselves from less wealthy relatives and friends whom they wrongly fear will want to get at their money.

Despite all this, it is clear that our notion of flourishing is one that carries with it an assumption of both a certain level of basic external goods and basic levels of human capacities and activities (or functions). With respect to external goods, for example, human beings without enough food to maintain sustained focus on activities other than food procurement, and without decent shelter suffer, thereby a blow to their potential to flourish. Similarly, in terms of capacities and activities, human beings without the capacity for interpersonal relationships are thereby incapable of activities central to human flourishing. Of course, there is a distinction to be drawn between those things that contribute to and those things that constitute our flourishing. I leave

aside the question exactly which elements are actually constitutive of flourishing, and additionally leave aside the question which constitutive elements may be properly reduced to the function of reason. What is important is only that what constitutes flourishing is broader than activity expressing reason alone and also includes elements (functions and the obtaining of some external goods) that are shared with animals, as will be discussed in the next section.

The response to the expanded view of human flourishing that I support here might be that these so-called additional elements of human flourishing are actually only background conditions of virtue. That is, they are elements of flourishing only by way of being conditions of virtue itself and so not properly separate aspects of flourishing. This leaves logical room for virtue as both necessary and sufficient for flourishing. However, it is less plausible that those additional elements (external goods or functions other than practical reason) are required for either the development or maintenance of virtue than it is that they are required for flourishing. In the section on Aristotelian eudaimonism we made the point that external goods seemed not to be required for the maintenance of virtue although they might plausibly be required for the development of virtue. In the current section it seemed at least plausible that physical health should contribute to the maintenance of virtue, although it might not be required. Yet in both these cases it is clear that the relationship between these elements and virtue is less straightforward than the relationship to flourishing which obviously requires both (some basic physical health and external goods).

To make the point a different way, we have conceptual reasons to differentiate between the requirements for virtue and those for flourishing. Even if external goods and functions other than practical reason are required for both the development and maintenance of virtue, they still do not seem to be conceptually part of virtue. Alternatively, elements other than the excellent functioning of practical reason are clearly part of our concept of human flourishing. Finally, as also mentioned earlier, the view that I support allows us to escape from the worry that virtue and flourishing are too tightly explanatorily related.

INCORPORATING ANIMAL GOOD LIVES

If we accept the general view I have outlined regarding human flourishing, where does it get us in answering the question how we ought to treat animals? In so far as animals flourish in ways that partake of elements of our own normative end in *eudaimonia*, we have the same kinds of reasons for caring about and acting in accordance with their flourishing as we do with respect to the flourishing of other humans. But do animals flourish in ways that partake of the elements proper to human flourishing? We should begin with the obvious. As already noted, animals do not themselves have or lack moral or intellectual virtues of the sort that Aristotle describes for humans. Certainly some animals are 'smarter' than others and some exhibit extraordinarily complex social interactions, but even sophisticated animals do not exhibit the forms of virtue and vice at issue. To say otherwise, strikes me as putting our theoretical eggs in the wrong basket. It is also true then, that in so far as human good lives are constituted by moral and intellectual virtue *alone*, animal flourishing is not in the same

general category. As already argued, however, one shouldn't think that is the proper picture of human flourishing.

While animals may not flourish in the sense required for the exemplification of moral and intellectual virtue, we can make good sense of an animal's having a life that is a good one for its kind. The fact that animals can't *tell* us which kind of life they prefer does not hinder our ability to perceive which type is good. The good life for an animal will depend on its characteristics and the environment to which it is best suited, but flourishing for it will be of a type that is both good for it as an individual and as a normal member of a particular kind.¹⁰ To return to our zoo example, animals normally ranging over wide tracts of land may not be suited to life in a zoo, but this may not be true of animals normally occupying a narrowly circumscribed habitat. Animals having a keen consciousness of, and negative reaction to, being monitored or watched also should not be held in captivity. As Rosalind Hursthouse points out, 'There are few things more sad than the notice that used to appear on the cages of certain animals in zoos, "Does not breed in captivity"' (1999: 200). When such a basic biological function is eroded this serves as a strong warning that the possibility of flourishing for this type of animal is deeply undercut in captivity. This is consistent with the claim that, for any individual animal, it may turn out that it is better off not breeding (because, e.g., it would pose a threat to its health or because it happens to have no paternal or maternal sense—even where it is characteristic of the species to have such a sense).

