

Book Proposal for *Our Relationships with Animals*

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Rationale

Two approaches have dominated the subfield of animal ethics since the 1970s: utilitarianism, most famously exemplified in the work of Peter Singer, which says that our moral concern for animals ought to focus on their interests, typically their interests in avoiding pain and death; and the rights view, most famously exemplified in the work of Tom Regan, which says that our moral concern for animals ought to focus on their rights, typically their rights to be respected as ends in themselves and their rights against being harmed or killed. Although these approaches differ in important ways, they have quite a bit in common. For instance, they both quite rightly reject Kant's view that animals are mere instruments to be used for human purposes.

Utilitarianism and the rights view both affirm that animals, just like human beings, matter morally in their own right.

Human relationships with animals do not play a central role in either of these approaches. Traditionally, the rights view says that rights are the most important moral property and that animals' rights are independent of our relationships with them: an animal's right to life imposes obligations on all moral agents, not just those individuals with whom the animal has a special relationship. And for the utilitarian, relationships matter only to the extent that they are relevant to an individual's interests—interests that, fundamentally, carry the same moral weight for all moral agents.

Yet common sense strongly suggests that relationships have a great deal of moral significance. Intuitively, your obligations to your mother differ from your obligations to your accountant, in part because of your different relationships to them—even if these individuals are alike with respect to both their rights and their interests. And the same seems true of animals, though neither utilitarianism nor the rights view are able to easily account for this.

Here is an example to illustrate how utilitarianism and the rights view have difficulty capturing what seems to be the common-sense view about relationships. Every year on sheep farms all around the world, many millions of newborn lambs die of exposure. According to some estimates, at least one-fourth of newborn lambs die within their first two days of life. These deaths are slow and painful. Farmers could save a large fraction of these lambs, though saving them would be time-consuming and expensive. Thus, a question: Do farmers have a moral obligation to try their best to save newborn lambs from these early, painful deaths?

Now, compare that question to another. Wherever you live, you're likely surrounded by many wild animals, though most manage to stay out of sight. Those animals are continually suffering and dying from all sorts of causes, and many of these deaths are slow and painful. You could help to prevent many of these deaths, though doing so would be time-consuming and expensive. Do you have a moral obligation to do your best to prevent these deaths?

From the utilitarian perspective, these two different questions are fundamentally similar: both questions are to be answered in terms of a familiar sort of cost-benefit analysis weighing the suffering of animals against the value of the resources that would need to be spent to prevent

their suffering. And from the perspective of the rights view, these questions are yet again fundamentally similar, since newborn lambs on farms have the same fundamental moral rights as wild animals in the woods.

Thus, neither utilitarianism nor the rights view is able to easily capture the simple and intuitive idea that these questions are fundamentally different because a farmer's relationship with the sheep in her flock differs from the relationship that most humans have with most wild animals.

Although relationships have traditionally been sidelined in animal ethics, a number of philosophers—including Lori Gruen, Clare Palmer, Roger Scruton, Keith Burgess-Jackson, Cheryl Abbate, Will Kymlicka, and Sue Donaldson—have recently become more interested in the moral importance of human relationships with animals. Yet there is still no book-length treatment of animal ethics that gives due care and attention to the notion that relationships are morally central and fundamental for animal ethics. Our book will fill this gap in the literature.

But this book does not *only* break new ground in animal ethics. The book also aims to make a number of major contributions in general ethical theory.

Major innovations and contributions of the project

The book will contribute to the literature in animal ethics and in normative ethics in the following ways:

(1) Robert Nozick articulates, but does not endorse, a view he dubs “utilitarianism for animals, Kantianism for people” which says, roughly, that we ought to treat animals in accordance with utilitarian principles but ought to treat humans in accordance with deontological principles. Although this hybrid view is often mentioned as an intuitively attractive option in animal ethics, it has not been subjected to sustained philosophical scrutiny. But this will change in the near future with the special issue of *Philosophical Studies* that Killoren is currently co-editing with Richard Rowland. *Our Relationships with Animals* will build on the papers in that special issue as well as other important recent treatments of the hybrid view. When our book is completed, chapters 1 and 3 will contain the most exhaustive and up-to-date treatment of this style of hybrid view in the philosophical literature.

(2) One of the aims of this book is to put animal ethics into closer dialogue with mainstream moral philosophy. Mainstream moral philosophy has developed a rich literature on the ethics of relationships. A central figure in this literature is W. D. Ross, whose ethical pluralism is one of the most important theories of the ethics of relationships ever developed. Yet Rossian pluralism has had little to no influence in animal ethics, despite having had a resurgence in the work of many contemporary moral philosophers such as Robert Audi (2004), Phillip Stratton-Lake (2002) and Garrett Cullity (2018). In this book, we remedy this by developing an ethical theory that is informed by engagement with Ross and contemporary Rossians and then by applying this theory in animal ethics.