In a way it is much easier to say what counts as a good life for non-human animals than for the human animal.¹¹ The human animal is an odd one in that it has the capacity itself to determine, at least in part, what kind of life will count as a good one for it. The squirrel, on the other hand, who manages to 'squirrel away' a good haul of nuts for the winter, avoids the wheels of our cars, builds a particularly plush leaf nest in a nice high nook of a tree, has a healthy litter of young, and so on, just does have a good year. A package of these good years of the length that is normal for a squirrel makes it true of that squirrel that 'she has had a good life of the kind appropriate for a squirrel.' When a squirrel dies after having led that sort of life, it can be rightly said, 'she had a good life.' This is quite different from the case of a very young squirrel that ends up under the wheel of a tire on the first trip out of the nest. This one did not manage to have a good life. It did not flourish. Further, this kind of story may be made more interesting as we portray the lives of animals with more complex social relationships and intellectual capacities like those of dolphins, great apes, elephants, pigs, dogs, and so many others.

But do these ways in which animals flourish or fail to flourish provide normative ground for our care in the way that human flourishing does? If human flourishing is something like what I have described above, then human and non-human animal

¹⁰ For a more thorough description of flourishing for both plants and animals, see Hursthouse (1999: 197–205). Hursthouse's description is part of an argument about naturalism, which is an issue that I will not be able to address in this chapter.

¹¹ Philip J. Ivanhoe (1998) makes a similar point. He points out that we often have a more reliable sense of what animals (and plants) *need* than of what other humans need even though other humans can tell us what they *want*.

flourishing are more similar than appears to be the case when one focuses only on the role of moral and intellectual virtue in human flourishing. In so far as we are all animals of some sort or other, the same kinds of things that make our lives good also make the lives of non-human animals good. Not in the capacity for moral virtue or of abstract theoretical thought, but in having, to give a few examples, a safe and comfortable place to sleep, enough to eat, appropriately satisfied sexual urges, sufficient room for exercise, clean water, sunshine (or darkness), appropriate social relations and hierarchy, physical health, and positive psychological states.

We have said already that non-human animals do not seem to have the capacity for moral virtue. Yet, it is a quite familiar phenomenon to be impressed by the virtue-like characteristic activities of both individual animals and species of non-human animals. In this way certain traits of cognitively and socially advanced animals appear to mirror human virtues and vices and even to share in rudimentary elements of actual virtue and vice. Stories of elephants that gather in support of a dying member of their group or of apes that refuse to eat for long periods after the loss of their young tend not just to bring up fellow feeling with these animals but in some cases bring us to wish that humans would be so caring. These actions may seem even more like the virtue of care when they are the actions of individual members of a certain species rather than characteristic activities of most members of a particular species. This is likely because the actions then seem even more like the results of individual character traits. So the dog who 'heroically' saves her human companion from a burning building serves as a model of courage for us in a very real way. If the dog was also trained to be a rescuer, this in no way diminishes our admiration. After all, no human becomes virtuous except through proper training and habituation (although admittedly of a different sort). These types of examples are easily contrasted with a purely anthropomorphized symbolic projection of virtue or vice. The spider that 'wickedly' entices victims into its web is not thought by any reasonable observers actually to share in anything other than a symbolic representation of wickedness.

So even though we cannot properly say that non-human animals are either morally virtuous or vicious we can say that some of their activities partake in rudimentary elements of moral virtue (and vice). Furthermore, the ways in which animal activities parallel these human character traits reveal important parallels between the ways that we, and they, flourish in a social environment. Just as our expression of courage in the face of danger constitutes part of our flourishing, the rescuer dog's flourishing is in part expressed through her loyalty to her human companion in the face of danger. I am not claiming that animals 'really do' have the capacity for moral virtue and vice after all. There are important aspects of rational reflection that are simply missing for them—such as knowing that the action is virtuous or choosing an action for its own sake. However, animal activities that parallel human virtue in a way that is not purely symbolic, but rather reflect more advanced animal dispositions, are likely also to share some of the rudimentary elements of what for us becomes virtuous and vicious action. For example, they might spring from a rudimentary motive of care.