(3) We propose and defend a theory of the metaphysics of relationships according to which relationships arise from and can be understood in terms of collectives (where a ‘collective’ is here defined as a group that has reasons). In so doing, we bring current literature in social

ontology on the metaphysics and ethics of collectives into new points of contact with the philosophy of relationships and with animal ethics.

(4) We propose and defend a new theory about the nature of directed moral obligations (i.e., obligations of an agent *to* an individual or group). According to this theory, relationships interact with reasons provided by interests to produce directed moral obligations. We argue that all directed moral obligations arise in this way. The result is a streamlined deontological moral theory, *relationalism*, according to which there are just two factors—namely, interests and relationships—that bear fundamentally on directed moral obligations.

(5) We argue that relationalism furnishes plausible and illuminating accounts of several ideas that have been central in deontological ethics: (i) moral status; (ii) moral rights; (iii) the doing/allowing distinction; (iv) the moral significance of use; and (v) conflicts among moral obligations. In each case, we argue that these ideas can be reductively analyzed in terms of relationships. (For example, we argue that a child's having a *moral right* against their parents to be cared for is nothing over and above those parents' being morally obligated, in virtue of the role they have in their relationship with the child, to care for the child.)

(6) We use relationalism to develop an altogether new approach in animal ethics that moves beyond the standard “utilitarianism vs. rights view” dialectic that has consumed much of the animal ethics literature. This approach allows us to introduce and defend a host of new ideas about major topics in animal ethics including the use of animals for scientific purposes, animal companionship, our obligations to wild animals, hunting, and the use of animals in agriculture.

Authors' background

We are well-situated to write this book. Both of us actively publish on animal ethics and normative ethical theory, have taught these topics for many years, and have organized and participated in national and international conferences on animal ethics. One of us (Streiffer) served for several years on an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which has one of the largest animal research programs in academia. The book will incorporate and build on material from some of our previous and current research, including:

- Robert Streiffer (2003), *Moral Relativism and Reasons for Action*. Routledge.
- David Killoren and Bekka Williams (2013), “Group Agency and Overdetermination,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16 (2).
- Robert Streiffer and David Killoren (2019), “Animal Confinement and Use,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 49 (1).
- David Killoren and Robert Streiffer (2020), “Utilitarianism about Animals and the Moral Significance of Use,” *Philosophical Studies* 177 (4).
- David Killoren and Robert Streiffer, “Three and a Half Ways to a Hybrid View in Animal Ethics.” This paper is provisionally forthcoming in a special issue of *Philosophical Studies* being edited by David Killoren and Richard Rowland. This special issue is set to contain eight papers on hybrid views in animal ethics, most of which were developed in the context of a workshop held at Oxford last year.
- David Killoren, “Omnivores Have Many Children,” currently under review at *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*.

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Introduction

Part I: Relationalism

Chapter 1: Beyond the Uerson/Derson Distinction

In *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Robert Nozick identified a hybrid ethical view which he named “utilitarianism for animals, Kantianism for people” (1974, 35–42). The most important commitment of such a hybrid view, we argue, is that most or all animals are *uersons* and most or all humans are *dersons*. An individual is a *uerson* if her interests matter but she has no genuine moral rights; an individual is a *derson* if her interests matter *and* she has genuine moral rights.¹ We argue that the hybrid view captures a series of widely endorsed intuitions about animal ethics and does so more effectively than either thoroughgoing utilitarianism or standard versions of the rights view. Thus, the hybrid view deserves serious consideration. Yet the hybrid view is ultimately unsuccessful because no satisfactory rationale exists for its sharp distinction between animals and humans and because the hybrid view does not handle intuitions about the moral significance of certain human-animal relationships. An alternative theory that preserves the hybrid view’s advantages while avoiding its disadvantages would be desirable. The remainder of Part I aims to show that relationalism is just such a theory. This chapter draws significantly from our paper “Utilitarianism about Animals and the Moral Significance of Use,” *Philosophical Studies* (2020), as well as from our paper “Three and a Half Ways to a Hybrid View in Animal Ethics,” which (as mentioned above) is provisionally forthcoming in a special issue of *Philosophical Studies*. However, the bulk of the chapter is new material.