Along with the ways in which animal lives mirror and inspire moral virtue, they also share subsets of the functions that are important for human flourishing. Contrary to what may appear to be the case from what has been said so far, many types

of more cognitively developed non-human animals share with us the use of various forms of practical reason and in particular agency, even if not moral agency (Degrazia 1996: 140–72). Not in the least due to the fact that the nature of the emotions is itself controversial (see, e.g., Sherman in Ch. 12), the extent to which various non-human animals have emotions is a matter for dispute. However, it does seem implausible to claim that the ape who suffers loss of appetite and general motivational depression because of the death of her young is not experiencing emotion of a familiar sort. There are many such cases of non-human animal feelings. That is not to say that simple sensations or basic responses such as the ‘fight or flight’ response would constitute emotions, but rather that some of the more advanced animals are likely to have feelings that are very similar to, if not just like, our emotions.

So the lives of some non-human animals are like ours in ways that partake of some part of even our highest types of characteristic functions. Non-human animals that do not share with us some capacity for reason or emotion will share with us some of those other functions that contribute to our flourishing. In the most general sense, to return for simplicity’s sake to Aristotle’s classification, flourishing animal lives depend on nutrition and growth and, for many, sense perception. Animals also share with us requirements for external goods necessary to flourishing, although their specific needs are often very different (in a generally species-specific manner) from ours. But if it is true that what it is for non-human animals to flourish is in some core respects the same as what it is for us to flourish, then it is false that we can fail to care about and act in accordance with their flourishing without undermining proper commitment to our own constitutive end.

In response to the view that I support here, it may be argued that animals such as squirrels have no awareness of their lives *as* either good or not good and so, although there may be similarities between human and squirrel flourishing in such things as having a fine place to sleep, there is no corresponding subjective similarity. While it is true that, as a conscious being, the squirrel may in fact experience the positive benefit of a flourishing life, the squirrel is not self-conscious and so she fails to recognize *that* her life is either good or not good. For human beings, on the other hand, the having of a good life is partly dependent on the recognition of the nature of that good life and thus a proper recognition of our own good end. Thus it may seem that although there are parallels in the ways that we describe good human and good squirrel lives, the nature of the good life for them is so different as to make them wholly different in kind.

The question at the root of our inquiry has been whether or not animal lives can be good in ways that partake in some of the same elements that are significant for our flourishing. In answering this question, the issue of whether animals are self-conscious, merely conscious, or indeed unconscious is not *the* deciding factor. After all, even plants can either flourish or fail to flourish in ways that partake of *some* features that are significant for our flourishing—namely nutrition and growth. The question is an objective one: Is the plant, animal, or person in fact flourishing? For a human being the answer to this question will depend to some extent on whether they experience their lives *as* flourishing and may depend also on whether they are *aware*

that they are flourishing. For plants this question is totally irrelevant since flourishing for them does not include any kind of consciousness.