Chapter 2: How Relationships Matter: Introducing Relationalism

Our theory, relationalism, has three components:

- (1) The *interests and relationships view* is an account of how directed moral obligations are generated. While others’ interests provide us with reasons, reasons provided by interests do not, on their own, ever create directed moral obligations. Rather, directed moral obligations are always a function of reasons provided by interests together with relationships.
- (2) The *collectivity view* is an account of what relationships are. On this view, the fact that two individuals A and B are in a relationship obtains in virtue of the fact that A and B are both part of some collective C. A collective is a group of individuals that has reasons for action over and above the individuals within the collective.²
- (3) The *role view* is an account of the nature and content of directed moral obligations. On this view, all directed moral obligations are obligations to do one’s part in the collectives to which one belongs—i.e., the collectives in virtue of which one’s relationships obtain.

¹ The reader is invited to pronounce ‘uerson’ like ‘yerson.’ ‘Uersonhood’ is so-called because it is the sort of status that (standard) utilitarians believe all persons possess; dersonhood is so-called because it is the sort of status that (standard) deontologists believe all persons possess.

² (Feinberg 1974; Cahen 1988) both incorporate an “over and above” clause in analogous situations. For recent discussion on group’s reasons for actions, see (Chant 2014; Fiebach 2020; Roth 2020).

The task of Chapter 2 is to explain the meaning and significance of each of these components and to make some initial points about their advantages.

Chapter 3: Relationalism Elaborated and Defended

In this chapter we begin our case for relationalism by arguing that it is superior to the hybrid view: it can capture the intuitions that make the hybrid view attractive while avoiding the disadvantages that make the hybrid view unsustainable. Next, we address several of the most important objections to relationalism. Among these is the widely discussed objection (pressed by, e.g., Roger Crisp) that theories like relationalism involve a kind of irrational prejudice akin to racism and sexism; we think that our theory has the resources to neutralize this objection. The bulk of the chapter argues that relationalism earns its keep by unifying and explaining a wide variety of different familiar commitments of deontological ethics: (i) moral status; (ii) moral rights; (iii) the doing/allowing distinction; (iv) the moral significance of use; and (v) conflicts among moral obligations.

Part II: Relationalist Approaches in Animal Ethics

Chapter 4: The Moral Dilemmas of Animal Research

This chapter considers historical examples of animal research which provided crucial scientific and medical advances, but which also involved horrific treatment of animals. We show in this chapter how relationalism can help make progress dealing with such acute dilemmas. With supporters of animal research typically adopting a utilitarian approach and critics adopting an animal rights approach, the animal research debate is constructed to foster a focus exclusively on rights and interests. Baruch Brody's defense of animal research, which appeals to scientists' relationship to their fellow human beings, is one attempt to incorporate relationships, but we argue that his myopic focus on human-human relationships ignores large categories of research (e.g., animal research for environmental conservation or for veterinary medicine) as well as numerous other morally significant relationships that impact the animal research context. We show how relationalism provides a framework for thinking about the ethics of animal research that improves on other approaches that have been developed in the literature.

Chapter 5: The Tragic Ethics of Human-Animal Companionship

In this chapter we argue that when you adopt an animal, you form a relationship with that animal that is accompanied by weighty and demanding moral obligations to care for that animal. These obligations are in many cases extremely expensive and time-consuming to discharge, which leads to a kind of tragedy. Humans' obligations to their animal companions are burdensome enough that they quite rationally dissuade many people from adopting animals in the first place. We maintain that many animals in shelters would be better off if humans saw their obligations to companion animals as being more minimal than those obligations in fact are, because then humans would adopt animals more readily, which would spare many animals from being left homeless or euthanized at a young age. Hence the tragedy: a large amount of animals' suffering and death is caused by our *correct* understanding of the scope of our obligations to our animal companions. We show how this conclusion is not only important for thinking about the ethics of animal adoption but also illustrates a number of the distinctive features of relationalism as a general ethical theory.

Chapter 6: Wild Animals and the Possibility of Moral Strangers

One of the major implications of relationalism is that if two individuals A and B are not co-constituents of any shared collective C, then they have no relationship to one another—they are what we call *moral strangers* to one another—and therefore they have no obligations to each other. This chapter asks the question: Are wild animals moral strangers to humans? We maintain that wild animals can and often do participate in meaningful relationships with human beings. We argue that wilderness conservation involves a form of use of the wild animals who live in the areas being conserved and that this forges morally significant relationships between humans and wild animals. We further argue that human management of wilderness areas can create moral obligations to help relieve suffering of wild animals in those areas, which may include protecting them from predators (here we wade into the recent debate over re-introduction of wolves to Yellowstone). After we discuss these issues, we address a more difficult question: Are there *any* wild animals with whom we humans have no relationships whatsoever? We develop arguments for the speculative idea that nearly everyone in the world has some sort of relationship to everyone else and therefore humans have relationships with all wild animals.

Chapter 7: Animal Agriculture and the Use Relationship

One of the themes of our discussion of animal research in Chapter 4 is that using someone forms a relationship with them that can dramatically affect the obligations of the user to the usee. In that discussion and in other chapters that deal with use, we do not offer an analysis of use. Instead, we follow the standard practice of most ethicists, which is to investigate the moral significance of use without the benefit of such an analysis. Drawing from our previously published papers, “Animal Confinement and Use” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* (2019) and “Utilitarianism about Animals and the Moral Significance of Use,” *Philosophical Studies* (2020), we take some steps in Chapter 7, the final chapter of the book, toward an analysis of both the metaphysics and ethics of use and we show how our findings can inform relationalist approaches to a number of human interactions with animals. We focus on the most ubiquitous kind of animal use by humans, their use in agriculture, with more than a trillion estimated land and aquatic animals used each year, but one of the upshots of our discussion is that using others is more widespread than is commonly believed. For instance, we make the argument that there are cases in which an agent A uses an individual B even when B’s involvement is not necessary in order for A to achieve her goal. (For example, use may occur when a homeowner poisons a rat.) Given that use is extremely widespread, and given that (as we argue in this chapter) use of one individual by another is sufficient to establish the existence of some sort of relationship between those individuals, we’re able to argue that relationships are extremely widespread. The chapter then brings these considerations to bear on issues involving the use of animals for food, arguing that farmers are not the only ones who use farmed animals; ordinary consumers also use farmed animals, even if they never step foot on a farm.

Target Audience and Niche in the Animal Ethics Literature

This work is primarily intended for an academic audience: scholars, faculty, graduate students, and advanced undergraduates with an interest in normative ethics, applied ethics, and animal ethics.

Some of the best work in applied ethics is innovative in that it finds new ways to bring abstract moral theories into contact with concrete, real-world moral issues. Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* (1975) and *Practical Ethics* (1993), two books that helped set the agenda for applied

ethics in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, are innovative in that way. In the traditional model of applied ethics that Singer helped to establish, innovative *application* of moral theories to real-world issues is part of the applied ethicist's job description, but substantial development and refinement of moral theories is beyond the applied ethicist's purview and is best left to the separate subfield of normative ethical theory.

A different model is followed by two books that contribute to the recent literature in applied ethics, both published by Oxford University Press: Christine Korsgaard's *Fellow Creatures* (2018) and Shelley Kagan's *How to Count Animals, More or Less* (2019). Both works make substantial headway on issues in applied ethics—specifically, in animal ethics—while also introducing major innovations at the theoretical level. Korsgaard critiques many common real-world forms of human treatment of animals and also defends new ideas about the content and scope of the Categorical Imperative and develops new resources in Kantian ethical theory. In the course of defending a view about how to compare animals' interests to humans' interests, Kagan develops a new hierarchical theory of moral status that has implications in many areas beyond animal ethics. Thus, each of these represent an emerging approach in which a single work aims to make substantial progress in *both* normative ethics and applied ethics and thus does not belong exclusively to either of those subfields.

The importance of this kind of crossover work lies in the way it encourages theory and application to illuminate one another in unexpected and valuable ways. *Our Relationships with Animals* is a crossover work of that type and thus will sit comfortably alongside Kagan's and Korsgaard's books. A great many philosophers have appreciated Kagan's and Korsgaard's books—these are among the most influential recent works in animal ethics and have also been very widely read by normative ethicists and other philosophers who have only passing interests in animal ethics. These philosophers will also find value in our book. Specialists in normative ethics will be interested in our development and defense of relationalism; its implications for the nature and moral significance of relationships; and our new relationalist analyses of familiar deontological commitments (see summaries of parts and chapters below for more detail on this). Specialists in applied ethics and in animal ethics will be interested in our new relationalist approach in animal ethics and its implications for major topics in animal ethics including animal research, wilderness conservation, wild animal suffering, animal agriculture and the use of animals as food, and many other topics. Because our project bridges and contributes to both of these subfields of moral philosophy, our book has the potential to find an unusually large audience of moral philosophers, scholars, and students.

Manuscript Details

We anticipate a final product of about 140,000 words, completed early in 2022.

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David Killoren is a research fellow at the Dianoia Institute, Australian Catholic University. He has broad-ranging interests across moral philosophy, including normative ethics, metaethics, and applied ethics. His work has appeared in *Philosophical Studies*, *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, *Journal of Ethics & Social Philosophy*, among other excellent journals. He is the co-editor of *Ethics in Politics*, a volume on political ethics published by Routledge, and is currently co-editing a special issue of

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