On the other hand, whether something is the type of thing or being that is non-conscious, conscious, or self-conscious will make a significant difference for what virtue requires of us in our interactions with it. We cannot act cruelly towards wheat by cutting it down at harvest time although we might act wastefully by carelessly harvesting it in a way that ruins a large portion of the crop.¹² Similarly it is not necessarily callous to kill an animal with the capacity for pain and pleasure, but without a sense of itself as continuing over time, although doing so in a way that imposes unnecessary suffering is cruel. Thus the squirrel's lack of self-conscious awareness of the nature of her flourishing life does not diminish her flourishing as such, however it does change the nature of our responsibilities with respect to that flourishing. The specific nature of those responsibilities and how they may be shaped by the nature of the flourishing life in question cannot be developed any further in this context. Clearly such an account will require, among other things, a thorough understanding of the nature of the flourishing life for the animals in question.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, a view of the normative role and nature of human and animal flourishing has been developed as a way of offering a particular virtue ethical framework for addressing the ethics of how we ought to treat animals. A fundamental issue has been the role of considerations of animal flourishing in virtuous interactions with them. Given the apparently very different nature of human and animal flourishing, how is it that their flourishing should be normative for us? To answer this question we first recognized a broader problem for virtue ethics, namely why we should pay heed to the flourishing of other human beings. To explain why we should be so concerned we turned to the idea that a flourishing life is the value that constitutes the complete and self-sufficient end of our actions. As such, flourishing grounds what we value ethically speaking. Properly aiming at this value includes recognition and pursuit of it not only for ourselves, but also for others who share this end. Yet this answer left open the question why we should also place value on animal flourishing, which is so different from ours. We then saw that human and non-human animal flourishing are closer in kind than appeared to be the case when we focused more narrowly on the human capacity for reason. To the extent that this is true, we have a subset of the very same general kinds of reasons for caring about and furthering non-human animal flourishing as we have for caring about and furthering the flourishing of our fellow humans.

I have thus argued that animal good lives are of a kind with our own good lives, giving us the very same kinds of reasons for caring about and acting in accordance

¹² I will not discuss in very much detail how my picture would apply to environmental virtues. For two excellent discussions of virtues and the environment following somewhat different lines see Hursthouse's essay in this volume and Tom Hill's now classic paper 'Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments' (1983).

with their flourishing as we have with respect to one another's flourishing. Of course, even when the good-making aspects of the lives of non-human animals seem quite foreign to our own, they will still share some relevantly similar general features (even the elements of plant nutrition and growth share some relevantly similar features). In that respect, then, there will be some ethical reasons, on the picture I have given, for caring about and acting in accordance with the flourishing of all kinds of plants and animals. As already discussed, however, that does not mean that it would be wrong to destroy some plants and animals. These judgments are contextual and the virtuous actor takes into account the kind of being at issue, but also the relationship or relevance to others (including other animals and even ecosystems), the manner of acting, and the reasons and motivations for action.

Yet some might worry that I have not left sufficient resources for the protection of animals, plants, and aspects of the non-biological environment that either do not flourish at all or do not flourish as we do. It is thus important to make explicit that I claim only that partaking of a subset of the elements of our flourishing provides a sufficient, but not a necessary, underpinning for such care and activity. This view is thus consistent with a consequentialist argument that virtue requires protection of the environment—biological or non-biological—and non-human animal species of all sorts in so far as doing so supports human flourishing and that of non-human animals whose flourishing is independently a proper object of concern. The ways in which animals, plants, and things directly support human flourishing should be construed broadly to include not merely human interests such as health and longevity, but also such interests as enriched aesthetic appreciation. The (to us) sometimes very strange and wonderful creatures, plants, and ecosystems that make up our planet fill us with wonder and respect and in that way contribute to our flourishing. To return to Mary Midgley whose words opened this chapter, 'That eager reaching out to surrounding life and to every striking aspect of the physical world, which in other species belongs only to infancy, persists in human beings much longer, and may be present throughout their lives' (1983: 119). This includes that trait of children to seek in particular what is different from them (Midgley 1983: 118). Even more broadly, one can argue that traits that are basic to human flourishing such as self-respect are somehow bundled up with care about or respect for the environment and animals of all sorts (see, e.g., Schmidtz 1998; Hill 1983).

Yet a focus on human flourishing alone should not offer the primary virtue ethical resource for care about animals for two reasons. First, the result of such an interpretation is not clear. Dead animals also can be said to contribute greatly to our flourishing (because, among other things, they are tasty to eat, a good source of protein, and building on their habitats may give us wonderful homes). While virtue may require that we attend to animal flourishing for its own sake, the reasons for this are lost when we focus only on the moral significance of human flourishing. Secondly, a focus on human flourishing alone obscures a primary benefit of a virtue ethical analysis of how we ought to treat animals, namely that such an analysis offers the theoretical tools for understanding the ethical significance of animal flourishing as such. While the view offered in this chapter does place great significance on human flourishing, it does so

in a way that opens up the notion of 'flourishing' to encompass the moral significance of the animals themselves.

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